Connect HISTORY and Literature

British literature spans more than 1,500 years—from Old English poems to modern bestsellers. As you read, you’ll be asked to make connections between individual works and the real-life conditions that inspired them. In this way, you’ll gain a greater understanding of the people and events that shaped Britain over the centuries.

Explore BIG IDEAS

Can love bring more suffering than joy? What makes an effective leader? People of all time periods and cultures have grappled with questions about love and politics. Some ideas are universal, as you’ll discover when you read sonnets by lovestruck poets and speeches by such leaders as Elizabeth I and Winston Churchill.

Insights and Perspectives

The study of British literature is a remarkable journey that begins with an epic battle against an Anglo-Saxon monster and continues through works in which modern writers tackle contemporary issues. Along the way, you’ll encounter Robin Hood, King Arthur, and other legendary characters who remain a vital part of popular culture because they still have the power to captivate. You’ll explore masterpieces—such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Macbeth*—that have changed the way we view society and ourselves. You’ll also learn how British literature has influenced American traditions. The literature in this book can help you . . .
Build CULTURAL LITERACY

Who was the Bard of Avon? Where does the phrase “Big Brother” come from? There are certain people, events, phrases, and ideas so embedded in today’s culture that everyone should be familiar with them. Studying British literature helps you develop an awareness of the authors, literary works, and historical milestones that still matter.

Appreciate a LEGACY

Why read an Anglo-Saxon epic about a fierce warrior or a medieval legend about heroic knights? Some characters and themes in early works of British literature live on in today’s stories and movies. In this book, you’ll find out why such tales as Beowulf and Le Morte d’Arthur continue to be reimagined by cultures around the globe.
## Literature in Context

To best appreciate works of British literature, you should have some sense of their **historical context**, or the social conditions that gave rise to them. Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales*, for example, is unmistakably a product of its time. The rich stories in Chaucer’s work strongly reflect the customs and people of his medieval world. Similarly, the early 20th-century fiction of James Joyce is forever linked with his boyhood experiences in Dublin, Ireland’s bustling capital. As you read this book, you will become more familiar with Britain’s long, fabled history and the circumstances that influenced the thoughts and words of its finest writers.

### BRITISH LITERATURE IN CONTEXT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The Beowulf Poet</td>
<td>• Geoffrey Chaucer</td>
<td>• Christopher Marlowe</td>
<td>• Daniel Defoe</td>
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<tr>
<td>• The Venerable Bede</td>
<td>• The Gawain Poet</td>
<td>• William Shakespeare</td>
<td>• Alexander Pope</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Sir Thomas Malory</td>
<td>• John Milton</td>
<td>• Jonathan Swift</td>
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<td>• John Donne</td>
<td>• Samuel Johnson</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Mary Wollstonecraft</td>
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<tr>
<th>449</th>
<th>1066</th>
<th>1517</th>
<th>1665</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>793</td>
<td>1215</td>
<td>1558</td>
<td>1760</td>
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<tr>
<td>Vikings begin raids on England, eventually conquering northern and eastern regions.</td>
<td>King John signs the Magna Carta, limiting royal authority.</td>
<td>The reign of Elizabeth I begins (to 1603).</td>
<td>The reign of George III begins (to 1820).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>871</td>
<td>1315</td>
<td>1609</td>
<td>1775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alfred the Great becomes king of Wessex.</td>
<td>The Hundred Years’ War with France begins (to 1453).</td>
<td>Galileo Galilei studies the heavens with a telescope.</td>
<td>War with colonies in North America erupts (to 1783).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1347</td>
<td>1642</td>
<td>1789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The bubonic plague reaches Europe, killing millions.</td>
<td>The English Civil War erupts (to 1651).</td>
<td>The French Revolution rises in Paris (to 1799).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Literary Movements

Like music and art, literature can be organized into historical periods. Within each period, there are groups of writers who play a key role in the development of literary movements, or noteworthy trends in literature. Some movements are so important that historical periods are named after them. While grunge and hip hop are examples of trends in music history, British literature counts romanticism and modernism among its important trends. Studying these literary movements in context will allow you to better grasp how, when, and why various works of British literature came into being.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• William Wordsworth</td>
<td>• Alfred, Lord Tennyson</td>
<td>• T. S. Eliot</td>
<td>• Samuel Beckett</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Samuel Taylor Coleridge</td>
<td>• The Brontë Sisters</td>
<td>• Virginia Woolf</td>
<td>• Ted Hughes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• George Gordon, Lord Byron</td>
<td>• Anthony Trollope</td>
<td>• James Joyce</td>
<td>• Seamus Heaney</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Percy Bysshe Shelley</td>
<td>• Charles Dickens</td>
<td>• George Orwell</td>
<td>• William Trevor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• John Keats</td>
<td>• George Eliot</td>
<td>• W. H. Auden</td>
<td>• Nadine Gordimer</td>
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</table>

1811 George III is declared insane; Prince of Wales is named regent.
1815 Britain and Prussia conquer Napoleon Bonaparte at Waterloo.
1817 Ludwig van Beethoven begins composing Ninth Symphony (to 1824).
1837 At age 19, Victoria I begins her reign (to 1901).
1859 Charles Darwin publishes *On the Origin of Species*.
1861 Civil War erupts in the United States (to 1865).
1879 Ireland pressures for home rule.
1918 British military deaths total about 750,000 at the end of World War I.
1921 Irish Free State is established (becomes the Republic of Ireland in 1949).
1936 The reign of George VI begins (to 1952).
1939 Britain joins France in battling Germany in World War II (to 1945).
1952 Elizabeth II becomes Britain’s monarch.
1979 Margaret Thatcher becomes first female prime minister.
1997 Britain returns Hong Kong to China, ending 155 years of colonial rule.
2003 Britain joins with the United States and other nations in the Iraq War.
Using Critical Lenses

Think about what you see when you look through a camera’s lens. What do you consider before you snap a photograph? Do you want your subject to be brightly lit or cast in shadow? Should you focus on objects in the center or something off to the side? Believe it or not, you can ask similar questions when you’re reading literature. Using critical lenses can help shed light on the stories you read and bring overlooked elements into focus. For example, how did the author’s life influence his or her writing? What social tensions affected the author? Looking through different lenses, you may discover more to literature than meets the eye.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THE LENSES</th>
<th>QUESTIONS TO ASK</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>LITERARY LENS</strong>&lt;br&gt;When you look through a literary lens, you focus on such elements as plot, theme, and author’s style in various forms of literature, including poetry.</td>
<td>• What is the specific form of poetry or prose, and what are its characteristics?&lt;br&gt;• What is distinctive about this author’s style?&lt;br&gt;• How is imagery used to establish the setting and mood?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL LENSES</strong>&lt;br&gt;Historical and cultural lenses help you consider how elements of history and culture may have influenced the author and the writing.</td>
<td>• What was going on in the country at the time this work was written?&lt;br&gt;• What questions, issues, and concerns were people of the time grappling with?&lt;br&gt;• How are those events and issues, as well as the author’s attitude toward them, reflected in the writing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>BIOGRAPHICAL LENS</strong>&lt;br&gt;The biographical lens focuses your attention on the author’s background. It prompts you to consider how factors such as heritage, personal experiences, and economic circumstances may have shaped him or her.</td>
<td>• What were the defining events or experiences in the author’s life?&lt;br&gt;• What people—other writers, friends, family members—were known influences on him or her?&lt;br&gt;• What role did culture or heritage play in shaping the author’s attitude toward his or her subject?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OTHER LENSES</strong>&lt;br&gt;• psychological&lt;br&gt;• social&lt;br&gt;• political&lt;br&gt;• philosophical/moral</td>
<td>• What motivations might be influencing a character’s behavior? (psychological)&lt;br&gt;• Do you agree with the character’s choices and decisions? Are they ethical and honest? (moral)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
MODEL: CRITICAL LENSES

David Copperfield is considered one of Charles Dickens’s most autobiographical works. It is set in early 19th-century London, when the Industrial Revolution first began. Cities became crowded, and the working class struggled to survive. In this excerpt, an orphaned Copperfield takes a job for his own survival. Read the entire passage first. Then read it again, using critical lenses to answer the Close Read questions.

from

David Copperfield

Novel by Charles Dickens

I know enough of the world now, to have almost lost the capacity of being much surprised by anything; but it is matter of some surprise to me, even now, that I can have been so easily thrown away at such an age. A child of excellent abilities, and with strong powers of observation, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily and mentally, it seems wonderful to me that nobody should have made any sign in my behalf. But none was made; and I became, at ten years old, a little labouring hind¹ in the service of Murdstone and Grinby.

Murdstone and Grinby’s warehouse was at the water-side. It was down in Blackfriars.² Modern improvements have altered the place; but it was the last house at the bottom of a narrow street, curving down hill to the river, with some stairs at the end, where people took boat. It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its panelled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place; are things, not of many years ago, in my mind, but of the present instant. They are all before me, just as they were in the evil hour when I went among them for the first time, with my trembling hand in Mr. Quinion’s.

Murdstone and Grinby’s trade was among a good many kinds of people but an important branch of it was the supply of wines and spirits to certain packet ships. I forget now where they chiefly went, but I think there were some among them that made voyages both to the East and West Indies. I know that a great many empty bottles were one of the consequences of this traffic, and that certain men and boys were employed to examine them against the light, and reject those that were flawed, and to rinse and wash them. When the empty bottles ran short, there were labels to be pasted on full ones, or corks to be fitted to them, or seals to be put upon the corks, or finished bottles to be packed in casks. All this work was my work, and of the boys employed upon it I was one.

Close Read

1. Cultural Lens  David feels he was “thrown away” to become a worker at a young age. What can you infer about society’s attitude toward both work and the education and welfare of children?

2. Literary/Historical Lenses  Reread the boxed text. What imagery does Dickens use to describe the setting? Consider what this suggests about the working conditions of the time.

3. Historical Lens  How might the process described in lines 23–28 be handled today? How has the need for human labor changed since the Industrial Revolution?

¹ hind: a farm laborer or skilled worker.

² Blackfriars: a small district in Central London.
There were three or four of us, counting me. My working place was established in a corner of the warehouse, where Mr. Quinion could see me, when he chose to stand up on the bottom rail of his stool in the counting-house, and look at me through a window above the desk. Hither, on the first morning of my so auspiciously beginning life on my own account, the oldest of the regular boys was summoned to show me my business. His name was Mick Walker, and he wore a ragged apron and a paper cap. He informed me that his father was a bargeman, and walked, in a black velvet head-dress, in the Lord Mayor’s Show. He also informed me that our principal associate would be another boy whom he introduced by the—to me—extraordinary name of Mealy Potatoes. I discovered, however, that this youth had not been christened by that name, but that it had been bestowed upon him in the warehouse, on account of his complexion, which was pale or mealy.

No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these henceforth everyday associates with those of my happier childhood—not to say with Steerforth, Traddles, and the rest of those boys; and felt my hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man crushed in my bosom. The deep remembrance of the sense I had, of being utterly without hope now; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young heart to believe that day by day what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, would pass away from me, little by little, never to be brought back anymore; cannot be written.

Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth, England, during the height of the Industrial Revolution. The Dickens family, as many others, moved to overcrowded London to find work. Two years later, Charles’ father was imprisoned for unpaid debts. To help support his family of ten, twelve-year-old Charles withdrew from school and went to work labeling bottles in a warehouse. It was common for factory owners of this era to demand that child laborers work 14-hour days, 6 days a week, in dirty and unsafe conditions. Dickens eventually returned to school, became a law clerk, then a journalist, and finally a novelist. *David Copperfield* and his other popular novels made Dickens a champion of the working class. He died in 1870, having become one of the most beloved authors of his day.
Reading British Literature

Britain boasts a proud history of literature that, over time, both defied and defined the times—from fierce nationalism to radical experimentation. As content and style evolved, so did the forms authors used to express themselves. You may find some forms of British prose and poetry challenging. Use these advanced strategies to help you unlock the meaning of what you read.

**CONSIDER THE FORM**

British literature includes not only short stories, novels, and essays but also a wide range of poetic forms, such as the sonnet, ballad, epic, and ode. When it comes to approaching new forms, you can rely on strategies you are already familiar with, such as visualizing and reading aloud. Adding additional strategies will help you overcome any hurdles you may encounter when reading less familiar forms. Here, for example, are useful strategies for reading epics and sonnets.

**FORM/DEFINITION**

- **Epic**
  
  An epic is a long, narrative poem celebrating the adventures of a great hero, such as Beowulf. The hero is usually a male who reflects the values and ideals of his society.

- **Sonnet**
  
  A sonnet is a lyric poem of 14 lines. One type is the Shakespearean sonnet, which is made up of three quatrains (groups of four lines), followed by a rhyming couplet (two lines).

**STRATEGIES FOR READING**

- **Epic**
  
  - Read in complete sentences. Don’t simply stop at the ends of lines.
  - Take notes to keep track of the events in the hero’s journey.
  - Decide what virtues the epic hero embodies. They probably reflect the cultural values that were celebrated and honored at that time.

- **Sonnet**
  
  - Read the poem aloud, noting the rhyming pattern, rhythm, and other sound devices.
  - Identify the shift in the speaker’s mood or message in the third quatrain.
  - Use a chart to record sensory images—words or phrases that appeal to the five senses.

**LEARN THE LANGUAGE**

British literature may include language that seems dated to the modern ear. Particularly with older works, you may encounter unfamiliar sentence constructions, grammar, conventions, and styles. Use these tips as you set about reading:

- Despite what it may seem, these works were written by ordinary people wishing to express common experiences and even humor. Look for the simple meanings in complex structures.

- Dialects have their own rules of grammar and pronunciation. Rely on context clues to help work out the meaning of unfamiliar words.

- Long, daunting sentences are only the sum of their parts. Isolate sentence parts; restate and rearrange them until the meaning is clear.
Critical Thinking and Writing

Russian author Vladimir Nabokov once wrote the following about the challenge of writing: “The pages are still blank, but there is a miraculous feeling of the words being there, written in invisible ink and clamoring to become visible.” If you have ever faced the blank page or screen, then you probably understand what Nabokov meant. Writing can be a powerful tool—a way of exploring opinions, sharing insights, and evaluating information. The challenge lies in making the ideas in your head “visible” to readers.

Focus on Thinking Skills

Good writing starts with clear, sound thinking. In other words, you can’t make your ideas “visible” if you haven’t taken the time to explore and organize them. As you read the selections in this book, you’ll use the following skills to sharpen your thinking and hone your ideas in preparation for writing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>THINKING SKILL</th>
<th>HOW TO APPLY IT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>COMPARISON</strong></td>
<td>Juxtaposing ideas and weighing their similarities and differences</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How does the concept of the individual differ between romantic and Victorian literature?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How does the imagery in William Blake’s <em>Songs of Innocence</em> poems differ from that in his <em>Songs of Experience</em> poems?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ANALYSIS</strong></td>
<td>Breaking down subjects and examining their components</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What role does dramatic irony play in Shakespeare’s <em>Macbeth</em>?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Why does Percy Bysshe Shelley refer to an Egyptian pharoah in his poem “Ozymandias”?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SYNTHESIS</strong></td>
<td>Drawing from ideas in multiple sources to answer a question or arrive at a conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What messages can modern leaders glean from the writings of Sir Thomas More and Queen Elizabeth I?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What effect did authors such as Mary Wollstonecraft and the Brontë sisters have on future women authors?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>EVALUATION</strong></td>
<td>Using established criteria to make judgments about subjects or ideas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In <em>The Condition of England</em>, does Thomas Carlyle present a logical argument about England’s wealth distribution during Victorian years?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How effective is the movie <em>Gulliver’s Travels</em> at capturing the satirical tone that Jonathan Swift intended?</td>
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The Writing Process

As you complete the Writing Workshops in this book, you’ll discover the process that works best for you. Use this model as a guide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What To Do</th>
<th>What It Looks Like</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Analyze the prompt.</strong></td>
<td><strong>WRITING PROMPT</strong> Many 20th-century modernist poets expressed their ideas about a common subject—the alienation and suffering of the individual in the modern age. Write an essay comparing the works of two modernist poets who grappled with this subject.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Underline or circle key words and phrases in the prompt that indicate the expectations for your writing. Make sure you understand the content, format, audience, and purpose. If the topic is up to you, develop clear and challenging goals for yourself.</td>
<td>I’ll be comparing the works of two modernist poets who explored the subject of individual isolation. I’ll assume my readers have some knowledge of the modernist movement but will still need historical background.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Decide on your subjects.</strong></td>
<td>It would be interesting to explore how contemporaries T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden express their perceptions about isolation and suffering. Both poets explore these ideas in their poems, “Preludes” and “Musée des Beaux Arts,” respectively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine which authors and selections you want to focus on. Make sure that your choices will provide you with enough material for an in-depth analysis.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>3. Brainstorm ideas.</strong></td>
<td>Eliot’s “Preludes”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capture your ideas in a chart or a graphic organizer. First, jot down all your ideas. Then review your notes, marking those ideas that seem substantial and intriguing enough to explore in your essay.</td>
<td>• gritty images of urban life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• speaker despairs over society’s cruel indifference</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• individuals suffering</td>
<td>Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• society indifferent</td>
<td>• images of peaceful scene; boy drowns, and others carry on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• speaker employs a matter-of-fact, ironic tone</td>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In the poems “Preludes” and “Musée des Beaux Arts,” T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden comment on society’s indifference to individual suffering. The two poets, however, use contrasting images, employ different speakers, and respond to slightly different historical backdrops.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>4. Craft your thesis.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Formulate a working thesis—a sentence or two describing the main points you want to make about the selections and the authors. Your thesis should be clear, specific, and supportable. Don’t be afraid to refine your thesis as your essay begins to take shape.</td>
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</table>
### What To Do

#### 5. Gather evidence.
Find evidence from the selections that clearly supports your thesis statement. Look for relevant quotations and details that illustrate the key ideas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;Preludes&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Musée des Beaux Arts&quot;</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;His soul stretched tight across the skies / That fade behind a city block, / Or trampled by insistent feet / At four and five and six o’clock&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;...the expensive delicate ship that must have seen / Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky, / Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.&quot;</td>
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</table>

#### 6. Plan your structure.
Start with an informal outline to organize your key points. Build a logical progression of thought, comparison, or argument in your outline. You may want to try several structures to find what works best.

1. Imagery
   - A. Negative imagery in "Preludes"
   - B. Peaceful imagery in "Musée des Beaux Arts"
2. Speaker’s attitude
   - A. Speaker’s despairing tone in "Preludes"
   - B. Speaker’s ironic tone in "Musée des Beaux Arts"
3. Historical influences on poet
   - A. T.S. Eliot
   - B. W.H. Auden

T.S. Eliot wrote "Preludes" after seeing the crippling effects of World War I on the people struggling to earn a wage in industrialized cities. In depicting a rural landscape, Auden’s poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" generates a similar sympathy for the plight of those suffering.

### What It Looks Like

#### 7. Create a draft.
Following the structure you have outlined, begin a draft of your essay, including the main ideas and the evidence you found to support them. Don’t expect perfection the first time; you may need to do several drafts before hitting your stride.

T.S. Eliot strove to show the alienating effect of the industrial age, especially in large cities. For this reason, he wrote poetry.

This seems incomplete—could you say more about a specific poem as evidence?

Good point. I’ll replace "For this reason, he wrote poetry," with, "In "Preludes," Eliot describes the gloomy, isolating life of those laboring in crowded cities."
A Lonely World: Isolation and Indifference in Modernist Poetry

Does society care about the common person? What is the value of an individual life? Do we suffer alone? Many modernist poets, T. S. Eliot and W. H. Auden among them, grappled with questions like these as they struggled to make sense of a post-World War I world and the individual’s place in it. In Eliot’s “Preludes” and Auden’s “Musée des Beaux Arts,” each poet contends that an indifferent society stands by and watches while individuals suffer alone. The two poets, however, use contrasting images, employ different speakers, and respond to slightly different historical backdrops.

In sections I and II of “Preludes,” Eliot creates a mood of desolation and disorder through his powerful use of disjointed imagery. Readers are introduced to a bleak cityscape with “withered leaves about your feet,” “newspapers from vacant lots,” and “broken blinds and chimney-pots.” In sections III and IV, Eliot acquaints readers with a man and a woman who are leading tiresome, lonely lives. Of the woman Eliot writes, “You had such a vision of the street / As the street hardly understands. . . . ” The man has a soul “stretched tight across the skies” and “trampled by insistent feet.” Through this patchwork of negative images, Eliot emphasizes just how isolated and alone these two individuals are. The city moves past them, cruelly indifferent to their suffering.

