The Miller’s Tale

One of the pilgrims created by Chaucer is the Miller. In modern English, this is how Chaucer describes him.

There was a Miller, a man of powerful size;
In wrestling bouts he always won the prize.
Thick-set and muscular, big-boned and raw,
He could heave from its hinges any door
Or break it down by charging with his head.
His beard, like fox or farmyard sow, was red
And broad as well, shaped like a garden spade.
On the right side of his nose the man displayed
A wart, and on it grew a tuft of hair
Red as the bristles in an old pig's ear.
His nostrils, as I could see, were black and wide;
He wore a sword and buckler at his side.
His mouth was vast, wide as a furnace door;
With bawdy tales he liked to hold the floor.
Corn he stole and charged three times his due;
But honest millers are, I fear, extremely few.
His coat was white, and blue his hooded gown;
His bagpipe music brought us put of town.

TASK ONE - WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS FIRST

Use a dictionary, if necessary, to make sure that you know the meanings of the following.

1. bouts  
2. thick-set  
3. big-boned  
4. heave  
5. sow  
6. buckler  
7. vast  
8. bawdy  
9. to hold the floor  
10. three times his due

TASK TWO

Now complete the “Pilgrim study sheet” for the miller
Complete the following table for the pilgrim named above. Use as much significant detail as you can but use bullet points, not sentences.

1. **Job/occupation/title and what this means**

2. **Facial features**

3. **Build and physical appearance**

4. **Clothes**

5a. **Props or accessories**

5b. **What do these show or imply?**

6. **Five key words used in the passage about his/her personality**

7. **Five descriptive words of your own for this person**

8. **Images or ideas used in the description and what do these show or imply?**

9. **What does Chaucer seem to think of this person?**

10. **What are your impressions of this person?**
The Opening to “The General Prologue” – Visit this Website – Listen to Chaucer’s English

You will need:

- this worksheet
- access to a computer with speakers
- (optional) a modern version of the opening to the General Prologue

The website address is:

http://www.unc.edu/depts/chaucer/chworks.htm

Go to this page and click on “Teaching Chaucer” on the left hand side of the screen. Then click on The Crying and the Soun: Chaucer Audio Files. You are now on a page called the “Chaucer Metapage”. Click on the very first item in the list – “The General Prologue, lines 1 – 34.” You can read the text as you listen to the reading.

This is Chaucer’s opening to the Canterbury Tales, when he writes about the meeting of the pilgrims who are going to set off together to Canterbury. The recording has been made by an expert in how to read and pronounce Chaucerian English.

**Task**

Listen to this audio as many times as you like and answer the following questions.

**Questions and Research**

1. **Line 1** = Chaucer seems pleased that it is a new season. Which season and which month is it and why is it a good time to go on a pilgrimage? __________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. **Line 4** = “flour”
   In modern English, this word means ________________
   Underline the word that is the nearest rhyme to “flour”:
   door shower paw car newer

3. **Line 7** = “croppes”
   In modern English, this word means: _____________
   How many syllables does it have in Chaucer’s English?
• **Line 10 and 23 = “nyght”**
  What do you notice about how this word used to be pronounced? (Notice that it’s the modern word “night.”) ____________________________________________

• **Line 16 =** What are the modern spellings of “Engelond” and “Cantebury”? ____________________________________________

• **Line 17** Who is the “hooly blisful martir” that they are going to seek? ____________________________________________

• **Line 20 =** The pilgrims meet “in Southwerk at the Tabard…….”
  Where is “Southwerk”? ____________________________________________
  It still exists! How has the spelling changed nowadays? ____________________________
  Can you explain how it is pronounced today? ____________________________
  This is a picture of what “the Tabard” looked like.
  What is “the Tabard”? ____________________________________________

• **Line 12 = “pigrimage”**
• **Line 13 = “straunge”**
• **Line 22 = “corage”**
  These three words all end in “-ge.” How does the sound differ from modern English? (Here’s a clue if you know some French! When Chaucer was writing, it wasn’t 400 years since the Norman Invasion, which brought French to England.) ____________________________________________

• **Line 24 –** How many pilgrims are there in this group that Chaucer has invented? ____________________________________________

• **Line 33 = “ryse”**
  Underline the modern meaning: rice rise write ride writhe
  Underline the word that rhymes with “ryse”:
  cries twice bees freezer fizz

**EXTENSION TASK**

*For those of you who coped quite well with this work*

Return to the “Chaucer Metapage” and listen to any other expert recording of an extract from Chaucer’s work. There is always a text to follow as you listen.

