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CLASSICS

**Simon & Schuster Classroom Activities
for the Enriched Classic edition of
Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer
0-671-72769-9 • \$5.95 / \$7.99 Can.**

Activities created by Katie Gideon

Each of the three activities includes:

- NCTE standards covered
- An estimate of the time needed
- A complete list of materials needed
- Step-by-step instructions
- Questions to help you evaluate the results

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Lesson Plan #1

“Let the Woman Tell Her Story”
(A Lesson in Literary Satire)

Satire critiques human follies through the use of irony, derision, or humorous ridicule. Often, this literary technique reminds readers of the contrast between a reality and its corresponding ideal—encouraging us to identify and improve our personal and/or societal shortcomings.

Today’s satirists include political cartoonists and writers of sketch comedy. Their work bears striking similarity to the satire found in *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. Through understanding how this medieval story functions as a satire, students may come to a better understanding of satire in their own society.

This activity begins with one night of homework. It will take one or two fifty-minute class periods, and should be followed directly by the second lesson in this curriculum guide.

NCTE Standards Covered:

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What To Do:

1. This lesson assumes that students have finished reading *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. Before you commence with the investigation of satire in this piece, review key events with your students. They should pay special attention to any descriptions of how the Wife of Bath gains power in her conjugal relationships.
2. Directly after students finish reading *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, assign Handout #1 for homework. In order to understand Chaucer’s humorous depiction of marriage, students must

know what expectations medieval theologians had regarding the ideal relationship between men and women.

3. At the start of class the next day, go over the handout. Make sure that everyone understands the correct answers before you move forward. Then, discuss the definition of “satire” with your students. Ask them to give you modern-day examples. Perhaps they’ve seen a recent political cartoon or comedy sketch that seemed satirical?

4. Pass out a copy of Handout #2 to each student. Explain that, in order to demonstrate understanding of a key literary term, they must be able to identify it in action: explaining how the author constructs and to what purpose.

5. In the “Realities of Medieval Marriage” column, students should record six pieces of evidence from the texts (St. Augustine and/or Chaucer) that show the realities of medieval marriage. How did married men sometimes behave? How did married women sometimes behave? Based on this text, what can we infer about the relationship between the two?

6. In the “Ideal Medieval Marriage” column, students should record six pieces of evidence from the texts (St. Augustine and/or Chaucer) that show the ideal state of a medieval marriage. How were married men *supposed* to behave? How were married women *supposed* to behave? Based on this text, what can we infer about the ideal relationship between the two?

7. Encourage students to use their observations to draw explicit comparisons between the ideals and realities regarding medieval marriage. They must write five contrast statements comparing the ideals and realities.

Example contrasting statement: In his treatise, St. Augustine argues that a woman should only have sex for purposes of procreation. If she has sex often or with multiple partners, “she cannot possibly be a wife, but only a harlot.” Yet the Wife of Bath gleefully claims “I will use my instrument [sexual organs] as freely as God gave it to me.” Despite the church’s teachings, it seems that some medieval women enjoyed sex.

8. After students have written their contrasting statements, ask them to explain the humor of *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. Why is it funny? What does it satirize? Students should share with one another, either in small groups or as a whole class.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (ISBN: 0671727699) for each student

Copies of Handout #1 (one per student)

Copies of Handout #2 (one per student)

How did it go?

Were the students able to read and analyze St. Augustine's writings? Did the graphic organizer help students draw connections between the ideals and realities of medieval marriage? Were they able to write strong compare/contrast statements? Could students understand how the differences between the ideal and reality create the satirical humor of the text? Were they able to share their insights effectively during a class conversation?

Lesson Plan #2

“Ruled By Their Wives”
(A Lesson in Close Reading)

This close reading activity asks students to investigate *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* as a cultural artifact. In this lesson, students will analyze exactly what Chaucer’s writing can (and cannot) tell modern scholars about medieval English history. Such an exercise will deepen their understanding of the text and exercise their critical thinking skills.

This activity begins with one night of homework. It will take one or two fifty-minute class periods to complete, and is meant to come directly after the first lesson in this curriculum guide.