Auden also describes society’s indifference in his poem “Musée des Beaux Arts,” written 23 years after Eliot penned “Preludes.” However, Auden uses images that conjure up not dingy, empty streets but the peaceful, picturesque countryside in 16th-century artist Pieter Breughel’s painting *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*. The mythical Icarus has fallen into the ocean after flying too close to the sun, and struggles in the water. Auden uses unmistakable images of society turning a blind eye—a ship sailing serenely by, ploughmen and peasants wandering the shores, and a sun shining as the boy drowns. Such images suggest that society’s indifference is not necessarily cruel—just a fact of life that is not unique to the modern world.
UNIT 1

Preview Unit Goals

LITERARY ANALYSIS
- Understand historical context and cultural influences of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods
- Analyze characteristics of an epic and a medieval romance
- Identify and analyze elements of Old English poetry
- Identify and analyze character traits and methods of characterization
- Identify and analyze irony and satire

READING
- Make inferences; monitor understanding of older works
- Analyze primary sources and synthesize information

WRITING AND GRAMMAR
- Write a comparison-contrast essay
- Use adjectives and verbs to create imagery
- Use participles and participial phrases effectively

SPEAKING, LISTENING, AND VIEWING
- Examine how movies transmit culture
- Prepare and deliver an oral report

VOCABULARY
- Understand the historical development of the English language
- Use knowledge of Latin roots to help determine word meaning
- Use context to determine meaning of multiple-meaning words
- Research word origins to help determine word meaning

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY
- Anglo-Saxon period
- medieval period
- character traits
- characterization
- epic
- irony
- satire

Included in this unit: R1.1, R1.2, R2.4, R2.5, R3.1, R3.2, R3.3, R3.4, R3.7, W1.1, W1.2, W1.3, W1.5, W1.9, W2.1, W2.2, LC1.1, LS1.14, LS2.3
The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods

449–1485
THE ORIGINS OF A NATION
• The Anglo-Saxon Epic
• The Age of Chaucer
• Reflections of Common Life
• Medieval Romance
Questions of the Times

**DISCUSS** Read and discuss these questions with a partner, and share your thoughts with the class as a whole. Then read on to explore the ways in which these issues affected the literature of the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods.

What makes a true HERO?

From the fierce, doomed Anglo-Saxon warrior Beowulf to King Arthur and his loyal knights, bound by their code of chivalry, early British literature shows a deep fascination with the hero as the embodiment of society’s highest ideals. As these ideals have shifted, the image of the hero has changed too. What do you believe are the qualities of a true hero?

Who really shapes SOCIETY?

The medieval period in British history conjures up images of kings, queens, and knights in shining armor, but in reality most of the people were simple peasants. The feudal system ensured that peasants, despite their large numbers, had very little political power. Yet their struggles and contributions helped build a great nation. What do you think truly shapes society? Is it the power of the few or the struggles of many?
Can people live up to high ideals?

During the medieval period, elaborate rules of conduct developed to guide behavior in battle as well as in romance. This code of chivalry assumed that knights were uniformly gallant and loyal, ladies fair and devout, manners impeccable, and jousting the way to prove bravery and win favor. Is it possible to live up to such high ideals? Is it worth trying?

Does fate control our lives?

The seafaring Anglo-Saxons led harsh, brutal lives, often cut short by violence, disease, or the unpredictable tempests of the icy North Sea. They admired strength and courage but ultimately saw humans as helpless victims of a grim, implacable fate they called wyrd. Do you believe people can determine their own futures, or does chance or fate play a part?
A towering circle of ancient stones, draped in the mist of centuries. The clatter of horses’ hooves, the clash of swords and spears. A tiny island whose motley tongue would become the language of the world, and whose laws, customs, and literature would help form Western civilization. This is England, and the story begins here.
The Anglo-Saxon Period: Historical Context

**KEY IDEAS** Britain’s early years were dominated by successive waves of invaders. Among them were the Anglo-Saxons—a people who gave us the first masterpieces of English literature.

### Centuries of Invasion

The Dark Ages, as the Anglo-Saxon period is often called, was a time of bloody conflicts, ignorance, violence, and barbarism. Life was difficult, and the literature of the period reflects that reality. Little imagery of the brief English summers appears in this literature; winter prevails, and spring comes slowly, if at all. The people were serious minded, and the reader finds scarce humor in their literature. Indeed, many of the stories and poems present heroic struggles in which only the strong survive. And no wonder.

**EARLY BRITAIN** The first person ever to write about England may have been the Roman general Julius Caesar, who in 55 B.C. attempted to conquer the British Isles. Put off by fierce Celtic warriors, Caesar hastily claimed victory for Rome and returned to Europe, leaving the Britons (as the people were known) and their neighbors to the north and west, the Picts and Gaels, in peace. A century later, however, the Roman army returned in force and made good Caesar’s claim. Britain became a province of the great Roman Empire, and the Romans introduced cities, roads, written scholarship, and eventually Christianity to the island. Their rule lasted more than three hundred years. “Romanized” Britons adapted to an urban lifestyle, living in villas and frequenting public baths, and came to depend on the Roman military for protection. Then, early in the fifth century, the Romans pulled out of Britain, called home to help defend their beleaguered empire against hordes of invaders. With no central government or army, it was not long before Britain, too, became a target for invasion.

**ANGLO-SAXONS** The Angles and Saxons, along with other Germanic tribes, began arriving from northern Europe around A.D. 449. The Britons—perhaps led by a Celtic chieftain named Arthur (likely the genesis of the legendary King Arthur of myth and folklore)—fought a series of battles against the invaders. Eventually, however, the Britons were driven to the west (Cornwall and Wales), the north (Scotland), and across the English Channel to an area of France that became known as Brittany.

Settled by the Anglo-Saxons, the main part of Britain took on a new name: Angle-land, or England. Anglo-Saxon culture became the basis for English culture, and their gutteral, vigorous language became the spoken language of the people, the language now known as Old English.
**The 790s** brought the next wave of invaders, a fearsome group of seafaring marauders from the rocky, windswept coasts of Denmark and Norway: the **Vikings**. Shrieking wildly and waving giant battle-axes, Viking raiders looted, killed, and burned down entire villages. At first, they hit and ran; later, finding England a more pleasant spot to spend the winter than their icy homeland, the Danish invaders set up camps and gradually gained control of much of the north and east of the country.

In the south, the Danes finally met defeat at the hands of a powerful Anglo-Saxon king known as **Alfred the Great**. Alfred unified the English, and under his rule, learning and culture flourished. The **Anglo-Saxon Chronicle**, a record of English history, was initiated at his bidding.

### The Norman Conquest

In 1042, a descendant of Alfred’s took the throne, the deeply religious **Edward the Confessor**. Edward, who had no children, had once sworn an oath making his French cousin William, duke of Normandy, his heir—or so William claimed. When Edward died, however, a council of nobles and church officials chose an English earl named Harold to succeed him. Incensed, William led his Norman army in what was to be the last successful invasion of the island of Britain: the **Norman Conquest**. Harold was killed at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, and on Christmas Day of that year, **William the Conqueror** was crowned king of England.

The Norman Conquest ended Anglo-Saxon dominance in England. Losing their land to the conquerors, noble families sank into the peasantry, and a new class of privileged Normans took their place.

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**A Voice from the Times**

William returned to Hastings, and waited there to know whether the people would submit to him. But when he found that they would not come to him, he went up with all his force that was left and that came since to him from over sea, and ravaged all the country. . . .

—Anglo-Saxon Chronicle
Cultural Influences

**KEY IDEAS** Early Anglo-Saxon literature reflected a fatalistic worldview, while later works were influenced by rapidly spreading Christianity.

### The Spread of Christianity

Like all cultures, that of the Anglo-Saxons changed over time. The early invaders were seafaring wanderers whose lives were bleak, violent, and short. Their pagan religion was marked by a strong belief in *wyrd*, or fate, and they saved their admiration for heroic warriors whose fate it was to prevail in battle. As the Anglo-Saxons settled into their new land, however, they became an agricultural people—less violent, more secure, more civilized.

The bleak fatalism of the Anglo-Saxons’ early beliefs may have reflected the reality of their lives, but it offered little hope. Life was harsh, it taught, and the only certainty was that it would end in death. **Christianity** opened up a bright new possibility: that the suffering of this world was merely a prelude to the eternal happiness of heaven.

**CHRISTIANITY TAKES HOLD** No one knows exactly when the first Christian missionaries arrived in Britain, but by a.d. 300 the number of Christians on the island was significant. Over the next two centuries, Christianity spread to Ireland and Scotland, and from Scotland to the Picts and Angles in the north. In 597, a Roman missionary named Augustine arrived in the kingdom of Kent, where he established a monastery at Canterbury. From there, Christianity spread so rapidly that by 690 all of Britain was at least nominally Christian, though many held on to some pagan traditions and beliefs.

**Monasteries** became centers of intellectual, literary, artistic, and social activity. At a time when schools and libraries were completely unknown, monasteries offered the only opportunity for education. Monastic scholars imported books from the Continent, which were then painstakingly copied. In addition, original works were written, mostly in scholarly Latin, but later in Old English. The earliest recorded history of the English people came from the clergy at the monasteries. The greatest of these monks was the **Venerable Bede** (c. 673–735), author of *A History of the English Church and People*.

When Vikings invaded in the late eighth and ninth centuries, they plundered monasteries and threatened to obliterate all traces of cultural refinement. Yet Christianity continued as a dominant cultural force for more than a thousand years to come.
Literature of the Times

**KEY IDEAS**  Anglo-Saxon literature often focused on great heroes such as Beowulf, though sometimes it addressed everyday concerns.

**The Epic Tradition**

The early literature of the Anglo-Saxon period mostly took the form of lengthy *epic poems* praising the deeds of heroic warriors. These poems reflected the reality of life at this time, which was often brutal. However, the context in which these poems were delivered was certainly not grim. In the great *mead halls* of kings and nobles, Anglo-Saxons would gather on special occasions to celebrate in style. They feasted on pies and roasted meats heaped high on platters, warmed themselves before a roaring fire, and listened to *scops*—professional poets—bring the epic poems to life. Strumming a harp, the scop would chant in a clear voice that carried over the shouts and laughter of the crowd, captivating them for hours on end with tales of courage, high drama, and tragedy.

To the Anglo-Saxons, these epic poems were far more than simple entertainment. The scop’s performance was a history lesson, moral sermon, and pep talk rolled into one, instilling cultural pride and teaching how a true hero should behave. At the same time, in true Anglo-Saxon fashion, the scop reminded his listeners that they were helpless in the hands of fate and that all human ambition would end in death. With no hope for an afterlife, only an epic poem could provide a measure of immortality.
These epic poems were an oral art form: memorized and performed, not written down. Later, as Christianity spread through Britain, literacy spread too, and poems were more likely to be recorded. In this age before printing presses, however, manuscripts had to be written out by hand, copied slowly and laboriously by scribes. Thus, only a fraction of Anglo-Saxon poetry has survived, in manuscripts produced centuries after the poems were originally composed. The most famous survivor is the epic Beowulf, about a legendary hero of the northern European past. In more than 3,000 lines, Beowulf relates the tale of a heroic warrior who battles monsters and dragons to protect the people. Yet Beowulf, while performing superhuman deeds, is not immortal. His death comes from wounds incurred in his final, great fight.

Reflections of Common Life

While epics such as Beowulf gave Anglo-Saxons a taste of glory, scops also sang shorter, lyric poems, such as “The Seafarer,” that reflected a more everyday reality: the wretchedness of a cold, wet sailor clinging to his storm-tossed boat; the misery and resentment of his wife, left alone for months or years, not knowing if her husband would ever return.

Some of these poems mourn loss and death in the mood of grim fatalism typical of early Anglo-Saxon times; others, written after the advent of Christianity, express religious faith or offer moral instruction. A manuscript known as the Exeter Book contains many of the surviving Anglo-Saxon lyrics, including more than 90 riddles, such as this one: Wonder was on the wave, when water became bone. Answer: an iceberg.

EARLY AUTHORS Most Old English poems are anonymous. One of the few poets known by name was a monk called Caedmon, described by the Venerable Bede in his famous history of England. Like most scholars of his day, Bede wrote in Latin, the language of the church. It was not until the reign of Alfred the Great that writing in English began to be widespread; in addition to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which was written in the language of the people, Alfred encouraged English translations of the Bible and other Latin works.

As England moved into the Middle Ages, its literature continued to capture the rhythms of everyday life. The medieval period was one of social turbulence and unrest, and several works give modern readers a glimpse of the individual hopes and fears of people of the time. Margery Kempe, for example, describes a crisis of faith brought on by childbirth; the letters of Margaret Paston and her family mainly deal with issues of marriage and managing the family estate.
The Medieval Period: Historical Context

Key Ideas

With the Norman Conquest, England entered the medieval period, a time of innovation in the midst of war.

The Monarchy

After his victory at Hastings, William the Conqueror lost no time taking full control of England. He was a new kind of king—powerful, well-organized, determined to exert his authority down to the smallest detail. Many people resented innovations such as the Domesday Book, an extraordinary tax record of every bit of property owned, from fish ponds to litters of pigs. Still, no one could deny that William brought law and order to the land, "so that," as one scribe wrote shortly after William’s death, “any honest man could travel over his kingdom without injury with his bosom full of gold.”

Power struggles in the decades after William’s death left England in a state of near-anarchy until 1154, when his great-grandson Henry Plantagenet took power.

For Your Outline

The Medieval Period

I. Historical Context

A. The Monarchy

1. William the Conqueror

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Analyze Visuals

This illustration from an illuminated manuscript of his poems depicts Charles, the French Duke of Orleans, imprisoned in the Tower of London. Charles was captured at the Battle of Agincourt during the Hundred Years’ War and imprisoned for the next 25 years. Yet like most captured nobles, his confinement was not strict: he was allowed to live in a style similar to that which he had known as a free man. What details show how Charles lived? Does the Tower look as you imagined it? Explain.
the throne as Henry II. One of medieval England’s most memorable rulers, Henry reformed the judicial system by setting up royal courts throughout the country, establishing a system of juries, and beginning to form English common law out of a patchwork of centuries-old practices.

Henry’s son Richard I, known as Richard the Lion-Hearted, spent most of his ten-year reign fighting wars abroad. During his absence, his younger brother, John, plotted against him. The villain of Robin Hood legends, King John was treacherous and bad-tempered, quarreling with nobles and raising their taxes until they threatened to rebel. In 1215 he was forced to sign the Magna Carta (“Great Charter”), which limited royal authority by granting more power to the barons—an early step on the road to democracy.

War and Plague

As the medieval period drew to a close, war was a near-constant fact of life. The Hundred Years’ War between England and France began in 1337, during the reign of Edward III. As the war continued on and off for more than a century, England also had to weather several domestic crises, including a terrible plague known as the Black Death, which killed a third of England’s population.

When the war finally ended in 1453, England had lost nearly all of its French possessions. Two rival families claimed the throne—the house of York, whose symbol was a white rose, and the house of Lancaster, whose symbol was a red rose. The fighting that ensued, known as the Wars of the Roses, ended in 1485 when the Lancastrian Henry Tudor killed the Yorkist king Richard III at Bosworth Field and took the throne as Henry VII. This event marked the end of the Middle Ages in England.

Cultural Influences

**KEY IDEAS** Medieval literature is best understood in the context of three powerful influences on medieval society: feudalism, the church, and a code of conduct called chivalry.

Three Social Forces

**THE FEUDAL SYSTEM** Feudalism was a political and economic system that William the Conquerer introduced into England after the Norman Conquest. Based on the premise that the king owns all the land in the kingdom, William kept a fourth of the land for himself, granted a fourth to the church, and parcelled out the rest to loyal barons, who, in return, either paid him or supplied him with warriors called knights. The barons swore allegiance to the king, the knights to the barons, and so on down the social ladder. At the bottom of the ladder were the conquered Anglo-Saxons, many of whom were serfs—peasants bound to land they could not own.
**THE POWER OF THE CHURCH** There was one grand exception to the feudal system’s hierarchy: the church. Led by the pope in Rome, the medieval church wielded tremendous power—levying taxes, making its own laws, running its own courts, and keeping kings and noblemen in line with the threat of ex-communication. The church owned more land than anyone in Europe, and its soaring stone cathedrals and great abbeys were as impressive as any castle. The church’s power did lead to conflicts with the monarchy. When Henry II’s archbishop and friend Thomas à Becket began favoring church interests over those of the crown, four knights loyal to the king murdered him. Becket was declared a saint, and his shrine at Canterbury became a popular destination for pilgrims, such as those described in Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales.*

**CHIVALRY AND COURTLY LOVE** Medieval literature, including the famous stories of King Arthur, was influenced by another social force as well—the ideals of chivalry and courtly love made popular during Henry II’s reign. Henry’s wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, brought from French court circles the concept of chivalry, a code of honor intended to govern knightly behavior. The code encouraged knights to be generous, brave, honest, pious, and honorable, to defend the weak and to battle evil and uphold good. It also encouraged knights to go on holy quests such as the Crusades, the military expeditions in which European Christians attempted to wrest the holy city of Jerusalem from Muslim control.

Eleanor and her daughter Marie applied chivalric ideals to the relationships between men and women as well. They presided over a “court of love,” where lords and ladies would come to be entertained by music and tales of King Arthur and other romantic heroes and argue about the proper conduct of a love affair. Courtly love and the concept of chivalry represented ideals rarely met in real life. Yet they served as inspiration for some of the finest literature of the time.

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**A Voice from the Times**

- Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
- He who is jealous cannot love.
- When made public, love rarely endures.
- A new love puts an old one to flight.
- Every lover regularly turns pale in the presence of his beloved.

—“rules” from the 12th-century book *The Art of Courtly Love*
Literature of the Times

**KEY IDEAS** Medieval works, such as The Canterbury Tales and Arthurian romances, drew from many sources, historical and contemporary, while reflecting the society and ideals of their time.

The Age of Chaucer

The most famous writer of medieval times, “the father of English literature,” was Geoffrey Chaucer, a poet who demonstrated the potential of English as a literary language. Drawing on sources as diverse as French poetry, English songs, Greek classics, contemporary Italian tales, and Aesop’s fables, Chaucer masterfully blended old with new, all in the natural rhythms of Middle English, the spoken language of the time.

**AN ENGLISH MASTERPIECE** The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer’s best-known work, displays his ability as a storyteller, his keen sense of humor, and his sharp eye for detail. A collection of tales ranging from irreverent to inspirational, it is held together by a frame story about a group of pilgrims who pass time on their journey to the shrine of Thomas à Becket by telling stories. The pilgrims’ characters are revealed through the stories they tell and their reactions to one another’s tales. Though Chaucer apparently intended to have each of the 30 pilgrims tell 4 stories apiece, he died having completed only 24 of the tales.

Chaucer lived during a time of change and turmoil in England. He was born just a few years after the outbreak of the Hundred Years’ War and was still a small child when the bubonic plague hit Europe. The Black Death, as it was known, greatly reduced the population, which led to a shortage of laborers. In turn, serfs realized their new value and left the land to work in towns and on neighboring estates. This shift led to the decline of feudanism and the growth of a new middle class, to which Chaucer’s family belonged. In addition, the war with France had spurred the re-emergence of the English language among the ruling class. With its cast of characters ranging across British society, from the “perfect gentle Knight” to a common miller, and its use of everyday English rather than elevated Latin or French, The Canterbury Tales reflected all of these developments.

**OTHER WORKS** Chaucer was not the only poet of his time to compose in English or to write about ordinary people; William Langland did both in his masterpiece Piers Plowman (see page 120), as did writers of the popular ballads of the day—narrative songs telling of the lives of common folks.
or of characters and events from folklore (see page 212). The combination of Chaucer’s literary gifts and social status, however, led to a new appreciation of English as a language that, while useful in everyday life, was elegant and poetic as well.