How easy or difficult did you find listening to, and understanding, Chaucer’s English? Put a cross on this line.

very easy ____________________________ very difficult

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Answers

- **Line 1** = April, spring, a time of renewal, growth, freshness, start of pleasanter weather and conditions

- **Line 4** = flower
  Nearest rhyme = door

- **Line 7** = crops
  Two syllables

- **Line 10 and 23** = the “gh” is pronounced, not silent like now.

- **Line 16** = England and Canterbury

- **Line 17** = Thomas Becket

- **Line 20** = South bank of River Thames
  Southwark
  “South” rhymes with “tooth” and the “w” has become silent
  The Tabard is the inn where Chaucer’s pilgrims meet

- **Lines 12, 13 and 22** “------age” pronunciation sound French, the “a” sounding longer and the “g” being softer, as in French “je”

- **Line 24** = Twenty-nine pilgrims

- **Line 33** = rise
  Freezer
Online Lesson

CHAUCER TRANSLATOR – VISIT THIS WEBSITE – THE CHANGING ENGLISH LANGUAGE BETWEEN CHAUCER AND NOW

The website address is:

http://aspirations.english.cam.ac.uk/converse/movies/chaucer_translator.swf

Go to this page. Read it and then click on the arrow. On the next page, click on “Chaucer Translator.”

Look at the website carefully for a few minutes to make sure that you understand what it does and how it works.

TASK

First, you are going to make sentences in modern English and then click to translate them into Chaucer’s English.

Then you must look to see if you can find links between Chaucer’s English and modern English.

Example: My brother is very polite

Translates to Chaucer’s English = My brother is ful curteis

like modern “full”

like modern “courteous” or “courtesy”
**TASK A**

*Make the following five sentences first.* Click on “Chaucer” to translate them. Copy out the Chaucerian sentence and then write down any links to modern English that you can see. **Write neatly below.**

1. We must attack this enemy.

2. That deceitful girl is crazy.

3. I always choose beautiful clothes.

4. My advice is to consider your friends.

5. I must seize my chance.

**TASK B**

*Now, make five of your own sentences,* using the words available to you. Write:

- your own modern sentence
- links to modern English that you can find.
- the Chaucer translation

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.
Answers – Chaucer translator website

 TASK A

1. We moot offend this foo
2. Thar fals gerl is wood
3. I ay chesen fair array
4. My conseil is to deme thyn frendes
5. I moot hente my aventure
Six pilgrims described by Chaucer

Here are my descriptions of six of my pilgrims. They’ve been turned into modern English for you though they have been made to rhyme, just as the original ones did. Look closely: sometimes the descriptions state facts about these people but sometimes I drop hints for you to pick up!

THE FRANKLIN

The Judge’s friend was a Franklin, it appeared,
Whose face was ruddy and daisy-white his beard.
He loved to dip his bread in wine when drinking.
Perfect happiness, to his way of thinking,
Lay in sensual pleasures. He was most
Most hospitable as householder and host;
His bread and ale were both extremely fine,
His cellars stocked with barrels of best wine,
His larders too with many a tasty pie
Of fish or meat, and in such rich supply
His household seemed to snow with food and drink
And every luxury a man could think.
His coops were filled with partridges; he was fond
Of pike and bream, the fish that filled his pond.
His cook was soon in trouble if he dared
To serve the sauce unspiced, or was unprepared.
A table in the hall would always stay
Laden with food for visitors all day.
At meetings of J.P.s he took the chair;
When Parliament was in session, he was there.
A dagger and a wallet made of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
He’d been a sheriff, was skilled at auditing,
A most distinguished vassal of his king.
THE PARDONER

There rode with the Summoner, near the end,
A Pardoner from Charing Cross, his friend.
He’d come from the court of Rome quite recently
And boldly chanted, “Come, my love, to me,”
While louder than the loudest trumpet rang
The bass accompaniment the Summoner sang.
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
Hanging smoothly like a hank of flax,
In wispy strands over his shoulders spread.
For fun he wore no hood upon his head;
Inside his bag he kept it, safely stowed.
In the latest style, it seemed to him, he rode;
Save for a little cap, his head was bare,
And he had staring eye-balls, like a hare.
He’d sewn a holy relic on his cap.
In front of him his bag lay in his lap,
Brought from Rome, with pardons stuffed to the brim.
His voice, a goat-like bleat, was small and thin;
He had no beard, and none was coming on _
Not a hair was on his chin or sign of one;
He reminded me of a gelding or a mare.
As for his trade, from Berwick down to Ware
There was no Pardoner could take his place.
Inside his bag he kept a pillow-case,
And this he vowed to be Our Lady’s veil.
He claimed he had a snippet of the sail
Of Saint Peter’s boat, when rashly far from land
He walked the waves, till saved by Jesus’ hand.
He had a metal cross, inlaid with stones
And in a vessel of glass a pig’s bones,
With which he made more money in one day
Than a country priest in months could put away.
So, by hollow flattery and deceit
He managed priest and people both to cheat.
But o give the man his due, first and last
In church he was a fine ecclesiast.
How well he read a lesson and told a story!
But best of all he sang the offertory,
Knowing full well that when his song was sung
He had to preach and polish smooth his tongue
To wheedle silver coins from the crowd;
Therefore he sang both merrily and loud.
THE FRIAR