NCTE Standards Covered:

- 2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- 3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
- 11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

What To Do:

- 1. Prior to beginning this activity, students should complete the first activity in this curriculum guide. Also, they should read *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* for homework before you begin this activity. With that in mind, open class with a brief discussion of chivalry. Acquaint students with chivalry as it commonly appears in Arthurian stories—the fact that most chivalric knights are admirable and/or tragic heroes possessing virtues such as mercy, courage, valor, faith, and loyalty. Men demonstrating chivalry towards women do so with graciousness and gentility.
- 2. Ask students to tell you how *The Wife of Bath’s Tale* differs from common Arthurian tales. What does this difference indicate about medieval relationships between men and women? Now, think about *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, as well. Is the information conveyed by this character meant to contradict the common medieval attitudes towards women, or is it meant to confirm the truth of those medieval attitudes? Give the students just a few minutes to discuss their initial impressions—then explain that they’ll revisit the question after doing some analysis.
- 3. Pass out copies of Handout #3. Go over the directions, and the guiding questions of each category. If students are confused as to how to fill out the handout, explain that they should use

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these definitions as globally as possible. Give an example of how the questions might be applicable. (For instance, the Wife of Bath never mentions any form of political institution, but the marriages described in her prologue definitely indicate a social contract between governing and governed members of the opposite sex.)

4. To ensure that students are thinking critically, remind them that it's just as important to recognize the limits of a source as it is to glean the information from it. In addition to taking what they can from the text, they should also ask themselves: to what extent can a literary source be trusted for historical information?

5. Give students time to work on handouts in groups or pairs. After they're finished, bring them together once more to discuss their findings. Is the information conveyed by the Wife of Bath meant to contradict common medieval attitudes towards women, or is it meant to confirm the truth of those medieval attitudes? What can Chaucer's text tell us in regards to this question? What can it *not* tell us?

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (ISBN: 0671727699) for each student

Copies of Handout #3 (one per student)

How Did It Go?

Could students extrapolate information regarding medieval attitudes towards women and/or marriage? Were they able to fill out all sections of the graphic organizer? Did the graphic organizer assist students' close reading of the text? Did they recognize the limitations of Chaucer's writing as a historical source? Were they able to productively discuss their findings?

Lesson Plan #3

“Folks Long to Go on Pilgrimage”
(A Lesson in Frame Stories)

The following assessment activity is designed to challenge students’ synthesizing ability in an engaging, creative way. In this lesson, students will critically examine the form and function of *The Canterbury Tales* in order to create a satirical frame story of their own.

This lesson will take at least two fifty-minute class periods to complete, and also includes homework.

NCTE Standards Covered:

3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

What To Do:

1. Have this journal prompt posted at the beginning of class:

Chaucer refers to his pilgrims by occupation instead of name. His characters are medieval archetypes as well as individuals, and they’re completing the most popular pilgrimage of their day. Now, think about the young adult novels you’ve read and teen movies you’ve watched. What patterns do you notice? Who are the archetypal characters? What common journeys do many of the teen characters carry out?

2. Give the students time to brainstorm on their own. Then, have them share as a class. If they’re having a hard time with the question, give them a jumpstart with some of the archetypes that abound in teen movies: the Jock, the Loner, the Cheerleader, etc. Why do these characters

constantly reappear in books and movies? How might some of Chaucer's archetypes be similar to these contemporary teenage archetypes?

3. Even if they haven't articulated it as such, students have already noticed the narrative structure of *The Canterbury Tales*. Conduct a brief lecture regarding the form and function of a frame story. A frame story is a technique whereby the main story serves the function of organizing a set of shorter stories. In essence, it's a story (or series of stories) within a story. In the case of *The Canterbury Tales*, the framing pilgrimage story allows Chaucer to assemble a motley assortment of medieval characters from various social classes. Their interactions lay the foundation for powerful, satirical social commentary.

4. Explain that students will be writing a creative frame story as part of their final assessment for the unit. Pass out copies of Handout #4. Explain that successful writers carefully read all of the information provided for an assignment before they commence work. Encourage students to underline key words and phrases as you read the story prompt and rubric out loud.

5. Brainstorm the different frame narratives that students might use in their story. Again, it may be helpful to refer to young adult novels and teen movies. What kind of frame might explain why such different kinds of students are socializing and telling one another stories? Perhaps they've been stuck in an elevator. Maybe they're on a bus for a field trip, or they all got stuck in Saturday detention. It could be as simple as taking a mandatory class together.

6. Then, look back at Chaucer's "General Prologue" (pgs. 1-18). What kind of information does Chaucer give about each of the characters? This is the kind of information students will be expected to provide for each of their teenage archetypes.

7. Ask if there are any further questions that the whole group needs to hear. If not, release the students to work independently. For the rest of the assessment period, you'll be working with each student about individual concerns. Your guidelines for the whole class are as follows: they should complete the framing prologue as homework. There's one more class day to work on the character prologue and story—anything students don't finish in class is homework.