**CHAUER’S LEGACY** The *Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer’s other works were wildly popular in his own time and inspired a generation of English poets. One admirer sent him a ballad, addressed to “noble Geoffrey Chaucer,” that described him as the ancient thinkers Socrates, Seneca, and Ovid all rolled into one. Another poet, John Lydgate, wrote after Chaucer’s death, “We may try to counterfeit his style, but it will not be; the well is dry.” Three-quarters of a century later, *The Canterbury Tales* was still so widely enjoyed that it was among the earliest books chosen to be published by William Caxton, the first English printer.

**Medieval Romance**

Medieval romances, stories of adventure, gallant love, chivalry, and heroism, represent for many readers the social order and ideals of the Middle Ages. Yet tales such as those of the good King Arthur and his sword Excalibur, Merlin the magician, Queen Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot and the Knights of the Round Table were set in an idealized world quite unlike the real medieval England, with its plagues, political battles, and civil unrest. In fact, while it is true that chivalry and courtly love were ideals made popular during the medieval period, the real Arthur was not of this age.

**A LEGENDARY HERO** From what little is known of him, Arthur was a Briton, a Romanized descendant of the long-haired, blue-dyed warriors who fought Caesar’s army. A Latin history written around A.D. 800, two hundred years or more after Arthur’s death, first mentions “Artorius” as a leader in the sixth-century battles against Anglo-Saxon invaders.

For centuries, oral poets in Wales celebrated their legendary hero Arthur just as Anglo-Saxon scops celebrated Beowulf. Then, about 1135, the monk Geoffrey of Monmouth produced a Latin “history” based on old Welsh legends. Geoffrey’s book caught the fancy of French, German, and English writers, who soon created their own versions of the legends, updating them to reflect then-current notions of chivalry. While the traditional tales focused on Arthur himself and on his courage and success in battle, these new romances used Arthur and his court as a backdrop for stories about knights who go through trials and perform great feats—often (influenced by the idea of courtly love) in the service of a lady.

**Middle English**

Along with political and cultural upheaval, the Norman Conquest led to great changes in the English language. Despite their Viking origins, by 1066 the Normans spoke a dialect of Old French, which they brought to England.

**Status Talk** Norman French became the language of the English court, of government business, of the new nobility, and of the scholars, cooks, and craftsmen who dined on the product of their labors. The use of English became confined to the conquered, mostly peasant population.

Hints of this class division still survive in modern English. For instance, Anglo-Saxons tending cattle in the field called the animal a *cū*, or cow, while the Norman aristocrats who dined on the product of their labors used the Old French word *bœuf*, or beef.

Ever adaptable, English soon incorporated thousands of words and many grammatical conveniences from Norman French. These changes led to the development of Middle English, a form much closer than Old English to the language we speak today.

**English Makes a Comeback** During the long war with France, it came to seem unpatriotic among the upper class to use the language of the nation’s number-one enemy, especially since Anglo-Norman French was ridiculed by the “real” French speakers across the English Channel. By the end of the Hundred Years’ War, English had once again become the first language of most of the English nobility.
TWO FAVORITES  About 1375, an anonymous English poet wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, recounting the marvelous adventures of a knight of Arthur’s court who faces a series of extraordinary challenges. Exciting, suspenseful, and peopled by an array of memorable characters, from the mysterious green giant who survives beheading to the all-too-human Sir Gawain, the 2,500-line poem is easy to imagine as a favorite of troubadours and their audiences.

A century later, in *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Sir Thomas Malory retold a number of the French Arthurian tales in Middle English. Despite its title, which means “The Death of Arthur,” Malory’s book includes many episodes in the life of the legendary king and is considered a precursor to the modern novel. Oddly enough, it was printed just weeks before the final battle in the Wars of the Roses, the last English battle ever fought by knights in armor. Fittingly then, the literary fall of Camelot coincided with the real-life end of chivalry—and the end of the Middle Ages as well.

For Your Outline

MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

- Romances are stories of adventure, love, heroism, and chivalry.
- They are set in an idealized world unlike medieval England.
- The real Arthur was a 6th-century warrior.
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Le Morte d’Arthur* are two medieval romances.
Connecting Literature, History, and Culture

Use this timeline and the questions on the next page to gain insight into the Anglo-Saxon and medieval periods.

**BRITISH LITERARY MILESTONES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>400</td>
<td>The Venerable Bede is born.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>The surviving version of Beowulf is likely composed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>Authors begin compiling data for the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, a year-by-year diary of important world events.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>892</td>
<td>Anglo-Saxon verse is collected in the Exeter Book.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>449</td>
<td>The Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain begins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>597</td>
<td>Christian missionaries land in Kent; Christianity begins to spread among Anglo-Saxons.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>664</td>
<td>The British Christian Church unites with the Roman Catholic Church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>793</td>
<td>Vikings begin the first of many raids on the Anglo-Saxon kingdom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>871</td>
<td>Alfred the Great becomes king of Wessex (to 899).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>871</td>
<td>Alfred wins important victory over Danes; Danes accept Christianity.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**WORLD CULTURE AND EVENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>500</td>
<td>A mathematician in India calculates the value of pi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>527</td>
<td>Justinian I becomes Byzantine emperor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>600</td>
<td>The prophet Muhammad conquers Mecca, which becomes the holiest city of Islam.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>800</td>
<td>Charlemagne, who unites much of Europe, is crowned emperor of the Holy Roman Empire.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>886</td>
<td>Alfred wins important victory over Danes; Danes accept Christianity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>886</td>
<td>The Chinese invent gunpowder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>880</td>
<td>Mayan culture begins decline.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**MAKING CONNECTIONS**

- Though William Caxton established the first British printing press, in what countries was printing first developed? When?
- Based on what you’ve learned in the introductory essay, why are there so few literary milestones recorded for the early years in Britain?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>1000</strong></th>
<th><strong>1200</strong></th>
<th><strong>1400</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>CIRCA 1000</strong></td>
<td><strong>CIRCA 1200</strong></td>
<td><strong>CIRCA 1400</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The surviving version of <em>Beowulf</em> is recorded by monks.</td>
<td><em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em> is composed.</td>
<td>The earliest surviving Paston letter is written.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1086</strong></td>
<td><strong>CIRCA 1375</strong></td>
<td><strong>1485</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1000</strong></td>
<td><strong>1200</strong></td>
<td><strong>1400</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1016</strong></td>
<td><strong>1215</strong></td>
<td><strong>1420</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canute, a Dane, becomes king of England (to 1035).</td>
<td>King John signs the Magna Carta.</td>
<td>Modern English develops from Middle English.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1066</strong></td>
<td><strong>1282</strong></td>
<td><strong>1430</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1170</strong></td>
<td><strong>1295</strong></td>
<td><strong>1476</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thomas à Becket is murdered.</td>
<td>A model Parliament is assembled under Edward I.</td>
<td>In Germany, the Gutenberg Bible is produced on a printing press.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1171</strong></td>
<td><strong>1337</strong></td>
<td><strong>1453</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Henry II declares himself lord of Ireland, beginning centuries of English-Irish conflict.</td>
<td>The Hundred Years’ War with France begins (to 1453).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1054</strong></td>
<td><strong>1206</strong></td>
<td><strong>1431</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian Church divides into east and west branches.</td>
<td>Genghis Khan begins Mongol conquest of much of Asia (to 1272).</td>
<td>Joan of Arc is burned at the stake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1095</strong></td>
<td><strong>CIRCA 1300</strong></td>
<td><strong>1453</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The first of centuries of “holy wars” called Crusades begins (to 1272).</td>
<td>The Renaissance begins in northern Italy.</td>
<td>Ottomans conquer Constantinople.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1192</strong></td>
<td><strong>1347</strong></td>
<td><strong>1455</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Japanese emperor takes the title of shogun.</td>
<td>Bubonic plague reaches Europe, killing millions.</td>
<td>In Germany, the Gutenberg Bible is produced on a printing press.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Arthur Lives

Stories of King Arthur and his loyal knights have never lost their appeal. From Alfred, Lord Tennyson’s 19th-century epic *Idylls of the King*, to Mark Twain’s satiric novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court*, to the *Star Wars* movies, in which Jedi knights battle evil in outer space, each generation continues to create its own interpretations of the Arthurian romance.

CREATE With a partner, search online for other incarnations of the Arthurian legend. Use the keywords *King Arthur, Camelot, Knights of the Round Table, Guinevere*, and *Lancelot* to begin your search. From your results, create a collage of images and words to show the prevalence of the Arthurian legend over the years.

Keira Knightley and Clive Owen in the 2004 film *King Arthur*
Modern Monarchy

In the early days of England, kings ruled the land with absolute authority. In 1215, the Magna Carta transferred some of that power to the noblemen. Today, the monarchy plays a less active role in government, yet to many the royal family is still the public face of Great Britain and the embodiment of a beloved and romantic tradition.

**RESEARCH** Go online to research today’s royal family. How involved in creating legislation is today’s monarch? What role does the royalty play in international affairs? What philanthropies or organizations have members of the royal family founded? Report your findings to the class in a brief oral report.

Stories in Song

Though clubs, music channels, and MP3 players have taken the place of banquet halls, the spirit of the scops and troubadours survives in modern ballads—popular songs that tell a story. Like the original oral literature, these contemporary verses combine words and music in an appealing, memorable way. They also reveal the values of our modern culture as surely as the ancient ballads did theirs.

**DISCUSS** With a small group, brainstorm examples of current songs that tell a story. Choose one or two and discuss what they reveal about the worldviews of those who sing and listen to them.

Musician and ballad singer Tori Amos
The Epic

What do you do to celebrate the heroes of your day? Hold a parade? Have a party? Attend a banquet where speakers chronicle the hero’s deeds? As far back as the third millennium B.C., heroes have been celebrated in a variety of ways. One type of celebration common to many cultures throughout history is to honor the hero’s story in an epic.

The Epic Tradition

An *epic* is a long narrative poem that celebrates a hero’s deeds. The earliest epic tales survived for centuries as oral traditions before they were finally written down. They came into existence as spoken words and were retold by poets from one generation to the next. Most orally composed epics date back to preliterate periods—before the cultures that produced them had developed written forms.

Since many epics were based on historical fact, their public performance provided both entertainment and education for the audience. The oral poets (known in different cultures as *scops* or *bards*) drew upon existing songs and legends, which they embellished or combined with original material. The poets had to be master improvisers, able to compose verse in their heads while simultaneously singing or chanting it. One characteristic feature of oral poetry is the repetition of certain words, phrases, or even lines. Two of the most notable examples of repeated elements are stock epithets and kennings.

- **Stock epithets** are adjectives that point out special traits of particular persons or things. In Homer, stock epithets are often compound adjectives, such as the “swift-footed” used to describe Achilles in the *Iliad* (page 74).

- **Kennings** are poetic synonyms found in Germanic poems, such as the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* (page 38). Rather than being an adjective, like an epithet, a kenning is a descriptive phrase or compound word that substitutes for a noun. For example, in *Beowulf* “the Almighty’s enemy” and “sin-stained demon” are two kennings that are used in place of Grendel’s name.

Stock epithets and kennings were building blocks that a poet could recite while mentally preparing for the next line or stanza. Epithets had an added advantage—they were designed to fit metrically into specific parts of the lines of verse. In skillful hands, these “formulas” helped to establish tone and reinforce character traits and setting.
Epic Proportions

Epics from different languages and time periods do not always have the same characteristics. Kennings, for example, are not found in Homer’s epics. All epics, however, concern the actions of a hero, who can be described as:

• being of noble birth or high position, and often of great historical or legendary importance
• exhibiting character traits, or qualities, that reflect important ideals of society
• performing courageous, sometimes superhuman, deeds that reflect the values of the era
• performing actions that often determine the fate of a nation or group of people

In addition, most epics share certain conventions, which reflect the larger-than-life events that a hero might experience.

• The setting is vast in scope, often involving more than one nation.
• The plot is complicated by supernatural beings or events and may involve a long and dangerous journey through foreign lands.
• Dialogue often includes long, formal speeches delivered by the major characters.
• The theme reflects timeless values, such as courage and honor, and encompasses universal ideas, such as good and evil or life and death.
• The style includes formal diction (the writer’s choice of words and sentence structure) and a serious tone (the expression of the writer’s attitude toward the subject).

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp’s rejoicing
Call and the poet’s clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making the earth, shaping
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon
To glow across the land and light it;

—from Beowulf
from Beowulf

Epic Poem by the Beowulf Poet
Translated by Burton Raffel

The Anglo-Saxon Epic

NOTABLE QUOTE
“It is a poem by a learned man writing of old times, who looking back on the heroism and sorrow feels in them something permanent.”
—J.R.R. Tolkien

FYI
Did you know that the Beowulf manuscript . . .

• exists in only one original copy?
• was damaged and nearly destroyed in a fire in the 18th century?
• has now been preserved through computer digitization?

The Beowulf Poet

about 750?

“Hear me!” So begins Beowulf, the oldest surviving epic poem in English. The command was intended to capture the listening audience’s attention, for Beowulf was originally chanted or sung aloud. Centuries of poet-singers, called scops (shōps), recited the adventures of Beowulf. It is our great fortune that eventually a gifted poet unified the heroic accounts and produced an enduring work of art.

By Anonymous
Unfortunately, we don’t know who that poet was or when Beowulf was composed. Scholars contend that the poet may have lived anytime between the middle of the seventh century A.D. and the end of the tenth century. However, we do know where the poem was written. In the fifth century, bloody warfare in northern Europe had driven many Germanic-speaking tribes, including groups of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, to abandon their homes. Many of these groups settled in England, where they established what is now called Anglo-Saxon civilization.

The people of the Anglo-Saxon period spoke a language known as Old English, the language in which Beowulf was composed. Old English bears little resemblance to Modern English and so must be translated for readers today. By the time Beowulf was written, the Anglo-Saxons had also converted to Christianity. This Christian influence is evident in the poem.

Long Ago and Far Away
Although Beowulf was composed in England, the poem describes events that take place in Scandinavia around the 500s among two groups: the Danes of what is now Denmark and the Geats (gēts) of what is now Sweden. Beowulf is a Geat warrior who crosses the sea to defeat Grendel, a monster who is terrorizing the Danes. He later returns to his homeland to succeed his uncle as king of the Geats.

Beowulf celebrates warrior culture and deeds requiring great strength and courage. Scops recited the poem and other tales in mead halls, large wooden buildings that provided a safe haven for warriors returning from battle. During the performances, audiences feasted and drank mead, an alcoholic beverage.

Survivor
The sole surviving copy of Beowulf dates from about the year 1000. It is the work of Christian monks who preserved the literature of the past by copying manuscripts. After suffering mistreatment and several near-disasters, the Beowulf manuscript is now safely housed in the British Library in London.
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EPIC**

An *epic*, a long narrative poem that traces the adventures of a great hero, has the power to transport you to another time and place. *Beowulf* takes you to the Anglo-Saxon period and the land of the Danes and the Geats, where a mighty warrior battles fantastic monsters. As you read the poem, note some of the following characteristics of epic poetry:

- The **hero** is a legendary figure who performs deeds requiring incredible courage and strength.
- The hero embodies **character traits** that reflect lofty ideals.
- The poet uses formal **diction** and a serious **tone**.
- The poem reflects timeless values and **universal themes**.

**READING STRATEGY: READING OLD ENGLISH POETRY**

Old English poetry is marked by a strong rhythm that is easy to chant or sing. Here are some of the techniques used in an Old English poem:

- **alliteration**, or the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, which helps unify the lines
  
  So mankind’s enemy continued his crimes

- **caesura** (si’-zhōr’-ə), or a pause dividing each line, with each part having two accented syllables; this helps maintain the rhythm of the lines
  
  He took what he wanted, // all the treasures

- **kenning**, a metaphorical compound word or phrase substituted for a noun or name, which enhances meaning—for example, “mankind’s enemy” used in place of “Grendel”

As you read *Beowulf*, note examples of these techniques and consider their effect on rhythm and meaning in the poem.

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

The words shown here help convey the monstrous forces *Beowulf* faces in the epic. Choose a word from the list that has the same definition as each numbered item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>WORD LIST</strong></th>
<th>affliction</th>
<th>lair</th>
<th>purge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>gorge</td>
<td>livid</td>
<td>talon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>infamous</td>
<td>loathsome</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. claw   2. burden   3. notorious   4. cram
Hrothgar (hrôth’gär’), king of the Danes, has built a wonderful mead hall called Herot (hēr’ēt), where his subjects congregate and make merry. As this selection opens, a fierce and powerful monster named Grendel invades the mead hall, bringing death and destruction.

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp’s rejoicing
Call and the poet’s clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making the earth, shaping
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon
To glow across the land and light it;
The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:

OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 1–2 aloud. Notice the use of alliteration with the repetition of the letters p and d. What mood, or feeling, does the alliteration convey?

ANALYZE VISUALS
Examine the composition, or arrangement of shapes, in this photograph. How does the angle of the photo contribute to its impact?
So Hrothgar’s men lived happy in his hall
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,
Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild
Marshes, and made his home in a hell
Not hell but earth. He was spawned in that slime,
Conceived by a pair of those monsters born
Of Cain, murderous creatures banished
By God, punished forever for the crime
Of Abel’s death. The Almighty drove
Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,
Shut away from men; they split
Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits
And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
A brood forever opposing the Lord’s
Will, and again and again defeated.

Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster’s
Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:
He slipped through the door and there in the silence
Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
The blood dripping behind him, back
to his lair, delighted with his night’s slaughter.

At daybreak, with the sun’s first light, they saw
How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
Broke their long feast with tears and laments
For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
In Herot, a mighty prince mourning
The fate of his lost friends and companions,
Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
His followers apart. He wept, fearing
The beginning might not be the end. And that night
Grendel came again, so set
On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
No savage assault quench his lust
For evil. Then each warrior tried
To escape him, searched for rest in different
Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,
Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
Distance was safety; the only survivors
Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.
So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
One against many, and won; so Herot
Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped the seas, was told and sung in all
Men’s ears: how Grendel’s hatred began,
How the monster relished his savage war
On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud alive, seeking no peace, offering
No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
In gold or land, and paying the living
For one crime only with another. No one
Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:
That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
Stalked Hrothgar’s warriors, old
And young, lying in waiting, hidden
In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
Of the marsh, always there, unseen.
So mankind’s enemy continued his crimes,
Killing as often as he could, coming
Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived
In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
Dared to touch king Hrothgar’s glorious throne, protected by God—God,
Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar’s heart was bent. The best and most noble
Of his council debated remedies, sat
In secret sessions, talking of terror
And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,
Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell’s support, the Devil’s guidance in driving
Their affliction off. That was their way,
And the heathen’s only hope, Hell
Always in their hearts, knowing neither God nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear His praise nor know His glory. Let them beware, those who are thrust into danger,
Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace
In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail to those who will rise to God, drop off their dead bodies and seek our Father’s peace!
So the living sorrow of Healfdane’s son
Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom
Or strength could break it: that agony hung
On king and people alike, harsh
And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.

In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac’s
Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
Proclaiming that he’d go to that famous king,
Now when help was needed. None
Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,
And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
Chose the mightiest men he could find,
The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen
In all, and led them down to their boat;

104 Healfdane’s son: Hrothgar.

109–110 Higlac’s follower: a warrior loyal to Higlac (hɪɡˈlæk), king of the Geats (and Beowulf’s uncle).

EPIC
Reread lines 109–116, in which Beowulf is first introduced.
What traits of an epic hero does he appear to possess?
He knew the sea, would point the prow
Straight to that distant Danish shore. . . .

*Beowulf and his men sail over the sea to the land of the Danes to offer help to Hrothgar. They are escorted by a Danish guard to Herot, where Wulfgar, one of Hrothgar’s soldiers, tells the king of their arrival. Hrothgar knows of Beowulf and is ready to welcome the young prince and his men.*

125 Then Wulfgar went to the door and addressed
The waiting seafarers with soldier’s words:
   “My lord, the great king of the Danes, commands me
   To tell you that he knows of your noble birth
   And that having come to him from over the open
130 Sea you have come bravely and are welcome.
   Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets,
   But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,
   Let them lie waiting for the promises your words
   May make.”