There was a Friar, a lively chao and merry,
Impressive, too. His tongue knew how to flatter
Nicely; he was rich in local chatter.
Within the boundaries where he begged for alms
He was well liked and on the best of terms
With wealthy squires and women with possessions,
As he was authorized to hear confessions
For graver sins than those that could be named
In front of parish priests, or so he claimed.
Easy was his penance and given sweetly
If he was sure of being tipped discreetly.
His hood was crammed with pins and pocket-knives
Inside the folds, to give to pretty wives.
His voice was pleasing, with a merry ring;
He could play the fiddle and could sing
Ballads by the score and drive you silly.
His neck, I saw, was whiter than the lily,
Though he was champion-tough. In every town
He knew the inns and taverns up and down.
To barmaids more than beggars he would come –
It didn’t do to mix with common scum,
But with the rich. Where profit could be found,
Polite and humble, he’d be hanging round.
For begging, no other friar could match this tout;
So pleasantly his text he trotted out
That, even if a widow had no shoes,
She’d give him sixpence rather than refuse.
He made his biggest profits on the sly,
On settling days he romped about, as spry
As a puppy; he was helpful (for a fee);
Not dressed, like a cloistered scholar, shabbily,
But smartly as a Doctor or a Poe.
Of double-worsted was his outer cloak,
And rounded like a bell straight from the press.
He lisped a little, purely to impress
And make his words trip sweetly off the tongue;
And when he’d played his harp or sung his song,
His eyes would twinkle in his head, as bright
As stars in heaven on a frosty night.
THE CLERK

There was an Oxford scholar, a priest in training;
Philosophy, his subject, he found sustaining.
His horse was lean and lanky as a rake,
And he was none too fat, there’s no mistake,
But frail and hollow-cheeked and rather sad,
And in a threadbare jacket he was clad.
But he was too aloof to seek employment;
In worldly matters he saw no enjoyment.
He would rather have beside his bed
Twenty volumes bound in black and red
Than costly robes or psalter. Even so,
The clue to making gold he did not know.
Any money that his friends might lend,
At once on books and learning he would spend,
Then offer grateful prayers in return
For the souls of those who gave him means to learn.
Knowledge above all things else he heeded,
And never uttered one word more than needed –
Formal, to the point, respectful too,
And shot with lofty thinking through and through.
Full to the brim with goodness was his speech,
And he would gladly learn and gladly teach.

THE KNIGHT

There was a Knight, a most illustrious man,
Who, from the moment that he first began
To ride abroad, had worshipped chivalry,
Fair dealing, honour, truth and courtesy.
He’d won distinction in his sovereign’s war;
Moreover, he had ridden – none so far –
Through Christendom and heathen lands as well.
He was at Alexandria when it fell;
He’d held the seat of honour when in Prussia,
Campaigned in Lithuania and in Russia.
In fifteen deadly battles he had been,
And battled for the faith at Tramissene.
In all he undertook he won the prize.
Respected highly, he was also wise
And in behaviour modest as a maid.
Never a discourteous word he’d said
In all his life to injure or to slight;
He was a true and perfect, noble knight.
He had good horses but was not finely dressed;
Rust marks from his armour stained his vest.
Just home from foreign service, he had sworn
To make this pilgrimage on his return.
THE WIFE OF BATH

There was a jolly wife; from Bath she came,
And she was a little deaf, which seemed a shame.
No weaver was there, even in Ypres or Ghent,
Could weave like her – at the loom her time was spent.
Her kerchiefs of the finest cloth were made;
I daresay that at least ten pounds they weighed,
The ones she wore on Sunday on her head.
Her stockings were a handsome scarlet red
And tightly fastened; her shoes were soft and new.
Her face was comely, bold, of rosy hue;
She was a worthy woman all her life.
Five times in church had she been made a wife,
Apart from other loves she’d known before,
Of whom, for the present, I need say no more.
Three times to Jerusalem she’d been,
Crossing many a distant foreign stream.
She’d been to papal Rome and to Boulogne,
To holy shrines in Galicia and Cologne;
Fond of the road, she’d travelled much of late.
Her front teeth stood apart, like an open gate.
With a graceful wimple, and on her head a hat
As broad as a shield or buckler, round in shape,
With a skirt that did her ample buttocks drape,
And a pair of pointed spurs upon her feet.
How she chattered and laughed along the street!
She knew all the cure foe love, for it must be said
That was a theme she’d learned from A to Z.

