The Canterbury Tales

Directions: Read the biographical information for Chaucer on page 90. Summarize/Paraphrase each paragraph.

Geoffrey Chaucer
- Son of merchant, page in royal house; royal clerk; knew many different walks of life (castes)
- Contemporary view of 14th century England

The Poet's Beginning
- shovel unknown, middle class family, worked as page; served in English Army; P.O.W.
- Edward paid for release; lots of $ (well liked)
- Married lady in waiting to Queen

The Poet Matures
- Began writing in 20s
- Inspired by European writers

The Canterbury Tales
- Written in his later years
- Perhaps inspired by his pilgrimage
- Only 24 Tales/120 were finished
- Medieval lit.; humor, romance
- Frame narrative; story within a story

The Father of English Poetry
- Chaucer buried at Westminster Abbey
- Poet's corner established around him
Connecting to Literature

It may have been a class trip you took to a museum or a visit to a famous person's birthplace. Trips taken for inspiration or renewal, even if they are not religious, can loosely be termed pilgrimages. The pilgrims who gather in the Prologue are about to depart on such a journey.

Literary Analysis

• characterization

direct characterization

about character
direct slmts.
Ex: "She had red hair."

indirect characterization
to portray character

Reading Strategy

Chaucer's Guided Tour of Medieval Life and Literature (pp. 92-93)

Directions: Read silently the title above, and summarize the important points in your own words.

pilgrimage - a journey to a sacred spot
this joined ppl of diverse backgrounds

The Journey Begins
Narrator, presumably Chaucer, meets 29 pilgrims at Tabard Inn (in London suburb)
Harry Bailey, host of Inn, challenges each to tell two stories there and two back
best tale treated to a feast
Bailey travels to judge the competition

Snapshots of an Era
Prologue-brief, vivid sketch of each pilgrim
courtly world: centered around nobility
middle ranks: learned professional men
lower orders: craftsmen, storekeepers, peasants

Church - cornerstone of medieval society

A Literary Tour
popular genres
romances and fabliaux (short, bawdy, humorous stories)
stories of saint's lives
sermons
allegories (character represents abstraction ex-Pride, Honor)

Chaucer adapted French poetic forms to the English of his day
heroic couplet - a pair of rhyming lines with five stressed syllables each
father of English poetry
Guided Reading Questions

The Prologue

1. Using the HW5 method, analyze lines 1 though 18.

Spring weather is nice, the people want to go on their pilgrimages.

2. In the aforementioned lines, what does the narrator suggest about the pilgrims' motives going to Canterbury?

Want to visit a saint's shrine to ask for healing.

3. What does Chaucer say he will do in lines 35-42? How, or in what manner, will he do it?

He is going to tell us about the people he is going on a pilgrimage with (social status, profession, etc.)

4. What do lines 54-65 indirectly suggest about the Knight's character?

- brave
- skilled fighter
- courageous (always kills his man)
- modest (fought in battle)
5. What is the relationship among the Knight, the Squire and the Yeoman? Provide textual evidence.

6. What two basic qualities does the sentence in lines 141-145 attribute to the Nun?
- The nun has good manners/is friendly.
- She pretends to be elegant/Sophisticated.
- Kind to animals

7. What can you infer about the Prioress based on this detailed description on her jewelry?
- wears jewelry(wealth)
- Latin/French
- well educated
- well traveled
- worldliness

8. What is the Monk's main interest?
- hunting— even though Bible says he shouldnt.

9. What do the details about the Monk's habits and tastes indirectly suggest about religious institutions of the time?
- ignores religious doctrine
- the people running the Church at the time were hypocrites.
10. In lines 244 - 254, is Chaucer using direct or indirect characterization? Explain.

11. What is the main thought in the sentence in lines 259-263? What question about this main idea (HW^5) do the other parts of the sentence help answer?

12. How does the Friar earn his living?

13. What question do lines 346-348 answer about the main idea in line 345?

14. What are the Cleric's interests?
15. What are the Franklin's interests?

17. What point is Chaucer making about the relationship between these men and their wives?

- Acting as if they should be a member of the aristocracy (by the way they dress).
- Wives want to be called madam.

18. What picture of the Skipper is created by the mixture of details about his heartlessness with details about his competence?

- Kills his enemies once they're captured.
- Always on a boat. Ruthless, but competent + smart.

19. In the sentence in lines 421-428, what is said about how the Doctor practices medicine?

- Uses astrology (witch doctor).
- Is knowledgeable of surgery but takes into account the stars.
20. What are two characteristics of the Skipper?

Ruthless + competent

21. What is the main idea of lines 493 - 500?

- he is a giving person (gives the poor his own things)
- religious
- a model clergyman - humble & devoted to his flock.

22. How does Chaucer use his characterization of the Parson to comment on the way priests ought to behave?

- priests ought to behave with dignity, loyalty, kindness, generosity, etc.

23. What is the Parson's main characteristic?

He practices what he preaches (unlike monk - friar)
- He protects the people - cares about them.

- Plowman + Parson are brothers
- He works hard for what he earns (not a lot)
- Honest + religious - loves God + his neighbors
25. What does the comparison of the Miller’s hair color to that of a sow or fox indirectly suggest about his character?

26. What are the two subjects of the comparison in lines 594 - 604?

27. What is the Miller like?

28. In the sentences in lines 647 - 650, what could not be cured?
29. In lines 652 - 659, is the characterization of the Summoner direct or indirect? Explain.

30. How does the Summoner turn religion to personal profit?

He will allow immoral activities
if the people pay him not to say
anything —- blackmail

31. What facts in lines 719 - 726 indirectly characterize the Pardoner?

- Dishonest
- Fools priests

32. Why does Chaucer apologize in the sentence starting with line 745?

- For speaking frankly/being blunt and not censoring himself.

33. What concern does the Host raise?

Who can tell the best story + who will judge?

34. What does the Host's decision to accompany the pilgrims suggest about him?

The Host is fair + generous.
Review and Assess

#5. How does Chaucer's attitude toward the Monk differ, if at all, from his attitude towards the Friar? Explain.

#7. Judging from his pilgrims, do you think Chaucer believes people are basically good, basically evil, or often a mix of the two? Give examples to support your response.

HSPA PREP: OPEN-ENDED QUESTION

The Canterbury Tales is a frame narrative in which many different characters are presented and in which those characters tell their own tales on the pilgrimage to Canterbury.

• From what segments of medieval society do the pilgrims come?
• What does their participation in a common pilgrimage suggest about the times?

Use details from The Canterbury Tales to support your response.
Grammar Focus
p. 117

Past and Past Perfect Tenses

• past perfect

• past perfect tense

This estimable Merchant so had set / His wits to work, none knew he was in debt

Practice

1. Narrator meets pilgrims / stays at inn
2. Nun plans trip / wears nice clothing
3. Cleric is poor / finds no preferment
4. Wife goes to Rome / joins the group
5. Pardoner sells relic / lies about its origin