   Beowulf arose, with his men

135 Around him, ordering a few to remain
   With their weapons, leading the others quickly
   Along under Herot’s steep roof into Hrothgar’s
   Presence. Standing on that prince’s own hearth,
   Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt
140 Greeting with a smith’s high art, he greeted
   The Danes’ great lord:
   “Hail, Hrothgar!
   Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
   Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel’s
   Name has echoed in our land: sailors
145 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
   Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
   Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
   Light and life fleeing together.
   My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
150 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes’
   Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
   Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
   Dripping with my enemies’ blood. I drove
   Five great giants into chains, chased
155 All of that race from the earth. I swam
   In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
   Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called —
Together, and I’ve come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people’s loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
Too, that the monster’s scorn of men
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac
Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield: my hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to death’s cold grip.
Grendel’s plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can, If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
There’ll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!”

Hrothgar replied, protector of the Danes:
“Beowulf, you’ve come to us in friendship, and because
Of the reception your father found at our court.
Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,
Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:
Your father’s countrymen were afraid of war,
If he returned to his home, and they turned him away.
Then he traveled across the curving waves
To the land of the Danes. I was new to the throne,
Then, a young man ruling this wide
Kingdom and its golden city: Hergar,
My older brother, a far better man
Than I, had died and dying made me,
Second among Healfdane's sons, first
In this nation. I bought the end of Edgetho's
Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean's
Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore
He'd keep that peace. My tongue grows heavy,
And my heart, when I try to tell you what Grendel
Has brought us, the damage he's done, here
In this hall. You see for yourself how much smaller
Our ranks have become, and can guess what we've lost
To his terror. Surely the Lord Almighty
Could stop his madness, smother his lust!
How many times have my men, glowing
With courage drawn from too many cups
Of ale, sworn to stay after dark
And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords.
And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering
With new light would be drenched with blood, the benches
Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend's
Savage assault—and my soldiers would be fewer
Still, death taking more and more.
But to table, Beowulf, a banquet in your honor:
Let us toast your victories, and talk of the future."

Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats,
Yielded benches to the brave visitors
And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead
Came carrying out the carved flasks,
And poured that bright sweetness. A poet
Sang, from time to time, in a clear
Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats
Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced. . . .
After the banquet, Hrothgar and his followers leave Herot, and Beowulf and his warriors remain to spend the night. Beowulf reiterates his intent to fight Grendel without a sword and, while his followers sleep, lies waiting, eager for Grendel to appear.

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty Hills and bogs, bearing God’s hatred,

Grendel came, hoping to kill 1
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
Up from his swampland, sliding silently
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar’s Home before, knew the way—
But never, before nor after that night,
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,

Tore its iron fasteners with a touch

---

1 **OLD ENGLISH POETRY**
Reread lines 233–235. Notice that the translator uses punctuation to convey the effect of the midline pauses, or caesuras, in the lines. In what way does the rhythm created by the pauses reinforce the action recounted here?
And rushed angrily over the threshold.
He strode quickly across the inlaid
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
With rows of young soldiers resting together.
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,
Intended to tear the life from those bodies
By morning; the monster’s mind was hot
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
Grendel to gnaw the broken bones
Of his last human supper. Human
Eyes were watching his evil steps,
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.
Grendel snatched at the first Geat
He came to, ripped him apart, cut
His body to bits with powerful jaws,
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted
Him down, hands and feet; death
And Grendel’s great teeth came together,
Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
—And was instantly seized himself, claws
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.
That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
Knew at once that nowhere on earth
Had he met a man whose hands were harder;
His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing
Could take his talons and himself from that tight
Hard grip. Grendel’s one thought was to run
From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
But Higlac’s follower remembered his final
Boast and, standing erect, stopped
The monster’s flight, fastened those claws
In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
Closer. The infamous killer fought
For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!
The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
And Danes shook with terror. Down
The aisles the battle swept, angry
And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
Built to withstand the blows, the struggling
Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
And out, artfully worked, the building
Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.
Hrothgar’s wise men had fashioned Herot
To stand forever; only fire,
They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
The sounds changed, the Danes started
In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
Screams of the Almighty’s enemy sang
In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel’s
Taut throat, hell’s captive caught in the arms
Of him who of all the men on earth
Was the strongest.

That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf’s
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
Swords raised and ready, determined
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel
From every side, trying to open
A path for his evil soul, but their points
Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
Had bewitched all men’s weapons, laid spells
That blunted every mortal man’s blade.
And yet his time had come, his days
Were over, his death near; down
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.
Now he discovered—once the afflictor
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant
To feud with Almighty God: Grendel
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws

Bound fast, Higlac’s brave follower tearing at
His hands. The monster’s hatred rose higher,
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder
Snapped, muscle and bone split

And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end

Of all his days. And after that bloody
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
He who had come to them from across the sea,
Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,

Now, with that night’s fierce work; the Danes
Had been served as he’d boasted he’d serve them; Beowulf,
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering
Forced on Hrothgar’s helpless people

By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
The victory, for the proof, hanging high
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster’s
Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
Herot, warriors coming to that hall
From faraway lands, princes and leaders
Of men hurrying to behold the monster’s
Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense
Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,

Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
Where he’d dragged his corpse-like way, doomed
And already weary of his vanishing life.
The water was bloody, steaming and boiling

In horrible pounding waves, heat
Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
Surf had covered his death, hidden
Deep in murky darkness his miserable
End, as hell opened to receive him.

Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hard-hooved
Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
Slowly toward Herot again, retelling
Beowulf’s bravery as they jogged along.

And over and over they swore that nowhere
On earth or under the spreading sky
Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.
(But no one meant Beowulf’s praise to belittle
Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)

And sometimes, when the path ran straight and clear,
They would let their horses race, red
And brown and pale yellow backs streaming
Down the road. And sometimes a proud old soldier
Who had heard songs of the ancient heroes
And could sing them all through, story after story,
Would weave a net of words for Beowulf’s
Victory, tying the knot of his verses
Smoothly, swiftly, into place with a poet’s
Quick skill, singing his new song aloud
While he shaped it, and the old songs as well. . . .

GRAMMAR AND STYLE
To capture a scene, the poet often uses vivid imagery. Notice the use in lines 369–374, for example, of adjectives such as bloody, steaming, pounding, and swirling to help readers see and feel the violent, churning water.

OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 389–396. In what ways does this description reflect the techniques used by Anglo-Saxon poets? Cite details.

Literary Analysis

1. Clarify Why does Beowulf journey across the sea to the land of the Danes?

2. Summarize How does Beowulf trap and kill Grendel?

3. Analyze Motivation What drives Grendel to attack so many men at Herot, the mead hall?

4. Make Inferences Why does Beowulf hang Grendel’s arm from the rafters of Herot?
Although one monster has died, another still lives. From her lair in a cold and murky lake, where she has been brooding over her loss, Grendel’s mother emerges, bent on revenge.

So she reached Herot,
Where the Danes slept as though already dead;  
Her visit ended their good fortune, reversed
The bright vane of their luck. No female, no matter
How fierce, could have come with a man’s strength,
Fought with the power and courage men fight with,
Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,
Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,
Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of points.
The soldiers raised their shields and drew
Those gleaming swords, swung them above
The piled-up benches, leaving their mail shirts
And their helmets where they’d lain when the terror took hold of them.

To save her life she moved still faster,
Took a single victim and fled from the hall,
Running to the moors, discovered, but her supper
Assured, sheltered in her dripping claws.
She’d taken Hrothgar’s closest friend,
The man he most loved of all men on earth;
She’d killed a glorious soldier, cut
A noble life short. No Geat could have stopped her:
Beowulf and his band had been given better

ANALYZE VISUALS
What mood is conveyed by this photograph? Which elements help create that mood?

400 vane: a device that turns to show the direction the wind is blowing—here associated metaphorically with luck, which is as changeable as the wind.
404 boar-headed helmets: Germanic warriors often wore helmets bearing the images of wild pigs or other fierce creatures in the hope that the images would increase their ferocity and protect them against their enemies.
Beds; sleep had come to them in a different
Hall. Then all Herot burst into shouts:
She had carried off Grendel’s claw. Sorrow
Had returned to Denmark. They’d traded deaths,
Danes and monsters, and no one had won,
Both had lost! . . .

Devastated by the loss of his friend, Hrothgar sends for Beowulf and
recounts what Grendel’s mother has done. Then Hrothgar describes
the dark lake where Grendel’s mother has dwelt with her son.

“...They live in secret places, windy
Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours
From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist
Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees
Growing out over their lake are all covered
With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike
Roots that reach as far as the water
And help keep it dark. At night that lake
Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,
No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,
Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,
A stag with great horns, though driven through the forest
From faraway places, prefers to die
On those shores, refuses to save its life
In that water. It isn’t far, nor is it
A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs
And storms, waves splash toward the sky,
As dark as the air, as black as the rain
That the heavens weep. Our only help,
Again, lies with you. Grendel’s mother
Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place
You’ve not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,
Once more, and again twisted gold,
Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you
For the battle you win!” . . .
Beowulf accepts Hrothgar's challenge, and the king and his men accompany the hero to the dreadful lair of Grendel's mother. Fearlessly, Beowulf prepares to battle the terrible creature.

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's Answer; the heaving water covered him Over. For hours he sank through the waves; At last he saw the mud of the bottom. And all at once the greedy she-wolf Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred Years discovered him, saw that a creature From above had come to explore the bottom Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws, Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him, Tried to work her fingers through the tight Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore
And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor
And sword and all, to her home; he struggled
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight
Brought other monsters swimming to see
Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth
As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,
And there the water's heat could not hurt him,
Nor anything in the lake attack him through
The building’s high-arching roof. A brilliant
Light burned all around him, the lake
Itself like a fiery flame.

Then he saw
The mighty water witch, and swung his sword,
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;
The iron sang its fierce song,
Sang Beowulf’s strength. But her guest
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,
And that too failed him; for the first time in years
Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf
Longed only for fame, leaped back
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,
Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where
He’d dropped it. If weapons were useless he’d use
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame
Comes to the men who mean to win it
And care about nothing else! He raised
His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.

She fell, Grendel’s fierce mother, and the Geats’
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,
Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew
A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared
To avenge her only son. But he was stretched
On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted
By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.
The hammered links held; the point
Could not touch him. He’d have traveled to the bottom of the earth,
Edgetho’s son, and died there, if that shining
Woven metal had not helped—and Holy
God, who sent him victory, gave judgment
For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy
Sword, hammered by giants, strong
And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons
But so massive that no ordinary man could lift
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it
From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,
And then, savage, now, angry
And desperate, lifted it high over his head
And struck with all the strength he had left,
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,
Broke bones and all. Her body fell
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.

The brilliant light shone, suddenly,
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven’s
Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked at her home, then following along the wall
Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,
His heart still angry. He was hunting another
Dead monster, and took his weapon with him
For final revenge against Grendel’s vicious
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over
And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar’s
Men slept, killing them in their beds,
Eating some on the spot, fifteen
Or more, and running to his loathsome moor
With another such sickening meal waiting
In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
Found him lying dead in his corner,
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
His head with a single swift blow. The body
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.

What does the light described in lines 526–528 suggest about Beowulf’s victory?

loathsome (lōth’sam) adj. disgusting
The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,
Like him staring into the monsters’ lake,
Saw the waves surging and blood
Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,
All the graybeards, whispered together
And said that hope was gone, that the hero
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never
Return to the living, come back as triumphant
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel’s
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.

The sun slid over past noon, went further
Down. The Danes gave up, left
The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
They would ever see him again.

—Then the sword
Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
Like water, disappearing like ice when the world’s
Eternal Lord loosens invisible
Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost
As only He can, He who rules
Time and seasons, He who is truly
God. The monsters’ hall was full of
Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took
Was Grendel’s head and the hilt of the giants’
Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked
Blade had dissolved in Grendel’s steaming
Blood, boiling even after his death.
And then the battle’s only survivor
Swam up and away from those silent corpses;
The water was calm and clean, the whole
Huge lake peaceful once the demons who’d lived in it
Were dead.

Then that noble protector of all seamen
Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy
Burdens he was bringing with him. He
And all his glorious band of Geats
Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;
They left the lake together. The Geats
Carried Beowulf’s helmet, and his mail shirt.

Behind them the water slowly thickened
As the monsters’ blood came seeping up.
They walked quickly, happily, across
Roads all of them remembered, left
The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men
Staggering under the weight of Grendel’s skull,
Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—
Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—
Yet proud of their ugly load and determined
That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.

Soon, fourteen Geats arrived
At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,
Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall
Green. Then the Geats’ brave prince entered
Herot, covered with glory for the daring
Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar
To salute him and show Grendel’s head.
He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,
Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,
Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared. . . .

**Literary Analysis**

1. **Clarify** Why does Hrothgar ask Beowulf to battle Grendel’s mother?

2. **Summarize** What does Beowulf do after he kills Grendel’s mother?

3. **Compare and Contrast** Compare the two monsters. Does the behavior of Grendel’s mother seem as wicked or unreasonable as Grendel’s behavior? Support your opinion.
With Grendel’s mother destroyed, peace is restored to the land of the Danes, and Beowulf, laden with Hrothgar’s gifts, returns to the land of his own people, the Geats. After his uncle and cousin die, Beowulf becomes king of the Geats and rules in peace and prosperity for 50 years. One day, however, a fire-breathing dragon that has been guarding a treasure for hundreds of years is disturbed by a thief, who enters the treasure tower and steals a cup. The dragon begins terrorizing the Geats, and Beowulf, now an old man, takes on the challenge of fighting it.

And Beowulf uttered his final boast:
“I’ve never known fear, as a youth I fought
In endless battles. I am old, now,
But I will fight again, seek fame still,
610 If the dragon hiding in his tower dares
To face me.”
Then he said farewell to his followers,

Each in his turn, for the last time:

“I’d use no sword, no weapon, if this beast
Could be killed without it, crushed to death
Like Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn
Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning
Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.
I feel no shame, with shield and sword
And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me

I mean to stand, not run from his shooting
Flames, stand till fate decides
Which of us wins. My heart is firm,
My hands calm: I need no hot
Words. Wait for me close by, my friends.

We shall see, soon, who will survive
This bloody battle, stand when the fighting
Is done. No one else could do
What I mean to, here, no man but me
Could hope to defeat this monster. No one

Could try. And this dragon’s treasure, his gold
And everything hidden in that tower, will be mine
Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!”

Then Beowulf rose, still brave, still strong,
And with his shield at his side, and a mail shirt on his breast,

Strode calmly, confidently, toward the tower, under
The rocky cliffs: no coward could have walked there!
And then he who’d endured dozens of desperate
Battles, who’d stood boldly while swords and shields
Clashed, the best of kings, saw

Huge stone arches and felt the heat
Of the dragon’s breath, flooding down
Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone
To stand, a streaming current of fire
And smoke that blocked all passage. And the Geats’

Lord and leader, angry, lowered
His sword and roared out a battle cry,
A call so loud and clear that it reached through
The hoary rock, hung in the dragon’s
Ear. The beast rose, angry,

Knowing a man had come—and then nothing
But war could have followed. Its breath came first,
A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,
Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf
Swung his shield into place, held it
In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon
Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it
Into battle. Beowulf’s ancient sword
Was waiting, unsheathed, his sharp and gleaming
Blade. The beast came closer; both of them
Were ready, each set on slaughter. The Geats’
Great prince stood firm, unmoving, prepared
Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining
Armor. The monster came quickly toward him,
Pouring out fire and smoke, hurrying
To its fate. Flames beat at the iron
Shield, and for a time it held, protected
Beowulf as he’d planned; then it began to melt,
And for the first time in his life that famous prince
Fought with fate against him, with glory
Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword
And struck at the dragon’s scaly hide.
The ancient blade broke, bit into
The monster’s skin, drew blood, but cracked
And failed him before it went deep enough, helped him
Less than he needed. The dragon leaped
With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting
Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.
And the Geats’ ring-giver did not boast of glorious
Victories in other wars: his weapon
Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it
Most, that excellent sword. Edgetho’s
Famous son stared at death,
Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it
For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey
Into darkness that all men must make, as death
Ends their few brief hours on earth.
Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,
And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling
Flames—a king, before, but now
A beaten warrior. None of his comrades
Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
Followers; they ran for their lives, fled
Deep in a wood. And only one of them
Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering.
As a good man must, what kinship should mean.

Reread lines 668–671. What do these lines reveal about the qualities of an epic hero?

Ring-giver: king; lord. When a man swore allegiance to a Germanic lord in return for his protection, the lord typically bestowed a ring on his follower to symbolize the bond.

What values are implied in lines 691–696? What message about these values do the lines convey?
Wiglaf joins Beowulf, who again attacks the dragon single-handed; but the remnant of his sword shatters, and the monster wounds him in the neck. Wiglaf then strikes the dragon, and he and Beowulf together finally succeed in killing the beast. Their triumph is short-lived, however, because Beowulf’s wound proves to be mortal.

Beowulf spoke, in spite of the swollen, *Livid* wound, knowing he’d unwound
His string of days on earth, seen
As much as God would grant him; all worldly
740 Pleasure was gone, as life would go,
Soon:

“I’d leave my armor to my son,
Now, if God had given me an heir,
A child born of my body, his life
Created from mine. I’ve worn this crown
745 For fifty winters: no neighboring people
Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers
Against us or talked of terror. My days
Have gone by as fate willed, waiting
For its word to be spoken, ruling as well

750 As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,
Seeking no lying wars. I can leave
This life happy; I can die, here,
Knowing the Lord of all life has never
Watched me wash my sword in blood

755 Born of my own family. Belovèd Wiglaf, go, quickly, find
The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life,
But its gold is ours, too. Hurry,
Bring me ancient silver, precious

760 Jewels, shining armor and gems,
Before I die. Death will be softer,
Leaving life and this people I've ruled
So long, if I look at this last of all prizes.”

Then Wexstan's son went in, as quickly

765 As he could, did as the dying Beowulf
Asked, entered the inner darkness
Of the tower, went with his mail shirt and his sword.
Flushed with victory he groped his way,
A brave young warrior, and suddenly saw

770 Piles of gleaming gold, precious
Gems, scattered on the floor, cups
And bracelets, rusty old helmets, beautifully
Made but rotting with no hands to rub
And polish them. They lay where the dragon left them;

775 It had flown in the darkness, once, before fighting
Its final battle. (So gold can easily
Triumph, defeat the strongest of men,
No matter how deep it is hidden!) And he saw,

Hanging high above, a golden

780 Banner, woven by the best of weavers
And beautiful. And over everything he saw
A strange light, shining everywhere,
On walls and floor and treasure. Nothing
Moved, no other monsters appeared;

785 He took what he wanted, all the treasures
That pleased his eye, heavy plates
And golden cups and the glorious banner,
Loaded his arms with all they could hold.
Beowulf’s dagger, his iron blade,
Had finished the fire-spitting terror
That once protected tower and treasures
Alike; the gray-bearded lord of the Geats
Had ended those flying, burning raids
Forever.

Then Wiglaf went back, anxious
To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him
Treasure they’d won together. He ran,
Hoping his wounded king, weak
And dying, had not left the world too soon.
Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found
His famous king bloody, gasping
For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water
Over his lord, until the words
Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.
Beholding the treasure he spoke, haltingly:
“For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank
Our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth—
For all of this, that His grace has given me,
Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
Still came to my lips. I sold my life
For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take
What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people,
Help them; my time is gone. Have
The brave Geats build me a tomb,
When the funeral flames have burned me, and build it
Here, at the water’s edge, high
On this spit of land, so sailors can see
This tower, and remember my name, and call it
Beowulf’s tower, and boats in the darkness
And mist, crossing the sea, will know it.”

Then that brave king gave the golden
Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf,
Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,
And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
“You’re the last of all our far-flung family.
Fate has swept our race away,
Taken warriors in their strength and led them
To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them.”

The old man’s mouth was silent, spoke
No more, had said as much as it could;
He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul
Left his flesh, flew to glory. . . .

And when the battle was over Beowulf’s followers
Came out of the wood, cowards and traitors,
Knowing the dragon was dead. Afraid,

While it spit its fires, to fight in their lord’s
Defense, to throw their javelins and spears,
They came like shamefaced jackals, their shields
In their hands, to the place where the prince lay dead,
And waited for Wiglaf to speak. He was sitting

Near Beowulf’s body, wearily sprinkling
Water in the dead man’s face, trying
To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept
Life in their lord’s body, or turned
Aside the Lord’s will: world

And men and all move as He orders,
And always have, and always will.

Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them
What men without courage must hear.
Wexstan’s brave son stared at the traitors,

His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to:
“I say what anyone who speaks the truth
Must say. . . .
Too few of his warriors remembered
To come, when our lord faced death, alone.