All these characters tell a story.

** For all of them except the Friar, you can find their stories in a modern and quite simple version in “The Road to Canterbury” by Ian Serrallier:

- **The Knight’s Tale** – “Prisoners of War” – page 22
- **The Clerk’s (or Scholar’s) Tale** – “Patient Griselda” – page 60
- **The Judge’s Tale** - “The Wild Waves” – page 83
- **The Franklin’s Tale** – “The Black Rocks of Brittany” – page 97
- **The Wife of Bath’s Tale** – “The Queen’s Riddle” – page 110
- **The Pardoner’s Tale** – “In Search of Death” – page 131

** For the Friar (and all the others) you can find his story in “The Canterbury Tales” Longman Classics.

** You can also find the original and translated texts alongside each other on the following websites but unlike the two books above, they have not been written for younger readers:
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/CT
http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer
Group work on one of Chaucer’s pilgrims

Organisation of the group work

- Your teacher will organise you into groups of three or four pupils.
- You will have a handout called “Six Pilgrims described by Chaucer” and you might already have read some or all of these descriptions.
- Your teacher will now tell you which one of these six pilgrims your group will be investigating more fully.
- At the end of your exploration and investigation, your group will be presenting your findings to the rest of the class.
- The aim is for every one else in the class to get to know your pilgrim and his/her tale and they can ask questions at the end.
- Your presentation will be about ten minutes long and it is important that every one in the group contributes equally.
- Your teacher will use this to assess your “Speaking and Listening” skills.

THE TASK – things to think about!

Here are the things that you will need to do to prepare your presentation.

- You will need to keep lots of notes during the work and then later you can organise them into your neat presentation form.
- You will have to decide how your group tackles these tasks.
- Are you going to start on everything together and then make decisions about who does what?
- Are you going to share them out?
- Are you going to share some but work on others individually?
- Are you all going to work on every task together?
- Are you going to work in pairs within your group?
- If you share out some of the tasks, do use what talents there are! For example, a good artist could do the storyboard or a picture of the pilgrim. Someone good at acting or delivering a lively reading could do some of the dramatised bits.
THE TASK – investigating your pilgrim – some compulsory, some optional

Use the column as a checklist

- Carefully read Chaucer’s description in your handout “Six Pilgrims described by Chaucer.”
- If you want a fuller description, in both Chaucerian as well as modern English, you could visit websites.
  
  http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/CT-prolog - para.html
  http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer
- Complete a “Pilgrim Study Sheet” for your pilgrim.
- This “Pilgrim Study Sheet” is quite basic. Think about expanding on the details by considering these questions:
  - How does the pilgrim behave and act?
  - Is this suitable for his/her occupation or status?
  - Are there any similes or metaphors in the description?
  - Is s/he compared to animals or birds and, if so, why?
  - Do you have any clues about what the other pilgrims think about him or her? Does s/he get on with the others?
  - What seems to be important to him/her?
- Your teacher will provide you with a copy of the tale that this pilgrim tells. Read it carefully and become familiar with it. This tale will be an important part of your presentation to the class.
- Does the tale have a moral or lesson for the listeners? If so, what is it? Does the tale tell you anything more about your pilgrim’s character or personality?
- You could draw a big storyboard, dividing the pilgrim’s tale into the main six or eight events. (A big and neat version of this could be used as part of your final presentation.)
- You could try acting out some key parts of the story, or a lively reading of some extracts – not the whole tale, as you do not have enough time. Choose which bits to do. You will need to rehearse this thoughtfully. If it works in practice, it could become part of your presentation to the class.
- If you visit www.Google.co.uk, and go to “Images”, you will probably be able to find pictures of your pilgrim. You might also be able to find illustrations from the tale that they tell. For example, this one comes from entering – Chaucer Franklin’s Tale.
- You could use these images in your presentation or get a good artist in your group to draw a big picture, perhaps with labels, pointing out the details in Chaucer’s description.
- You could prepare an interview with your pilgrim, one of you being the interviewer and the other being the pilgrim.

The Presentation

As well as the many suggestions above, you can also:

- Give a PowerPoint presentation
- Use a flipchart
- Use an overhead projector