8. Students should turn in the final draft of their story with Handout #4 attached, so that you can use it to grade them.

What You Need:

A copy of the Enriched Classic edition of *The Canterbury Tales* (ISBN: 0671727699) for each student

Copies of Handout #4 (one per student)

How Did It Go?

Were students able to recognize archetypes in their own media? Could they compare and contrast those archetypes with the ones used by Chaucer? Did their final stories show an understanding of frame narratives? Were they able to mimic Chaucer's structure? Did their final stories show an understanding of satire? Were they able to offer social commentary on contemporary teenage life?

Handout #1

Chaucer vs. the Church

St. Augustine lived in the fifth century, but his religious writings remained important long after his death. In medieval times, his ideas and writings guided theologians' beliefs on marriage, women, and proper gender roles. The following two quotes come from his work *On Marriage and Concupiscence*. Read the quotes, and answer the questions.

First, however, look up "Concupiscence" in the dictionary. What does it mean?

"Nor can it be doubted, that it is more consonant with the order of nature that men should bear rule over women, than women over men. It is with this principle in view that the apostle says, 'The head of the woman is the man;' and, 'Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands.' So also the Apostle Peter writes: 'Even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord.'"

— *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, St. Augustine

Rewrite the quote in your own words.

What point is the source trying to convey about the proper relationship between men and women?

"Wherefore, if one woman cohabits with several men inasmuch as no increase of offspring accrues to her therefrom, but only a more frequent gratification of lust, she cannot possibly be a wife, but only a harlot."

— *On Marriage and Concupiscence*, St. Augustine

Rewrite the quote in your own words.

In context, what is the meaning of the word "cohabits"?

What point is the source trying to convey about the proper behavior of women?

Handout #3

TAP SPA—*The Wife of Bath*

Through her prologue and tale, the Wife of Bath tells today’s readers many things about medieval society. After reading all sections of *The Canterbury Tales* related to her character, complete the following graphic organizer.

T	Topic	What idea is the source trying to convey? What is its significance? Why should you, as a reader, care?	
A	Author	Who created this piece? What’s your prior knowledge concerning her/his background and/or point of view?	
P	Philosophy	What do we know about the philosophical beliefs of the culture described? Is there a common religion? Who controls dogma? Do religious figures exercise political power? What is the relationship between religion and education? Are laypeople included or excluded from the sharing of ideas?	
S	Society	What are the various social classes in the culture described? How are people placed in different social classes? Are the boundaries between classes rigid, or fluid? How are people with lower status expected to treat people with higher status, and vice versa?	
P	Politics	What institutions or persons are allowed to make decisions? How does information reach the governors? How does information reach the governed? To what degree can the governed influence decision makers? Is there a social contract between the governors and the governed? How do decision makers regulate everyday life?	
A	Audience	For whom was the source created? For what purpose? How do you know? How does this affect the source’s reliability?	

Handout #4

The Canterbury Tales Creative Writing Assignment

Directions: Imagine yourself as a modern-day Chaucer. Your goal? To write part of an amusing, satirical frame story that captures the essence of contemporary teenage life. Using *The Canterbury Tales* as your model, write a tale that brings together disparate high school figures to share stories and social observations. The rubric below explains the expectations in detail.

Rubric

- + Excellent! You have this area mastered (30 points)
- ✓ Satisfactory, but could use some improvement (25 points)
- You need some help; please see me (20 points)

Frame Story Prologue

- States a plausible reason why the various characters have come together
- Describes at least five different contemporary teenage archetypes
- Descriptions of archetypal teenagers mimic Chaucer's descriptions of medieval archetypes
- States a plausible reason why each of the characters will be telling a story

Character Prologue

- Foreshadows the subject of the Character Story
- Elaborates on the character description in the Frame Story
- Gives readers all pertinent personal information about character
- Contains dialogue between focus character and at least one other archetypal character

Character Story

- Further elaborates on key points of the Character Prologue
- Gives readers further insight regarding the focus character's philosophies
- Refers indirectly to the focus character's beliefs and experiences
- Uses the focus character's voice (not the author's!) to tell the story

Story as a whole

- Uses satire to critique human follies through the use of irony, derision, or humor
- Provides a snapshot of contemporary teenage life (i.e., could serve as a cultural artifact for future generations)
- Exhibits intentional word choice: action verbs, few repeats, intentional vocabulary, few unintentional clichés/jargon
- Contains few mechanical errors (grammar, spelling, punctuation)

<p>_____ / 120 points</p>