And now the giving of swords, of golden
Rings and rich estates, is over,
Ended for you and everyone who shares
Your blood: when the brave Geats hear
How you bolted and ran none of your race

Will have anything left but their lives. And death
Would be better for them all, and for you, than the kind
Of life you can lead, branded with disgrace!” . . .

Then the warriors rose,
Walked slowly down from the cliff, stared

At those wonderful sights, stood weeping as they saw
Beowulf dead on the sand, their bold
Ring-giver resting in his last bed;
He’d reached the end of his days, their mighty
War-king, the great lord of the Geats,

Gone to a glorious death. . . .
Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf
Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors
Could find it from far and wide; working
For ten long days they made his monument,
Sealed his ashes in walls as straight
And high as wise and willing hands
Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf
Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,
Ancient, hammered armor—all
The treasures they’d taken were left there, too,
Silver and jewels buried in the sandy
Ground, back in the earth, again
And forever hidden and useless to men.
And then twelve of the bravest Geats
Rode their horses around the tower,
Telling their sorrow, telling stories
Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,
Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life
As noble as his name. So should all men
Raise up words for their lords, warm
With love, when their shield and protector leaves
His body behind, sends his soul
On high. And so Beowulf’s followers
Rode, mourning their beloved leader,
Crying that no better king had ever
Lived, no prince so mild, no man
So open to his people, so deserving of praise.
After Reading

Comprehension

1. **Recall**  In what way does Beowulf’s sword fail him?
2. **Clarify**  Why does Wiglaf denounce the other warriors?
3. **Summarize**  How do the Geats honor Beowulf after he dies?

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Epic Characteristics**  Review the discussion of the characteristics of an epic in the Literary Analysis Workshop on pages 34–35. Then use a chart like the one shown to list Beowulf’s traits as an **epic hero** and the deeds that demonstrate these traits. Do you think Beowulf is a typical epic hero? Use details from the poem to explain your answer.

5. **Analyze Old English Poetry**  Review the list you created as you read. In what ways might the **alliteration, caesuras, and kennings** in *Beowulf* have helped Anglo-Saxon poets chant or sing the poem and convey its meaning?

6. **Analyze Theme**  Beowulf is able to defeat **evil** in the form of Grendel and Grendel’s mother, yet he loses his life when he battles the dragon. What theme does this suggest about the struggle between good and evil?

7. **Compare and Contrast**  Compare and contrast the portrayals of Beowulf as a young and old man. Also compare Hrothgar’s recollections of his early deeds with his limitations as an aged king. What view of youth and age do these comparisons convey? Support your conclusions with specific evidence.

8. **Draw Conclusions**  Describe Beowulf’s attitude toward death or mortality in each of the following passages. How does his attitude change over time? Cite evidence to support your conclusions.
   - lines 179–189 (“And I think . . . unwind as it must!”)
   - lines 481–492 (“They wrestled . . . care about nothing else!”)
   - lines 665–691 (“Flames beat at the iron . . . beaten warrior.”)

9. **Evaluate Author’s Purpose**  Reread lines 81–85, which reveal the influence of Christianity on the Beowulf Poet. Why might the poet have chosen to describe Hrothgar and Grendel in terms of their relationship to God?

Literary Criticism

10. **Different Perspectives**  In his 20th-century novel *Grendel*, writer John Gardner tells the story of Grendel’s attacks against the Danes from the monster’s point of view. Consider the selection you have read from the perspectives of Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon. What reasons might each of them have to hate Beowulf and other men?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Decide whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

1. affliction/blessing
2. gorge/empty
3. infamous/respected
4. lair/hideout
5. livid/bruised
6. loathsome/delightful
7. purge/remove
8. talon/claw

**VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

Using at least four vocabulary words, describe a monster who might appear in an action-adventure or a science-fiction film. You might begin like this.

**EXAMPLE SENTENCE**

The monster was always hungry and liked to **gorge** his stomach.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE ANGLO-SAXON SUFFIX -some**

The word **loathsome** contains the Old English suffix **-some**, which usually means “like” or “tending to cause” and is used to turn words into adjectives. In **loathsome**, for example, the suffix turns the verb **loathe**, which means “to feel disgust,” into an adjective meaning “tending to cause one to feel disgust.”

**PRACTICE** Use an adjective ending in the suffix **-some** to describe each person, place, or thing listed. Form the adjective by adding **-some** to a word shown in the equation.

1. a load of books to carry
2. a city skyline sparkling in the sun
3. a person who always argues
4. a smile that charms people
5. a slimy toad

   awe + some

   burden loathe quarrel win

   + some

   affliction gorge livid lair livid loathsome purge talon
Reading-Writing Connection

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE AN ANALYSIS  The review on page 70 describes the powerful experience of listening to an oral performance of Beowulf. What do you think makes the written work so effective?

Write a three-to-five-paragraph analysis of Beowulf, explaining what elements in the poem bring it to life for you. You might focus on its characters, its vivid descriptions, or the elements characteristic of Old English poetry.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

CREATE IMAGERY  Review the Grammar and Style note on page 50. To describe a scene or convey a mood, the Beowulf Poet uses imagery—words and phrases that create vivid sensory experiences for the audience. The poet frequently creates this imagery through an effective use of adjectives and verbs. Here is an example from the epic:

The dragon leaped
With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting
Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere. (lines 675–677)

Notice that the verbs leaped, thrashed, and beat suggest a sense of movement and that the adjective murderous conveys the feeling of the flames’ heat. The imagery in the sentence helps you envision the scene and experience its intensity.

PRACTICE  Write down each of the following lines from Beowulf. Identify the adjectives and verbs in each sentence that create imagery and then write your own sentence with similar elements.

EXAMPLE

He moved quickly through the cloudy night, / Up from his swampland, sliding silently / Toward that gold-shining hall.

She drifted slowly down the leaf-strewn street, away from the city lights, winding sadly toward the deserted house.

1. ... Grendel will carry our bloody / Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones / And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls / Of his den.

2. He strode quickly across the inlaid / Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes / Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome / Light.

3. ... the Danes started / In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible / Screams of the Almighty’s enemy sang / In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain / And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel’s / Taut throat ...
European noblemen of a thousand years ago had much more exciting and intelligent entertainment than anything to be found now. Anyone who doubts that need only look in on Benjamin Bagby’s astonishing performance of the first quarter of the epic poem *Beowulf*—in Anglo-Saxon, no less—tonight at the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse at Lincoln Center. It will be the last of his three appearances in the Lincoln Center Festival.

From the moment he strode on stage on Sunday for the opening night, silencing the audience with that famous first word, “Hwaet!” (“Pay attention!”), until hell swallowed the “pagan soul” of the monster Grendel 80 minutes later, Mr. Bagby came as close to holding hundreds of people in a spell as ever a man has. As the epic’s warriors argued, boasted, fought or fell into the monster’s maw, there were bursts of laughter, mutters and sighs, and when Mr. Bagby’s voice stopped at the end, as abruptly as it had begun, there was an audible rippling gasp before a thunderclap of applause from cheering people who called him back again and again, unwilling to let him go.

Mr. Bagby—a Midwesterner who fell in love with *Beowulf* at 12 and who now is co-director of a medieval music ensemble, Sequentia, in Cologne, Germany—accompanies himself on a six-string lyre modeled on one found in a seventh-century tomb near Stuttgart. This surprisingly facile instrument underscores the meter of the epic.
verses and is counterpoint to Mr. Bagby’s voice as he recites, chants and occasionally sings the lines.

On the whole, this is a restrained presentation. The performer captures listeners at once simply by letting us feel his conviction that he has a tale to tell that is more captivating than any other story in the world. He avoids histrionic gestures, letting the majestic rhythms of the epic seize our emotions and guide them through the action. Gradually the many voices that fill the great poem emerge and the listener always knows who is speaking: a warrior, a watchman, a king, a sarcastic drunk. A translation is handed out to the audience, but after a while one notices people are following it less and just letting the sound of this strange and beautiful language wash over them. Perhaps not so strange, after all—enough phrases begin to penetrate the understanding that one finally knows deep down that, yes, this is where English came from.

How authentic is all this? Well, we know from many historical sources that in the first millennium at royal or noble houses a performer called a scop would present epics. Mr. Bagby has lived with this epic for many years, as well as with ancient music, and his performance is his argument that Beowulf was meant to be heard, not read, and that this is the way we ought to hear it. It is a powerful argument, indeed. The test of it is that when he has finished, you leave with the overwhelming impression that you know the anonymous poet who created Beowulf more than a dozen centuries ago, that you have felt the man’s personality touch you. That is a much too rare experience in theater.
Roughly a thousand years before the Beowulf Poet composed his epic poem, another oral poet, Homer, created two great epics. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were an essential part of the ancient Greek world. Schoolchildren memorized verses from the poems, and scholars discussed their meaning. Alexander the Great slept with a gold-encrusted copy of the *Iliad* under his pillow. But little or nothing was known about the poet himself.

**Man of Mystery** Nothing much has changed today. Legend and mystery abound in the life of Homer. According to one of the most persistent legends, Homer was blind. However, some scholars have pointed out that the ancient Greeks typically depicted a sage or philosopher as a blind man to emphasize his exceptional inner vision.

The poet’s birthplace and date of birth are also matters for speculation. For centuries, scholars even debated about whether Homer ever really existed. Today most agree that the author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was indeed a man named Homer who lived sometime between 800 and 600 B.C. and was born either in western Asia Minor or on one of the nearby Aegean islands. Evidence of his life has been gathered indirectly from writings of ancient Greece and from Homer’s poems.

**Clash of Titans** The *Iliad* relates events of the Trojan War, a conflict between Greeks and Trojans in the ancient city of Troy in Asia Minor. Most historians believe that some sort of war really did take place between Greece and Troy around 1200 B.C.

According to Homer’s poem, the Trojan War began when Paris, a prince of Troy, kidnapped Helen, the world’s most beautiful woman, from her husband, King Menelaus (mēn’ē-lā’ōs) of Greece. In retaliation, the king’s brother, Agamemnon (āg’ā-mēm’nōn), led the Greek army in an invasion of Troy. The Greeks laid siege to the city for ten years before finally achieving victory. The *Iliad* describes the final year of that siege.

**Unlettered Genius** Homer was able to draw on a rich oral tradition of stories about heroes and gods. Many scholars believe that he composed his epics orally, despite their great length and complexity. Homer probably could not read or write, but he may have recited his epics for someone else to record, thereby preserving the poems that became the foundation of Western literature.
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: SIMILE AND EPIC SIMILE**

Homer often helps readers visualize the action in his epics with a *simile*, a figure of speech that uses the word *like* or *as* to make a comparison between two unlike things. A long simile, often continuing for a number of lines, is called an *epic simile*. In the following epic simile, Achilles compares his hatred for Hector to that between enemies in nature:

As between men and lions there are none, no concord between wolves and sheep, but all hold one another hateful through and through, so there can be no courtesy between us . . .

As you read the selection from the *Iliad*, look for examples of similes and epic similes.

**Review:** Epic

**READING SKILL: CLASSIFY CHARACTERS**

The *Iliad* is a complex poem involving many characters—both human and divine. To help you keep track of the epic’s various characters as you read the *Iliad*, use a chart like the one shown to classify each character as a Greek, a Trojan, or a god. For each god, indicate whether he or she is helping the Greeks or the Trojans. Then note the important actions and characteristics of each character.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Greek, Trojan, or God?</th>
<th>Actions/Characteristics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Thetis    | a sea goddess           | • tries to console Achilles  
|           | helps the Greeks        | • loving toward son      |

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Homer uses the words shown here to help convey the passions and exploits of war. Substitute the boldfaced word in each of the following sentences with a word from the list.

**WORD LIST**

abstain  havoc  scourge  
defile  ponderous  vulnerable  
felicity  rancor

1. The feuding families viewed each other with *hatred*.
2. The elephant’s *weighty* leg broke the trainer’s stool.
3. The monster left behind a terrible trail of *devastation*.
4. It was a day of great *joy*, and everyone was smiling.

**Explore the Key Idea**

**What inspires COURAGE?**

**KEY IDEA** Running into a burning building to rescue a child. Standing up against gangs. Saving a drowning swimmer. These are all acts of *courage*. But what motivates people to perform them? After all, the logical thing to do when faced with danger is to run away. The three main characters in this selection draw on different types of strength when they confront their adversaries. What helps you find the courage to face your enemies and everyday dangers?

**DISCUSS** With a partner, discuss acts of courage you have witnessed or heard about. Talk about why these heroes did what they did. Are they different from other people? Is everyone capable of courageous acts?
While the Greeks are laying siege to Troy, a quarrel breaks out between Agamemnon and his greatest warrior, Achilles. As a result, the angry Achilles decides to remain in his tent and let the Greeks fight without him. The Trojans, under the leadership of Hector, are able to drive the Greeks back to the sea. During the battle, Hector kills Achilles’ best friend, Patroclus. While grieving for his friend, Achilles is visited by his mother, Thetis, a goddess of the sea.

from Book 18 THE IMMORTAL SHIELD

Bending near her groaning son, the gentle goddess wailed and took his head between her hands in pity, saying softly:

“Child, why are you weeping? What great sorrow came to you? Speak out, do not conceal it. Zeus did all you asked: Achaean troops, for want of you, were all forced back again upon the ship sterns, taking heavy losses none of them could wish.”

The great runner groaned and answered:

“Mother, yes, the master of high Olympus brought it all about, but how have I benefited? My greatest friend is gone: Patroclus, comrade in arms, whom I held dear above all others—dear as myself—
now gone, lost; Hector cut him down, despoiled him of my own arms, massive and fine, a wonder in all men’s eyes. The gods gave them to Peleus that day they put you in a mortal’s bed—
how I wish the immortals of the sea had been your only consorts! How I wish Peleus had taken a mortal queen! Sorrow immeasurable is in store for you as well, when your own child is lost: never again on his homecoming day will you embrace him! I must reject this life, my heart tells me, reject the world of men, if Hector does not feel my battering spear tear the life out of him, making him pay in his own blood for the slaughter of Patroclus!”

Letting a tear fall, Thetis said:

“You’ll be swift to meet your end, child, as you say: your doom comes close on the heels of Hector’s own.”

Achilles the great runner ground his teeth and said:

“May it come quickly. As things were, I could not help my friend in his extremity. Far from his home he died; he needed me to shield him or to parry the death stroke. For me there’s no return to my own country. Not the slightest gleam of hope did I afford Patroclus or the other men whom Hector overpowered. Here I sat, my weight a useless burden to the earth, and I am one who has no peer in war among Achaean captains—
though in council there are wiser. Ai! let strife and rancor perish from the lives of gods and men, with anger that envenoms even the wise and is far sweeter than slow-dripping honey, clouding the hearts of men like smoke: just so the marshal of the army, Agamemnon, moved me to anger. But we’ll let that go,

16–17 Patroclus wore Achilles’ armor to frighten the Trojans. “Despoiled him of my own arms” refers to Hector’s taking the armor from Patroclus’ corpse.
18 Peleus (pē’ē-os): Achilles’ human father.

A CLASSIFY CHARACTERS Reread lines 26–30. Notice that Achilles suggests that his heart is guiding him rather than his head. What characteristics does Achilles reveal in these lines?

38 parry: to turn aside; deflect.

rancor (rāng’kar) n. bitter, long-lasting anger; ill will

48 envenoms (ən-vēn’əmz): fills with poison.
though I’m still sore at heart; it is all past, 
and I have quelled my passion as I must.

Now I must go to look for the destroyer 
of my great friend. I shall confront the dark 
drear spirit of death at any hour Zeus 
and the other gods may wish to make an end. 
Not even Heracles escaped that terror 
though cherished by the Lord Zeus. Destiny 
and Hera’s bitter anger mastered him. 
Likewise with me, if destiny like his 
awaits me, I shall rest when I have fallen! 
Now, though, may I win my perfect glory 
and make some wife of Troy break down, 
or some deep-breasted Dardan woman sob 
and wipe tears from her soft cheeks. They’ll know then 
how long they had been spared the deaths of men, 
while I abstained from war!

Do not attempt to keep me from the fight, 
though you love me; you cannot make me listen.”

Achilles seeks to avenge Patroclus by slaughtering Trojans. Apollo, a god who protects Troy, opens the gates of the city so the Trojans can rush to safety inside the walls. Only Hector is left outside. Achilles chases him around the walls three times. Finally the goddess Pallas Athena, disguised as Hector’s brother Deiphobus, appears to Hector and persuades him to fight Achilles.

from Book 22 DESOLATION BEFORE TROY

And when at last the two men faced each other, 
Hector was the first to speak. He said:

“I will no longer fear you as before, 
son of Peleus, though I ran from you 
round Priam’s town three times and could not face you. 
Now my soul would have me stand and fight, 
whether I kill you or am killed. So come, 
we’ll summon gods here as our witnesses, 
none higher, arbiters of a pact: I swear 
that, terrible as you are, 
I’ll not insult your corpse should Zeus allow me 
victory in the end, your life as prize. 
Once I have your gear, I’ll give your body 
back to Achaeans. Grant me, too, this grace.”

59–61 Heracles (hâr’ə-klâz’): another name for Hercules, the greatest legendary hero of ancient Greece, son of Zeus and a mortal woman named Alcmena (âlk-mê’na). Zeus’ wife, the goddess Hera (hê’rə), hated and persecuted Heracles until his death.

66 Dardan (dâr’dn): Trojan.

abstain (âb-stân’): v. to hold oneself back from doing something

76 Priam’s (prî’amz) town: Troy. Priam is the Trojan King.

80 arbiters (âr’bî-tarz): judges; referees.

CLASSIFY CHARACTERS
In lines 82–85, Hector refers to the Greek and Trojan custom of returning the bodies of slain warriors to their people. What does this speech reveal about Hector?
But swift Achilles frowned at him and said:

“Hector, I’ll have no talk of pacts with you, forever unforgiven as you are. As between men and lions there are none, no concord between wolves and sheep, but all hold one another hateful through and through, so there can be no courtesy between us, no sworn truce, till one of us is down and glutting with his blood the wargod Ares. Summon up what skills you have. By god, you’d better be a spearman and a fighter! Now there is no way out. Pallas Athena will have the upper hand of you. The weapon belongs to me. You’ll pay the reckoning in full for all the pain my men have borne, who met death by your spear.”

He twirled and cast his shaft with its long shadow. Splendid Hector, keeping his eye upon the point, eluded it by ducking at the instant of the cast, so shaft and bronze shank passed him overhead and punched into the earth. But unperceived by Hector, Pallas Athena plucked it out and gave it back to Achilles. Hector said:

90 concord (kŏn’kôrd’): peace or harmony.

94 glutting with his blood the wargod Ares (âr’ôz): satisfying Ares, the god of war, by bleeding to death.

97–98 Pallas Athena, the goddess of wisdom, favors the Greeks.

C EPIC Reread lines 102–108. What characteristic of an epic is revealed in these lines?
“A clean miss. Godlike as you are,
you have not yet known doom for me from Zeus.
You thought you had, by heaven. Then you turned
into a word-thrower, hoping to make me lose
my fighting heart and head in fear of you.
You cannot plant your spear between my shoulders
while I am running. If you have the gift,
just put it through my chest as I come forward.
Now it’s for you to dodge my own. Would god
you’d give the whole shaft lodging in your body!
War for the Trojans would be eased
if you were blotted out, bane that you are.”

With this he twirled his long spearshaft and cast it,
hitting his enemy mid-shield, but off
and away the spear rebounded. Furious
that he had lost it, made his throw for nothing,
Hector stood bemused. He had no other.
Then he gave a great shout to Deiphobus
to ask for a long spear. But there was no one
near him, not a soul. Now in his heart
the Trojan realized the truth and said:

“This is the end. The gods are calling deathward.
I had thought
a good soldier, Deiphobus, was with me.
He is inside the walls. Athena tricked me.
Death is near, and black, not at a distance,
not to be evaded. Long ago
this hour must have been to Zeus’s liking
and to the liking of his archer son.
They have been well disposed before, but now
the appointed time’s upon me. Still, I would not
die without delivering a stroke,
or die ingloriously, but in some action
memorable to men in days to come.”

With this he drew the whetted blade that hung
upon his left flank, ponderous and long,
collecting all his might the way an eagle
narrowed himself to dive through shady cloud
and strike a lamb or cowering hare: so Hector
lanced ahead and swung his whetted blade.
Achilles with wild fury in his heart
pulled in upon his chest his beautiful shield—
his helmet with four burnished metal ridges
nodding above it, and the golden crest
Hephaestus locked there tossing in the wind.
Conspicuous as the evening star that comes,
amid the first in heaven, at fall of night,
and stands most lovely in the west, so shone
in sunlight the fine-pointed spear
Achilles poised in his right hand, with deadly
aim at Hector, at the skin where most
it lay exposed. But nearly all was covered
by the bronze gear he took from slain Patroclus,
showing only, where his collarbones
divided neck and shoulders, the bare throat
where the destruction of a life is quickest.
Here, then, as the Trojan charged, Achilles
drove his point straight through the tender neck,
but did not cut the windpipe, leaving Hector
able to speak and to respond. He fell
aside into the dust. And Prince Achilles
now exulted:

“Hector, had you thought
that you could kill Patroclus and be safe?
Nothing to dread from me; I was not there.
All childishness. Though distant then, Patroclus’
comrade in arms was greater far than he—
and it is I who had been left behind
that day beside the deepsea ships who now
have made your knees give way. The dogs and kites
will rip your body. His will lie in honor
when the Achaeans give him funeral.”

Hector, barely whispering, replied:

“I beg you by your soul and by your parents,
do not let the dogs feed on me
in your encampment by the ships. Accept
the bronze and gold my father will provide
as gifts, my father and her ladyship
my mother. Let them have my body back,
so that our men and women may accord me
decency of fire when I am dead.”
Achilles the great runner scowled and said:

“Beg me no beggary by soul or parents, whining dog! Would god my passion drove me to slaughter you and eat you raw, you’ve caused such agony to me! No man exists who could defend you from the carrion pack—not if they spread for me ten times your ransom, twenty times, and promise more as well; aye, not if Priam, son of Dardanus, tells them to buy you for your weight in gold! You’ll have no bed of death, nor will you be laid out and mourned by her who gave you birth. Dogs and birds will have you, every scrap.”

Then at the point of death Lord Hector said:

“I see you now for what you are. No chance to win you over. Iron in your breast your heart is. Think a bit, though: this may be a thing the gods in anger hold against you on that day when Paris and Apollo destroy you at the Gates, great as you are.”

Even as he spoke, the end came, and death hid him; spirit from body fluttered to undergloom, bewailing fate that made him leave his youth and manhood in the world. And as he died Achilles spoke again. He said:

“Die, make an end. I shall accept my own whenever Zeus and the other gods desire.”

At this he pulled his spearhead from the body, laying it aside, and stripped the bloodstained shield and cuirass from his shoulders. Other Achaeans hastened round to see Hector’s fine body and his comely face, and no one came who did not stab the body. Glancing at one another they would say:

“Now Hector has turned vulnerable, softer than when he put the torches to the ships!”

190 beggary (beg’-ri) n. poverty;

194 carrion (kär’-ən) pack: the wild animals that feed on dead flesh.

197 Dardanus (där’dn-os): the founder of the line of Trojan kings. Here son means “descendant.”

205–208 Although Achilles is still alive as the Iliad ends, other tales of the Trojan War tell how he is eventually killed by Hector’s brother Paris, with the aid of Apollo.

218 cuirass (kwir’əs’s): an armored breastplate. Hector is wearing the armor of Achilles that he took from Patroclus’ body.

224 Hector’s torching of the ships occurred when the Trojans forced the Greeks (fighting without Achilles) back to the sea.
And he who said this would inflict a wound. When the great master of pursuit, Achilles, had the body stripped, he stood among them, saying swiftly:

“Friends, my lords and captains of Argives, now that the gods at last have let me bring to earth this man who wrought havoc among us—more than all the rest—come, we’ll offer battle around the city, to learn the intentions of the Trojans now. Will they give up their strongpoint at this loss? Can they fight on, though Hector’s dead?

But wait:

why do I ponder, why take up these questions? Down by the ships Patroclus’ body lies unwept, unburied. I shall not forget him while I can keep my feet among the living. If in the dead world they forget the dead, I say there, too, I shall remember him, my friend. Men of Achaea, lift a song! Down to the ships we go, and take this body, our glory. We have beaten Hector down, to whom as to a god the Trojans prayed.”

Indeed, he had in mind for Hector’s body outrage and shame. Behind both feet he pierced the tendons, heel to ankle. Rawhide cords he drew through both and lashed them to his chariot, letting the man’s head trail. Stepping aboard, bearing the great trophy of the arms, he shook the reins, and whipped the team ahead into a willing run. A dustcloud rose above the furrowing body; the dark tresses flowed behind, and the head so princely once lay back in dust. Zeus gave him to his enemies to be defiled in his own fatherland. So his whole head was blackened. Looking down, his mother tore her braids, threw off her veil, and wailed, heartbroken to behold her son. Piteously his father groaned, and round him lamentation spread throughout the town, most like the clamor to be heard if Ilion’s

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228–229 captains of Argives (ăr’jiv’z): Greek officers.

havoc (hāv’ak) n. widespread destruction

240 The “dead world” is the house of Hades, or the underworld, where the Greeks believed the shades of the dead to reside.

CLASSIFY CHARACTERS
Reread lines 246–256. Why do you think Achilles mistreats Hector’s body in this manner?

defile (dī-fil’ə) v. to make filthy or impure; to violate the honor of

263 Ilion’s (ī’lē-anz): Troy’s.
towers, top to bottom, seethed in flames. They barely stayed the old man, mad with grief, from passing through the gates. Then in the mire he rolled, and begged them all, each man by name:

“Relent, friends. It is hard; but let me go out of the city to the Achaean ships.

I’ll make my plea to that demonic heart. He may feel shame before his peers, or pity my old age. His father, too, is old. Peleus, who brought him up to be a scourge to Trojans, cruel to all, but most to me,

so many of my sons in flower of youth he cut away. And, though I grieve, I cannot mourn them all as much as I do one, for whom my grief will take me to the grave—and that is Hector. Why could he not have died where I might hold him? In our weeping, then, his mother, now so destitute, and I might have had surfeit and relief of tears.”

Achilles and his warriors return to their camp and carry out the burial rites for Patroclus. Three times, Achilles drags Hector’s body behind his chariot around Patroclus’ grave. Afterwards, the gods cleanse and restore the body, and Zeus asks Thetis to tell Achilles to return the body to the Trojans. Priam sets out for the Greek camp to ask Achilles to return the body. He is not aware that the god Hermes helps him by putting the sentries to sleep and opening the gates. Hermes leads Priam to Achilles’ tent and then vanishes.

A grace given in sorrow

Priam, the great king of Troy, passed by the others, knelt down, took in his arms Achilles’ knees, and kissed the hands of wrath that killed his sons.

When, taken with mad Folly in his own land, a man does murder and in exile finds refuge in some rich house, then all who see him stand in awe.

So these men stood. Achilles gazed in wonder at the splendid king,

scourge (skûrj) n. a source of great suffering or destruction

surfeit (sûr’fît): more than enough for satisfaction.

EPIC SIMILE

Note the epic simile in lines 287–291. What does the simile emphasize about Priam’s action?
and his companions marveled too, all silent, with glances to and fro. Now Priam prayed to the man before him:

“Remember your own father, Achilles, in your godlike youth: his years like mine are many, and he stands upon the fearful doorstep of old age. He, too, is hard pressed, it may be, by those around him, there being no one able to defend him from bane of war and ruin. Ah, but he may nonetheless hear news of you alive, and so with glad heart hope through all his days for sight of his dear son, come back from Troy, while I have deathly fortune.

Noble sons I fathered here, but scarce one man is left me. Fifty I had when the Achaeans came, nineteen out of a single belly, others born of attendant women. Most are gone. Raging Ares cut their knees from under them. And he who stood alone among them all, their champion, and Troy’s, ten days ago

CLASSIFY CHARACTERS
Reread Priam’s speech in lines 295–305. What tactic is Priam using to persuade Achilles to return Hector’s body?

ANALYZE VISUALS
How do the gestures and facial expressions in this painting convey what happens in the scene between Priam and Achilles? Explain.
you killed him, fighting for his land, my prince, Hector.

It is for him that I have come
among these ships, to beg him back from you,
and I bring ransom without stint.

Achilles,
be reverent toward the great gods! And take
pity on me, remember your own father.
Think me more pitiful by far, since I
have brought myself to do what no man else
has done before—to lift to my lips the hand
of one who killed my son.”

Now in Achilles
the evocation of his father stirred
new longing, and an ache of grief. He lifted
the old man’s hand and gently put him by.
Then both were overborne as they remembered:
the old king huddled at Achilles’ feet
wept, and wept for Hector, killer of men,
while great Achilles wept for his own father
as for Patroclus once again; and sobbing
filled the room.

But when Achilles’ heart
had known the luxury of tears, and pain
within his breast and bones had passed away,
he stood then, raised the old king up, in pity
for his grey head and greybeard cheek, and spoke
in a warm rush of words:

“Ah, sad and old!
Trouble and pain you’ve borne, and bear, aplenty.
Only a great will could have brought you here
among the Achaean ships, and here alone
before the eyes of one who stripped your sons,
your many sons, in battle. Iron must be
the heart within you. Come, then, and sit down.
We’ll probe our wounds no more but let them rest,
though grief lies heavy on us. Tears heal nothing,
drying so stiff and cold. This is the way
the gods ordained the destiny of men,
to bear such burdens in our lives, while they feel no affliction. At the door of Zeus are those two urns of good and evil gifts that he may choose for us; and one for whom the lightning’s joyous king dips in both urns will have by turns bad luck and good. But one to whom he sends all evil—that man goes contemptible by the will of Zeus; ravenous hunger drives him over the wondrous earth, unresting, without honor from gods or men. Mixed fortune came to Peleus. Shining gifts at the gods’ hands he had from birth: felicity, wealth overflowing, rule of the Myrmidons, a bride immortal at his mortal side. But then Zeus gave afflictions too—no family of powerful sons grew up for him at home, but one child, of all seasons and of none. Can I stand by him in his age? Far from my country I sit at Troy to grieve you and your children.

You, too, sir, in time past were fortunate, we hear men say. From Macar’s isle of Lesbos northward, and south of Phrygia and the Straits, no one had wealth like yours, or sons like yours. Then gods out of the sky sent you this bitterness: the years of siege, the battles and the losses. Endure it, then. And do not mourn forever for your dead son. There is no remedy. You will not make him stand again. Rather await some new misfortune to be suffered.”

The old king in his majesty replied:

“Never give me a chair, my lord, while Hector lies in your camp uncared for. Yield him to me now. Allow me sight of him. Accept the many gifts I bring. May they reward you, and may you see your home again. You spared my life at once and let me live.”

Achilles, the great runner, frowned and eyed him under his brows:

“Do not vex me, sir,” he said. “I have intended, in my own good time,
to yield up Hector to you. She who bore me, the daughter of the Ancient of the sea, has come with word to me from Zeus. I know in your case, too—though you say nothing, Priam—that some god guided you to the shipways here. No strong man in his best days could make entry into this camp. How could he pass the guard, or force our gateway?

Therefore, let me be.

Sting my sore heart again, and even here, under my own roof, suppliant though you are, I may not spare you, sir, but trample on the express command of Zeus!

When he heard this, the old man feared him and obeyed with silence. Now like a lion at one bound Achilles left the room. Close at his back the officers Automedon and Alcimus went out—comrades in arms whom he esteemed the most after the dead Patroclus. They unharnessed mules and horses, led the old king’s crier to a low bench and sat him down. Then from the polished wagon they took the piled-up price of Hector’s body. One chiton and two capes they left aside as dress and shrouding for the homeward journey. Then, calling to the women slaves, Achilles ordered the body bathed and rubbed with oil—but lifted, too, and placed apart, where Priam could not see his son—for seeing Hector he might in his great pain give way to rage, and fury then might rise up in Achilles to slay the old king, flouting Zeus’s word. So after bathing and anointing Hector they drew the shirt and beautiful shrouding over him. Then with his own hands lifting him, Achilles laid him upon a couch, and with his two companions aiding, placed him in the wagon. Now a bitter groan burst from Achilles, who stood and prayed to his own dead friend:

“Patroclus, do not be angry with me, if somehow
even in the world of Death you learn of this—
that I released Prince Hector to his father.
The gifts he gave were not unworthy. Aye,
and you shall have your share, this time as well.”
The Prince Achilles turned back to his quarters.

He took again the splendid chair that stood
against the farther wall, then looked at Priam
and made his declaration:

“As you wished, sir,
the body of your son is now set free.
He lies in state. At the first sight of Dawn
you shall take charge of him yourself and see him.
Now let us think of supper. We are told
that even Niobe in her extremity
took thought for bread—though all her brood had
perished,
her six young girls and six tall sons. Apollo,
making his silver longbow whip and sing,
shot the lads down, and Artemis with raining
arrows killed the daughters—all this after
Niobe had compared herself with Leto,
the smooth-cheeked goddess.

She has borne two children,

Niobe said, How many have I borne!
But soon those two destroyed the twelve.

Besides,
nine days the dead lay stark, no one could bury them,
for Zeus had turned all folk of theirs to stone.
The gods made graves for them on the tenth day,
and then at last, being weak and spent with weeping,
Niobe thought of food. Among the rocks
of Sipylus’ lonely mountainside, where nymphs
who race Achelous river go to rest,
she, too, long turned to stone, somewhere broods on
the gall immortal gods gave her to drink.

Like her we’ll think of supper, noble sir.
Weep for your son again when you have borne him
back to Troy; there he’ll be mourned indeed.”

Priam and Achilles agree to an 11-day truce. During that
time, the Trojans will mourn Hector’s body before its burial.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  Why does Achilles vow to kill Hector?
2. **Recall**  What does Achilles do with Hector after he kills him?
3. **Summarize**  What happens when Priam confronts Achilles?

Literary Analysis

4. **Analyze Epic Similes**  Reread the following passages, which contain epic similes. Explain what is being compared in each simile, and identify the quality or qualities emphasized in the comparison.
   - “As between men . . . Ares.” (lines 89–94)
   - “With this he . . . whetted blade.” (lines 143–148)
   - “Conspicuous as . . . exposed.” (lines 154–160)
5. **Classify Characters**  Review the chart in which you classified the characters from the *Iliad*. Are the gods responsible for what happens to the mortals in the epic? Support your answer with specific details from the *Iliad*.
6. **Interpret Characters’ Actions**  Characters in the *Iliad* show **courage** in different ways. What courageous actions does each of the following perform?
   - Achilles
   - Hector
   - Priam
7. **Draw Conclusions**  Reread lines 31–33. In these lines and in others, it is apparent that Achilles and other characters in the epic know that he is fated to die soon. What do you think prevents Achilles from attempting to change his fate?
8. **Make Judgments**  In your opinion, do Achilles’ feelings about his friend Patroclus justify the way he treats Hector? Use evidence from the epic to explain your answer.
9. **Compare Epic Heroes**  Compare and contrast Achilles and Beowulf as epic heroes. Use a diagram like the one shown to list and compare their traits and their actions. Which character do you think is more heroic?

Literary Criticism

10. **Critical Interpretations**  Critic John Scott has said that although the *Iliad* is set during wartime, “the real greatness of that poem is in the portrayal of powerful human emotions rather than in military exploits.” Do you agree or disagree? Cite evidence to support your response.
Vocabulary in Context

Vocabulary Practice
Identify the word that is not related in meaning to the other words in each numbered set.

1. (a) ponderous, (b) swift, (c) weighty
2. (a) cleanse, (b) defile, (c) corrupt
3. (a) strong, (b) vulnerable, (c) defenseless
4. (a) destruction, (b) havoc, (c) protection
5. (a) guardian, (b) protector, (c) scourge
6. (a) abstain, (b) proceed, (c) perform
7. (a) bitterness, (b) rancor, (c) felicity

Vocabulary in Writing
Write a paragraph about a battle in ancient or modern times. Use at least three of the vocabulary words. Here is a sample opening sentence.

Example Sentence
The quiet countryside became a scene of great havoc.

Vocabulary Strategy: Spanish-English Cognates
Cognates are words with related origins and meanings. Many English words originate in Latin, the language from which Spanish comes. Sometimes you can understand an unfamiliar English word if you recognize a Spanish cognate. For example, knowing that the common Spanish word feliz means “happy” can help you figure out that the English word felicity means “happiness.”

Practice Use the list of common Spanish words shown here to help you explain the meaning of the boldfaced English words in the following sentences. Be sure also to consider the context of the words.

1. Our quarrel ended and we finally reached a state of amity.
2. Some religions teach that those who die are reincarnated as other living beings.
3. I offered my felicitations on her 16th birthday.
4. In a lunar calendar, are all months 28 days long?
5. The home’s roof was designed to make use of solar energy.
The Epic in Translation

The following versions of Beowulf prove the power of the translator. Although both describe the same passage (Grendel’s murderous raid on Herot), they are stunningly dissimilar.

“Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster’s
Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:
He slipped through the door and there in the silence
Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
The blood dripping behind him, back
To his lair, delighted with his night’s slaughter.”
—Translated by Burton Raffel

“So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes
were settling into it after their drink,
and there he came upon them, a company of the best
asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain
and human sorrow. Suddenly then
the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:
greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men
from their resting places and rushed to his lair,
flushed up and inflamed from the raid,
blundering back with the butchered corpses.”
—Translated by Seamus Heaney

Writing to Compare

Write a short essay comparing Raffel’s and Heaney’s translations. Do you prefer one over the other? Cite specific lines as support.

Consider
• each translator’s choice of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs
• the varying order of phrases and ideas
• each selection’s imagery, rhythm, and tone

Extension Online

INQUIRY & RESEARCH With one or more of your classmates, use the Internet to compile a list of literary and cinematic epics. Starting with a primary search engine, you may also want to search online movie databases as well as literary reference sites. Of the works you find, which feature heroes closest in spirit and deeds to Beowulf?
The Venerable Bede

c. 673–735

The Venerable Bede (bēd), regarded as the father of English history, lived and worked in a monastery in northern Britain during the late seventh and early eighth centuries. His most famous work, *A History of the English Church and People*, is a major source of information about life in Britain from the first successful Roman invasion (about A.D. 46) to A.D. 731. The book contains many stories about the spread of Christianity among the English.

**Raised By Monks** At the age of seven, Bede was taken by his parents to a monastery at Wearmouth, on the northeast coast of Britain, where he was left in the care of the abbot, Benedict Biscop. It is not known why the boy’s parents left him or whether he ever saw them again. When he was nine, Bede moved a short distance to a new monastery at Jarrow, where he spent the rest of his life.

**A Bookish Boy** Bede seems to have been a naturally devout and studious child. He read widely in the monastery libraries and participated fully in the religious life of the monastery. He was exposed to the art and learning of Europe through the paintings, books, and religious objects brought from Rome by Abbot Biscop. Bede became a deacon of the church at the age of 19—six years earlier than was usual—and was ordained to the priesthood when he was 30.

**Multitalented Scholar** Bede was a brilliant scholar and a gifted writer and teacher. He was also a careful and thorough historian. He sought out original documents and reliable eyewitness accounts on which to base his writing. Working in a chilly, damp, poorly lit cell in the monastery, Bede managed to write about 40 books, including works on spelling, grammar, science, history, and religion.

**Still Venerable Today** Bede’s reputation as a scholar and a devout monk spread throughout Europe during his lifetime and in the centuries following. (The honorific title “Venerable” was probably first applied to him during the century after his death, as an acknowledgment of his achievements.) Although Bede was influenced by the outlook of his time—as is evident in the miracle stories he included in his *History*—his carefulness and integrity are still respected and valued by scholars today, almost 1,300 years later.

**NOTABLE QUOTE**

“If history relates good things of good men, the attentive hearer is excited to imitate that which is good.”

**FYI**

Did you know that the Venerable Bede . . .
- invented the footnote?
- popularized the dating of events from the birth of Christ—the B.C./A.D. system?

For more on the Venerable Bede, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.
Bede was one of the first to write about English history. **Historical writing** is a systematic account, often in narrative form, of the past of a nation or a group of people. Historical writing generally has the following characteristics:

- It is concerned with real events in the relatively distant past.
- The events are treated in chronological order.
- It is usually an objective retelling of facts rather than a personal interpretation.

As you read the selection about the poet Caedmon (kā’d’mən) from Bede’s chronicle, consider what it tells you about life in Caedmon’s time.

**READING SKILL: ANALYZE AUTHOR’S PURPOSE**

The excerpt that you will read is an early **biography**; one of Bede’s purposes is to inform readers about Caedmon’s life. But there is a second purpose. Look back at the Notable Quote on page 92. It comes from the Preface to Bede’s **History**, in which he explains to King Ceolwulf (kəl’wōōl’f) his reason for writing about important Englishmen of the past. He believes that they will be good role models to imitate or bad examples to learn from. As you read, take notes about Caedmon on a web diagram. Decide which aspects of his life make him a role model.

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**Explore the Key Idea**

**How do dreams INSPIRE you?**

**KEY IDEA** History is full of stories of people who received a flash of inspiration during a dream. For example, the 19th-century German chemist Friedrich August Kekulé (kə’kōō-lā) said that the ringlike structure of the molecule benzene presented itself to him when he dozed off and dreamed of a snake holding its tail in its mouth. In the following selection, the Venerable Bede recounts a tale of a humble man who fell asleep one night and woke up the next morning an accomplished poet.

**QUICKWRITE** Write a description of a memorable dream that helped you discover something about yourself, solve a problem, or unlock a hidden talent. If no dream has ever inspired you in this way, describe something else that has, such as a conversation or a daydream.
In this monastery of Whitby there lived a brother whom God’s grace made remarkable. So skillful was he in composing religious and devotional songs, that he could quickly turn whatever passages of Scripture were explained to him into delightful and moving poetry in his own English tongue. These verses of his stirred the hearts of many folk to despise the world and aspire to heavenly things. Others after him tried to compose religious poems in English, but none could compare with him, for he received this gift of poetry as a gift from God and did not acquire it through any human teacher. For this reason he could never compose any frivolous or profane verses, but only such as had a religious theme fell fittingly from his devout lips. And although he followed a secular occupation until well advanced in years, he had never learned anything about poetry: indeed, whenever all those present at a feast took it in turns to sing and entertain the company, he would get up from table and go home directly he saw the harp approaching him.

On one such occasion he had left the house in which the entertainment was being held and went out to the stable, where it was his duty to look after the beasts that night. He lay down there at the appointed time and fell asleep, and in a dream he saw a man standing beside him who called him by name. “Caedmon,”
he said, “sing me a song.” “I don’t know how to sing,” he replied. “It is because I cannot sing that I left the feast and came here.” The man who addressed him then said: “But you shall sing to me.” “What should I sing about?” he replied. “Sing about the Creation of all things,” the other answered. And Caedmon immediately began to sing verses in praise of God the Creator that he had never heard before, and their theme ran thus: “Let us praise the Maker of the kingdom of heaven, the power and purpose of our Creator, and the acts of the Father of glory. Let us sing how the eternal God, the Author of all marvels, first created the heavens for the sons of men as a roof to cover them, and how their almighty Protector gave them the earth for their dwelling place.” This is the general sense, but not the actual words that Caedmon sang in his dream; for however excellent the verses, it is impossible to translate them from one language into another without losing much of their beauty and dignity. When Caedmon awoke, he remembered everything that he had sung in his dream, and soon added more verses in the same style to the glory of God.

Early in the morning he went to his superior the reeve, and told him about this gift that he had received. The reeve took him before the abbess, who ordered him to give an account of his dream and repeat the verses in the presence of many learned men, so that they might decide their quality and origin. All of them agreed that Caedmon’s gift had been given him by our Lord, and when they had explained to him a passage of scriptural history or doctrine, they asked him to render it into verse if he could. He promised to do this, and returned next morning with excellent verses as they had ordered him. The abbess was delighted that God had given such grace to the man, and advised him to abandon secular life and adopt the monastic state. And when she had admitted him into the Community as a brother, she ordered him to be instructed in the events of sacred history. So Caedmon stored up in his memory all that he learned, and like an animal chewing the cud, turned it into such melodious verse that his delightful renderings turned his instructors into his audience. He sang of the creation of the world, the origin of the human race, and the whole story of Genesis. He sang of Israel’s departure from Egypt, their entry into the land of promise, and many other events of scriptural history. He sang of the Lord’s Incarnation, Passion, Resurrection, and Ascension into heaven, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the teaching of the Apostles. He also made many poems on the terrors of the Last Judgment, the horrible pains of Hell, and the joys of the kingdom of heaven. In addition to these, he composed several others on the blessings and judgments of God, by which he sought to turn his hearers from delight in wickedness, and to inspire them to love and do good. For Caedmon was a deeply religious man, who humbly submitted to regular discipline, and firmly resisted all who tried to do evil, thus winning a happy death.

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3. impossible . . . another: Caedmon’s verses were composed in Old English, but Bede wrote his history in Latin.
4. reeve: the officer who oversaw the monastery’s farms.
5. sacred history: the narratives of the Christian Bible.
7. regular discipline: the rules of monastic life.
Comprehension
1. Recall What was Caedmon’s gift?
2. Recall How did Caedmon receive his gift?
3. Clarify How did Caedmon’s life change because of his gift?

Literary Analysis
4. Draw Conclusions What would be the reason for including Caedmon’s story in a history of the English church?
5. Examine Author’s Purpose Review the notes you took about Caedmon as you read. What is particularly admirable about him? What moral message can be taken from his story?
6. Apply Themes What does Caedmon’s story suggest about inspiration and poetic talent?
7. Analyze Historical Writing What do you learn from Bede about life in seventh-century England? Discuss facts about each of the following:
   • monasteries
   • language and literacy
   • poetry
   • people’s worldview
8. Evaluate a Poem What is beautiful about Caedmon’s hymn, judging from Bede’s translation?

Literary Criticism
9. Historical Context Discuss ways in which Bede’s purpose and worldview shape the way he presents information. How might a modern historian present information differently?
NOTABLE QUOTE
“Everything earthly is evilly born, / Firmly clutched by a fickle Fate.”

FYI
Did you know that the Exeter Book . . .
• consists of 131 leaves of parchment, each slightly bigger than a standard sheet of paper?
• has knife cuts on some of its pages, which suggests that at one point it was used as a cutting board?
• inspired the building of a 19-foot-high stainless-steel statue imprinted with riddles in the city of Exeter?

The Exeter Book

Nothing is known about the authors of “The Seafarer,” “The Wanderer,” and “The Wife’s Lament.” All three poems survive in the Exeter Book, a manuscript of Anglo-Saxon poems produced by a single scribe around A.D. 950. In addition to these and other secular poems, the Exeter Book contains religious verse, nearly 100 riddles, and a heroic narrative. It is the largest collection of Old English poetry in existence.

Neglected Treasure

Originally, the Exeter Book belonged to Leofric (ləˈo-frɪk), the first bishop of Exeter. He donated it to the Exeter Cathedral library sometime between 1050 and 1072. For several centuries the book was neglected and abused; few people were able to read the Old English language in which it was written and thus had little use for it. Some pages are badly stained or scorched. The original binding and an unknown number of pages are lost.

Rediscovery

With the rise of Anglo-Saxon studies in the 19th century, scholars began to take an interest in the Exeter Book. Benjamin Thorpe published the first complete translation in 1842. He assigned titles to “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer,” as none of the poems in the manuscript had titles. A photographic facsimile was published in 1933; it became the basis for later scholarly editions. A CD version, with facsimile pages and audio readings, was released in 2006.

The original manuscript still resides at the library at Exeter Cathedral, where it is cherished as one of the few surviving collections of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: IMAGERY**

Poets communicate through imagery, words and phrases that re-create sensory experiences for the reader. Notice how the imagery in this passage from “The Seafarer” appeals to the senses of sight, touch, and hearing:

> My feet were cast  
> In icy bands, bound with frost,  
> With frozen chains, and hardship groaned  
> Around my heart.

The images bring to mind ideas of coldness and confinement and suggest the speaker’s lonely, painful emotional state. As you read the following three poems, pay attention to the imagery, allowing it to evoke ideas and feelings in you.

**Review: Old English Poetry**

**READING STRATEGY: MONITOR UNDERSTANDING OF OLDER WORKS**

These poems have been translated from Old English into Modern English, but that doesn’t mean they will present no difficulty. Use the following strategies to understand them:

- **Visualize** the many images layered in the poems.
- **Question** as you read. Ask who the speaker is, for example.
- **Reread** passages that are confusing.
- **Paraphrase** difficult lines, restating them in your own words.
- **Clarify** events. The speakers remember past experiences and reflect on their present experiences. Let indentations and stanza breaks alert you that the speaker is turning to a new thought.

For each poem, create a chart to record what the speaker remembers or ponders in different sections of the poem.

| “The Seafarer” |  |
|---------------|-----------------
| **Section**   | **Speaker Remembers or Ponders** |
| Section 1 (lines 1–26) | being cold, hungry, and lonely on the sea |
| Section 2     |  |

**EXPLORE THE KEY IDEA**

**When are people most alone?**

**KEY IDEA** When people find themselves cut off from contact with others, the sense of isolation can be all consuming. It is not surprising that loneliness is a frequent topic in poetry written during the Anglo-Saxon era—an era during which disease, war, and other perils often wrenched people away from their loved ones.

**QUICKWRITE** Imagine that you are making a five-minute silent film about isolation and loneliness. What would you show onscreen? Where would you set the film? Who would the main character be, and what would he or she be doing? List some visual images that come to mind.

**Film Images**

- single robed traveler, trudging across the Sahara Desert
- endless sand dunes
This tale is true, and mine. It tells
How the sea took me, swept me back
And forth in sorrow and fear and pain,
Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,
In a thousand ports, and in me. It tells
Of smashing surf when I sweated in the cold
Of an anxious watch, perched in the bow
As it dashed under cliffs. My feet were cast
In icy bands, bound with frost,
With frozen chains, and hardship groaned
Around my heart. Hunger tore
At my sea-weary soul. No man sheltered
On the quiet fairness of earth can feel
How wretched I was, drifting through winter
On an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow,
Alone in a world blown clear of love,
Hung with icicles. The hailstorms flew.
The only sound was the roaring sea,
The freezing waves. The song of the swan
Might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl,
The death-noise of birds instead of laughter,
The mewing of gulls instead of mead.
Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed.

**BACKGROUND** The poems in the *Exeter Book* reflect the hardship and uncertainty of life in Anglo-Saxon times. Men who made their living on the sea had to leave behind their families and sail long distances in primitive, poorly equipped boats. The women and children left behind endured months and even years without knowing whether their menfolk would return. In addition, frequent outbreaks of disease and war scattered communities and brought untimely death to many people.

22 **mead** (mēd): an alcoholic beverage drunk at Anglo-Saxon gatherings.
By icy-feathered terns and the eagle’s screams;
   No kinsman could offer comfort there,
   To a soul left drowning in desolation.  
       And who could believe, knowing but
   The passion of cities, swelled proud with wine
   And no taste of misfortune, how often, how wearily,
30  I put myself back on the paths of the sea.
   Night would blacken; it would snow from the north;
   Frost bound the earth and hail would fall,
   The coldest seeds. And how my heart
   Would begin to beat, knowing once more
35  The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!
   The time for journeys would come and my soul
   Called me eagerly out, sent me over
   The horizon, seeking foreigners’ homes.
   But there isn’t a man on earth so proud,
40  So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,
   Grown so brave, or so graced by God,
   That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl,
   Wondering what Fate has willed and will do.
   No harps ring in his heart, no rewards,
No passion for women, no worldly pleasures,
Nothing, only the ocean’s heave;
Orchards blossom, the towns bloom,
Fields grow lovely as the world springs fresh,

And all these admonish that willing mind
Leaping to journeys, always set
In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide.
So summer’s sentinel, the cuckoo, sings
In his murmuring voice, and our hearts mourn
As he urges. Who could understand,
In ignorant ease, what we others suffer
As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on?

And yet my heart wanders away,
My soul roams with the sea, the whales’
Home, wandering to the widest corners
Of the world, returning ravenous with desire,
Flying solitary, screaming, exciting me
To the open ocean, breaking oaths
On the curve of a wave.

Thus the joys of God
Are fervent with life, where life itself
Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth
Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains.
No man has ever faced the dawn
Certain which of Fate’s three threats
Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy’s
Sword, snatching the life from his soul.
The praise the living pour on the dead
Flowers from reputation: plant
An earthly life of profit reaped
Even from hatred and rancor, of bravery
Flung in the devil’s face, and death
Can only bring you earthly praise
And a song to celebrate a place
With the angels, life eternally blessed
In the hosts of Heaven.

The days are gone
When the kingdoms of earth flourished in glory;
Now there are no rulers, no emperors,
No givers of gold, as once there were,
When wonderful things were worked among them
And they lived in lordly magnificence.
Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead,
The weakest survives and the world continues,
Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished,
The world’s honor ages and shrinks,
Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces
Blanch as time advances, their beards
Wither and they mourn the memory of friends,
The sons of princes, sown in the dust.
The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing
Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,
Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother
Opens his palms and pours down gold
On his kinsman’s grave, strewing his coffin
With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing
Golden shakes the wrath of God
For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing
Hidden on earth rises to Heaven. We all fear God. He turns the earth,
He set it swinging firmly in space,
Gave life to the world and light to the sky.
Death leaps at the fools who forget their God.
He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven
To carry him courage and strength and belief.
A man must conquer pride, not kill it,
Be firm with his fellows, chaste for himself,
Treat all the world as the world deserves,
With love or with hate but never with harm,
Though an enemy seek to scorch him in hell,
Or set the flames of a funeral pyre
Under his lord. Fate is stronger
And God mightier than any man’s mind.
Our thoughts should turn to where our home is,
Consider the ways of coming there,
Then strive for sure permission for us
To rise to that eternal joy,
That life born in the love of God
And the hope of Heaven. Praise the Holy
Grace of Him who honored us,
Eternal, unchanging creator of earth. Amen.

Translated by Burton Raffel

Literary Analysis

1. Summarize How does the speaker feel about life at sea?

2. Paraphrase What views does the speaker express about earthly life and God in lines 64–124?

3. Compare How does the last half of the poem (from line 64 on) relate to the first half of the poem?
The Wanderer

This lonely traveler longs for grace,
For the mercy of God; grief hangs on
His heart and follows the frost-cold foam
He cuts in the sea, sailing endlessly,
Aimlessly, in exile. Fate has opened
A single port: memory. He sees
His kinsmen slaughtered again, and cries:
“T’ve drunk too many lonely dawns,
Grey with mourning. Once there were men
To whom my heart could hurry, hot
With open longing. They’re long since dead.
My heart has closed on itself, quietly
Learning that silence is noble and sorrow
Nothing that speech can cure. Sadness
Has never driven sadness off;
Fate blows hardest on a bleeding heart.
So those who thirst for glory smother
Secret weakness and longing, neither
Weep nor sigh nor listen to the sickness
In their souls. So I, lost and homeless,
Forced to flee the darkness that fell
On the earth and my lord.

Leaving everything,

Weary with winter I wandered out
On the frozen waves, hoping to find
A place, a people, a lord to replace
My lost ones. No one knew me, now,
No one offered comfort, allowed
Me feasting or joy. How cruel a journey
I’ve traveled, sharing my bread with sorrow
Alone, an exile in every land,
Could only be told by telling my footsteps.
For who can hear: “friendless and poor,”
And know what I’ve known since the long cheerful nights
When, young and yearning, with my lord I yet feasted
Most welcome of all. That warmth is dead.
He only knows who needs his lord
As I do, eager for long-missing aid;
He only knows who never sleeps
Without the deepest dreams of longing.

Sometimes it seems I see my lord,
Kiss and embrace him, bend my hands
And head to his knee, kneeling as though
He still sat enthroned, ruling his thanes.
And I open my eyes, embracing the air,

And see the brown sea-billows heave,
See the sea-birds bathe, spreading
Their white-feathered wings, watch the frost
And the hail and the snow. And heavy in heart
I long for my lord, alone and unloved.

Sometimes it seems I see my kin
And greet them gladly, give them welcome,
The best of friends. They fade away,
Swimming soundlessly out of sight,
Leaving nothing.

How loathsome become
The frozen waves to a weary heart.

In this brief world I cannot wonder
That my mind is set on melancholy,
Because I never forget the fate
Of men, robbed of their riches, suddenly
Looted by death—the doom of earth,
Sent to us all by every rising
Sun. Wisdom is slow, and comes
But late. He who has it is patient;
He cannot be hasty to hate or speak,

He must be bold and yet not blind,
Nor ever too craven, complacent, or covetous,
Nor ready to gloat before he wins glory.
The man's a fool who flings his boasts
Hotly to the heavens, heeding his spleen
And not the better boldness of knowledge.

What knowing man knows not the ghostly,
Waste-like end of worldly wealth:
See, already the wreckage is there,
The wind-swept walls stand far and wide,
The mead-halls crumbled, the monarchs thrown down
And stripped of their pleasures. The proudest of warriors
Now lie by the wall: some of them war
Destroyed; some the monstrous sea-bird
Bore over the ocean; to some the old wolf
Dealt out death; and for some dejected
Followers fashioned an earth-cave coffin.
Thus the Maker of men lays waste
This earth, crushing our callow mirth.
And the work of old giants stands withered and still.”

He who these ruins rightly sees,
And deeply considers this dark twisted life,
Who sagely remembers the endless slaughters
Of a bloody past, is bound to proclaim:

“Where is the war-steed? Where is the warrior?
Where is his war-lord?

Where now the feasting-places? Where now the mead-hall pleasures?
Alas, bright cup! Alas, brave knight!
Alas, you glorious princes! All gone,
Lost in the night, as you never had lived.

And all that survives you a serpentine wall,
Wondrously high, worked in strange ways.
Mighty spears have slain these men,
Greedy weapons have framed their fate.

These rocky slopes are beaten by storms,
This earth pinned down by driving snow,
By the horror of winter, smothering warmth
In the shadows of night. And the north angrily
Hurls its hailstorms at our helpless heads.

Everything earthly is evilly born,
Firmly clutched by a fickle Fate.

Fortune vanishes, friendship vanishes,
Man is fleeting, woman is fleeting,
And all this earth rolls into emptiness.”

So says the sage in his heart, sitting alone with His thought.

It’s good to guard your faith, nor let your grief come forth
Until it cannot call for help, nor help but heed
The path you’ve placed before it. It’s good to find your grace
In God, the heavenly rock where rests our every hope.

Translated by Burton Raffel

Literary Analysis

1. Clarify Why is the wanderer in exile?

2. Compare How does the wanderer’s present life compare with his former life?

3. Summarize What does a wise man understand, according to the wanderer?
I make this song about me full sadly my own wayfaring. I a woman tell what griefs I had since I grew up new or old never more than now. Ever I know the dark of my exile.

First my lord went out away from his people over the wave-tumult. I grieved each dawn wondered where my lord my first on earth might be. Then I went forth a friendless exile to seek service in my sorrow’s need. My man’s kinsmen began to plot by darkened thought to divide us two so we most widely in the world’s kingdom lived wretchedly and I suffered longing.

My lord commanded me to move my dwelling here. I had few loved ones in this land or faithful friends. For this my heart grieves: that I should find the man well matched to me hard of fortune mournful of mind hiding his mood thinking of murder.

Blithe was our bearing often we vowed that but death alone would part us two naught else. But this is turned round now . . . as if it never were our friendship. I must far and near bear the anger of my beloved. The man sent me out to live in the woods
under an oak tree in this den in the earth. Ancient this earth hall. I am all longing.

30 The valleys are dark the hills high
the yard overgrown bitter with briars
a joyless dwelling. Full oft the lack of my lord
seizes me cruelly here. Friends there are on earth
living beloved lying in bed

35 while I at dawn am walking alone
under the oak tree through these earth halls.
There I may sit the summerlong day
there I can weep over my exile
my many hardships. Hence I may not rest

40 from this care of heart which belongs to me ever
nor all this longing that has caught me in this life.

May that young man be sad-minded always
hard his heart’s thought while he must wear
a blithe bearing with care in the breast

45 a crowd of sorrows. May on himself depend
all his world’s joy. Be he outlawed far
in a strange folk-land— that my beloved sits
under a rocky cliff rimed with frost

48 a lord dreary in spirit drenched with water
in a ruined hall. My lord endures
much care of mind. He remembers too often
a happier dwelling. Woe be to them

50 that for a loved one must wait in longing.

Translated by Ann Stanford
Comprehension

1. Recall Why does the speaker of “The Wife’s Lament” live apart from her husband?
2. Recall What is her dwelling like?
3. Clarify What does the speaker wish for her husband?

Literary Analysis

4. Monitor Understanding of Older Works Review the charts you made as you read. What is the speaker remembering or pondering in each poem? Which strategy—visualizing, clarifying, or paraphrasing—helped you most in understanding the poems? Explain.
5. Compare Texts Compare these three poems, noting similarities you see in each of the following elements:
   • subject • mood • imagery • theme
6. Analyze Imagery Which images in the poems most effectively convey a mood of isolation? What senses do these images appeal to?
7. Synthesize Ideas What ideas about Anglo-Saxon life and religious attitudes do you get from the poems?
8. Evaluate Style Judging from the translations, which poem is the most accomplished in style? Support your answer with details from the poems.
9. Apply Themes What advice might the speakers of “The Seafarer” and “The Wanderer” give the speaker of “The Wife’s Lament”? In what circumstances could modern people benefit from this advice?

Literary Criticism

10. Critical Interpretations There has been much debate over the number of speakers in “The Seafarer.” Some critics believe that a second person begins to speak at line 64, and others believe that there is only one speaker throughout the poem. Which interpretation do you prefer, and why?
Margery Kempe

The Book of Margery Kempe (kɛmp), a religious mystic’s story of her spiritual life, is thought to be the earliest surviving autobiography in the English language.

Ordinary Wife and Mother Margery Kempe was born about 1373 in Lynn—a town in the county of Norfolk, England—where her father served five terms as mayor. Although born to a prominent family, Kempe, like most women of her time, received little education. Around the age of 20, she married John Kempe, a tax collector, and raised a family.

Forsaking Secular Life At around the age of 40, Margery Kempe decided to become a “bride of Christ”—to live in chastity and preach to the world. As a vocal, outgoing speaker, she was quite an oddity at a time when most aspects of society, including the religious hierarchy, were controlled by men. Most women remained at home as wives and mothers. Any woman who wished to pursue a spiritual calling was expected to join a convent or to live as a recluse. Margery Kempe did neither.

Once Kempe had made her commitment to God, she began a series of religious pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Spain, Italy, and Germany. Although many men and women she met considered her a model of human compassion and devotion, many others disapproved of her lifestyle.

A Gift of “Holy Tears” It was in Jerusalem that Kempe received her gift of “holy tears.” She would fall into violent fits of crying at unpredictable times throughout the rest of her life, often during church services. Both the clergy and the common people found her hysterical crying at best annoying, at worst heretical. As a result, Kempe encountered a good deal of persecution and ridicule, although she maintained that her tears were a special gift from God, a physical token of her special worth in his eyes.

Her Life Story In the 1430s, Kempe began dictating her life story to scribes (like most women of her class, she was illiterate). She began her narrative by describing a deeply troubling experience following the birth of her first child, which eventually led to her devotion to a spiritual life. Her memoir is important for several reasons. It serves as a sort of time capsule of life in the 1400s, preserving for the reader the social customs, speech, and attitudes of the day. It also reveals the singular character of Kempe herself, a woman of strong faith who lived by her convictions despite intense social criticism and opposition.
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: AUTOBIOGRAPHY**

The *Book of Margery Kempe* is an autobiography, a writer's account of his or her own life. An autobiography, as opposed to a diary or a memoir, is a sustained narrative that attempts to make sense of a person's life. Most autobiographies are written in the first person, with a narrator who uses the pronoun *I*. Kempe's autobiography is highly unusual in that it is written in the third person, and Kempe is referred to as “she” or “this creature.”

*When this creature was twenty years of age, or somewhat more, she was married to a worshipful burgess [of Lynn] and was with child within a short time, as nature would have it.*

This third-person narration may reflect the fact that Kempe dictated her story to a scribe, who did the actual writing, or it may reflect her desire to be humble. As you read her autobiography, notice how she explains events in her life, and pay attention to the feelings she expresses.

**READING SKILL: DRAW CONCLUSIONS**

Kempe's autobiography requires you to read actively and draw conclusions about people and events. To draw a conclusion is to reach a judgment based on text evidence, experience, and reasoning. For example, if you read that a person answered a question hesitatingly and could not meet the questioner's eyes, you might conclude that the person was lying, based on these clues and your own knowledge of human behavior.

As you read, use a chart to note details from the text about Margery Kempe's personality and beliefs, her illness, and the society she lives in. Jot down any additional thoughts you have about these subjects. Then after reading, draw conclusions about them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information from Text</th>
<th>My Own Thoughts / Associations</th>
<th>Conclusions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personality</td>
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<td>Beliefs</td>
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<td>Illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Society</td>
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**Explore the Key Idea**

Where do you find STRENGTH?

**KEY IDEA** Margery Kempe didn’t take the easy path in life. By living as a “bride of Christ” despite being a married woman, she challenged traditional women’s roles and risked being branded as a heretic who could be burned at the stake. Her religious faith gave her the strength she needed to adhere to her convictions.

**DISCUSS** People have proved time and again that it is possible to overcome challenges, such as illness, poverty, physical handicaps, and oppression. With a group, discuss what gives people the strength to tackle a challenge or to keep going despite obstacles or setbacks. Draw from your own experiences or those of someone you know.
CHAPTER ONE: ILLNESS AND RECOVERY

When this creature was twenty years of age, or somewhat more, she was married to a worshipful burgess\(^1\) [of Lynn] and was with child within a short time, as nature would have it. And after she had conceived, she was troubled with severe attacks of sickness until the child was born. And then, what with the labor-pains she had in childbirth and the sickness that had gone before, she despaired of her life, believing she might not live. Then she sent for her confessor,\(^2\) for she had a thing on her conscience which she had never revealed before that time in all her life. For she was continually hindered by her enemy—the devil—always saying to her while she was in good health that she didn’t need to confess but to do penance by herself alone, and all should be forgiven, for God is merciful enough. And therefore this creature often did great penance in fasting on bread and water, and performed other acts of charity with devout prayers, but she would not reveal that one thing in confession.\(^3\)

And when she was at any time sick or troubled, the devil said in her mind that she should be damned, for she was not shriven\(^3\) of that fault. Therefore, after her child was born, and not believing she would live, she sent for her confessor, as said before, fully wishing to be shriven of her whole lifetime, as near as she could. And when she came to the point of saying that thing which she had so long concealed, her confessor was a little too hasty and began sharply to reprove her before she had fully said what she meant, and so she would say no more in spite of

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1. burgess (bûr’jəs): a citizen of an English town.
2. confessor: spiritual advisor; the priest to whom Margery confessed her sins.
3. shriven: absolved; forgiven for a sin or flaw.
anything he might do. And soon after, because of the dread she had of damnation on the one hand, and his sharp reproving of her on the other, this creature went out of her mind and was amazingly disturbed and tormented with spirits for half a year, eight weeks and odd days.

And in this time she saw, as she thought, devils opening their mouths all alight with burning flames of fire, as if they would have swallowed her in, sometimes pawing at her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes pulling her and hauling her about both night and day during the said time. And also the devils called out to her with great threats, and bade her that she should forsake her Christian faith and belief, and deny her God, his mother, and all the saints in heaven, her good works and all good virtues, her father, her mother, and all her friends. And so she did. She slandered her husband, her friends, and her own self. She spoke many sharp and reproving words; she recognized no virtue nor goodness; she desired all wickedness; just as the spirits tempted her to say and do, so she said and did. She would have killed herself many a time as they stirred her to, and would have been

damned with them in hell, and in witness of this she bit her own hand so violently that the mark could be seen for the rest of her life. And also she pitilessly tore the skin on her body near her heart with her nails, for she had no other implement, and she would have done something worse, except that she was tied up and forcibly restrained both day and night so that she could not do as she wanted.

And when she had long been troubled by these and many other temptations, so that people thought she should never have escaped from them alive, then one time as she lay by herself and her keepers were not with her, our merciful Lord Christ Jesus—ever to be trusted, worshiped be his name, never forsaking his servant in time of need—appeared to his creature who had forsaken him, in the likeness of a man, the most seemly, most beauteous, and most amiable that ever might be seen with man’s eye, clad in a mantle of purple silk, sitting upon her bedside, looking upon her with so blessed a countenance that she was strengthened in all her spirits, and he said to her these words: “Daughter, why have you forsaken me, and I never forsook you?”

And as soon as he had said these words, she saw truly how the air opened as bright as any lightning, and he ascended up into the air, not hastily and quickly, but beautifully and gradually, so that she could clearly behold him in the air until it closed up again.

And presently the creature grew as calm in her wits and her reason as she ever was before, and asked her husband, as soon as he came to her, if she could have the keys of the buttery to get her food and drink as she had done before. Her maids and her keepers advised him that he should not deliver up any keys to her, for they said she would only give away such goods as there were, because she did not know what she was saying, as they believed.

Nevertheless, her husband, who always had tenderness and compassion for her, ordered that they should give her the keys. And she took food and drink as her bodily strength would allow her, and she once again recognized her friends and her household, and everybody else who came to her in order to see how our Lord Jesus Christ had worked his grace in her—blessed may he be, who is ever near in tribulation. When people think he is far away from them he is very near through his grace. Afterwards this creature performed all her responsibilities wisely and soberly enough, except that she did not truly know our Lord’s power to draw us to him.

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4. **buttery**: pantry, where food provisions were stored.
5. **tribulation** (trɪˈbə-ləˈʃən): suffering; distress.
6. **she did not . . . to him**: She still was not giving her complete devotion to God, as she would later.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  Why did Kempe send for a priest?
2. **Summarize**  How did Kempe behave in the months after seeing the priest?
3. **Clarify**  What changed her behavior?

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Autobiography**  What kind of person does Kempe present herself to be, and for what purpose? Support your answer with details from the text.
5. **Draw Conclusions**  Review the chart you made as you read. What conclusions did you draw about each of the following?
   - Kempe’s personality
   - Kempe’s religious beliefs
   - Kempe’s illness
   - English society in Kempe’s time
6. **Interpret Theme**  What lesson about strength might Kempe have wanted her readers to draw from the story she relates about herself?
7. **Compare Texts**  What does this selection have in common with Bede’s account of Caedmon (page 94)? What do the two selections suggest about Christian beliefs in England during early times?

Literary Criticism

8. **Author’s Style**  It has been noted that Margery Kempe exhibits contradictory qualities, appearing to be both humble and forceful, both devout and arrogant. What evidence of these contradictory qualities do you see in the selection? Record this evidence on a chart like the one shown.
Reading-Writing Connection

WRITING PROMPT

WRITE A SURVIVAL TALE  The first chapter of Margery Kempe’s autobiography is a story of survival. Think about a time when you recovered from an illness, an injury, or some other difficult experience. Draft a one-page personal narrative in which you describe the attitudes and strategies that helped you cope. Present your story in a way that might help others in a similar situation.

SELF-CHECK

An effective personal narrative will . . .

- have a clear beginning, middle, and end
- include descriptive details to help readers understand your thoughts and actions
- demonstrate the significance of events or ideas

GRAMMAR AND STYLE

CRAFT EFFECTIVE SENTENCES  Review the Grammar and Style note on page 117. Margery Kempe uses a series of subordinate clauses, prepositional phrases, and participial phrases to chronicle the harrowing experience of her illness and recovery. The single, lengthy sentence below is rich with details, spliced skillfully into the sentence, that vividly portray the visions Kempe saw:

And in this time she saw, as she thought, devils opening their mouths all alight with burning flames of fire, as if they would have swallowed her in, sometimes pawing at her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes pulling her and hauling her about both night and day during the said time. (lines 25–28)

Notice how Kempe interjects the subordinate clause “as she thought” to alert readers to the important fact that she was hallucinating, without unduly interrupting the flow of her description. Two prepositional phrases—“with burning flames” and “of fire”—provide vivid sensory details. At the end of the sentence, Kempe uses participial phrases, such as “sometimes pawing at her” and “sometimes threatening her,” to effectively depict the ways in which she was tormented.

PRACTICE  Rewrite the following paragraph by incorporating subordinate clauses, prepositional phrases, and participial phrases that mimic Margery Kempe’s style.

The doctor told me the bad news and handed me a pair of crutches. I was going to have to use them for six weeks. It would take that long for my knee to heal. The first day on crutches was agony. It took me 20 minutes to travel one block. I had to stop every few steps to catch my breath.

EXAMPLE

As the doctor told me the bad news, he put a pair of crutches in my hands.

For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.
ABOUT THE AUTHOR  Did William Langland write *Piers Plowman*? Scholars do not agree. Because several versions of this 14th-century work survive, some scholars have argued that more than one person wrote it; however, most feel that the style points to a single author: Langland. While no separate evidence confirms his authorship, the writer refers to himself throughout the text as “Will” or “Long Will”—a nickname suggesting that he was tall. Other details indicate that he came from the Malvern Hills in western England, the setting he describes in the opening. He apparently trained for the church but was never able to take orders; instead he wound up spending many years in poverty, perhaps even wandering and begging. He also was familiar with London and probably lived for a time in or near the city.

ABOUT THE WORK  *Piers Plowman* is a dream vision, a work that the author pretends to have dreamed in order to make it seem more authentic. It is also an allegory, a work in which the characters and settings represent abstract ideas or virtues. In the famous opening, the author falls asleep in the Malvern Hills and awakens in a “field full of folk” set between the high tower of Truth and the deep dungeon of Wrong. After Conscience preaches to the people and Repentence moves their hearts, the Seven Deadly Sins make their confessions. Then a simple farmer, or plowman, named Piers offers to guide the people on the right path if they first help him plow his land. Those who help accompany him; those who shirk do not. In the final section, we meet Do-Good, Do-Better, and Do-Best, admirable characters who the author indicates are not to be found among the clergy of the day.

LEGACY OF A MASTERPICE  Combining deep religious faith with biting social criticism, *Piers Plowman* is considered one of the most important and imaginative works of medieval English literature. The large number of surviving manuscripts suggests that it was very influential in its day; in modern times it is read not only for its messages of faith and reform but for the many details it provides of everyday medieval life. Like many medieval works, it uses alliterative verse, in which several words in each line repeat the same initial sound. The original is in Middle English; the selection here is from a modern translation of the so-called B text, the second and best known of the poem’s three surviving versions. As the selection opens, Envy, one of the Seven Deadly Sins, is making his confession.
Envy with heavy heart asked for shrift
And grieving for his guilt began his confession.
He was pale as a sheep’s pelt, appeared to have the palsy.
He was clothed in a coarse cloth—I couldn’t describe it—
A tabard and a tunic, a knife tied to his side,
Like those of a friar’s frock were the foresleeves.
Like a leek that had lain long in the sun
So he looked with lean cheeks, louring foully.
His body was so blown up for anger that he bit his lips
And shook his fist fiercely, he wanted to avenge himself
With acts or with words when he saw his chance.
Every syllable he spat out was of a serpent’s tongue;
From chiding and bringing charges was his chief livelihood,
With backbiting and bitter scorn and bearing false witness.
This was all his courtesy wherever he showed himself.
“Id like to be shriven,” said this scoundrel, “if shame would let me.
By God, I’d be gladder that Gib had bad luck
Than if I’d won this week a wey of Essex cheese.
I’ve a neighbor dwelling next door, I’ve done him harm often
And blamed him behind his back to blacken his name.
I’ve done my best to damage him day after day
And lied to lords about him to make him lose money,
And turned his friends into foes with my false tongue.
His good luck and his glad lot grieve me greatly.
Between household and household I often start disputes
So that both life and limb are lost for my speech... . .
I condemn men when they do evil, yet I do much worse;
Whoever upbraids me for that, I hate him deadly after.
I wish that every one were my servant,
And if any man has more than I, that angers my heart.
So I live loveless like a loathsome dog
So that my breast is blown up for bitterness of spirit.
For many years I might not eat as a man ought
For envy and ill will are hard to digest.
Is there any sugar or sweet thing to assuage my swelling
Or any diapenidion that will drive it from my heart,
Or any shrift or shame, unless I have my stomach scraped?”
“Yes, readily,” said Repentance, directing him to live better;
“Sorrow for sins is salvation for souls.”
The 15th century in England was a period of great unrest and lawlessness. Landowners often attacked their neighbors’ estates and betrayed their political allies. The Wars of the Roses, a conflict between two royal families for control of the kingdom, ravaged England between 1455 and 1485. In addition, several outbreaks of the plague devastated many English families during the century.

The Saga Begins  A firsthand record of this turbulent era survives in more than 1,000 documents and letters written by the Pastons, an English landowning family. During the early 1400s, William Paston, a lawyer, began accumulating property in Norfolk, a county in eastern England, both through purchases and through his acquisition of estates inherited by his wife, Agnes Berry. William’s extensive landholdings and growing prosperity earned him a number of enemies. Some even challenged his claim to certain properties and brought grief to William’s descendants for many years.

Endless Legal Wrangling  William Paston and Agnes Berry had five children. The oldest, John I, inherited much of the family property when his father died in 1444, and his marriage to Margaret Mautby led to the acquisition of even more property from his wife’s family. Like his father, John I was a lawyer, possessed of skills that were much needed in his constant legal battles over claims to various properties. His many legal disputes required him to stay in London for long periods of time, leaving Margaret to manage the Paston estates. John I and Margaret’s seven children included two sons named John—John II and John III—and a daughter named Margery. The letters you will read concern John I, Margaret, and these three children.

Anxiously Awaited Letters  In their letters, the Pastons exchanged detailed information about their legal disputes and other problems. Although writing letters had become an important means of communication by the 15th century, sending the letters was not easy. They had to be delivered by hand, often by a servant or even a total stranger. Weeks might pass before a letter reached its destination, and many never arrived. Despite these limitations, the Pastons wrote hundreds of letters over the course of 90 years, leaving an invaluable source of information about the social and political conditions of the times.
What disturbs our sense of SECURITY?

KEY IDEA Imagine living with the fear of being struck down by the plague or learning that parts of your home and property had been destroyed—and feeling powerless to prevent further destruction. For the Paston family, such horrors were a reality. Although they were relatively wealthy and privileged, a sense of security was not something their money could buy.

DISCUSS Life in 21st-century America is radically different from life in 15th-century England, but events can still intrude upon our security. Working with a partner, think of a global, national, or local event that shook your sense of security. Discuss why you found the event disturbing and what you did to attempt to regain your peace of mind.

Event
Terrorist Attacks, 9-11-01
Aspects That Shook My Sense of Security
1.
2.
3.
What I Did to Regain My Sense of Security

LITERARY ANALYSIS: PRIMARY SOURCES

Primary sources are materials written or made by people who took part in or witnessed the events portrayed. Diaries, speeches, andtravelogues are some examples of primary sources. Letters, another type of primary source, can provide rich information about the people who wrote them and the period in which those people lived. Consider this excerpt from a letter written by Margaret Paston to her husband:

They let me know that various of Lord Moleyns’ men said that if they could get their hands on me they would keep me in the castle. They wanted you to get me out again, and said that it would not cause you much heart-ache.

The excerpt shows that participants in land disputes of the time would sometimes resort to kidnapping and ransom. As you read these letters, determine what they reveal about the writers and about life in the 15th century.

READING SKILL: RECOGNIZE WRITER’S MOTIVES

To get the most out of these letters, you must recognize the writer’s motives, or personal reasons for writing. These motives influence descriptions of people and events and affect the credibility, or believability, of what the writer says. For example, one of Margaret Paston’s motives for writing to her husband may have been to get him to come home and protect her. This would make her portray Lord Moleyns’s men as very dangerous. Clues to the motives for writing these letters can be found in

- the italicized introductions, which give the context for each letter
- specific requests that the writer makes of the recipient, such as “Finish your business”
- the tone, or the attitude expressed, such as flattery or anger

As you read each letter, think about the writer’s possible motives and decide whether you believe all that is said. Record your thoughts on a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writer/Recipient/Date</th>
<th>Possible Motives</th>
<th>Clues to Motives</th>
<th>Credible?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Margaret to John I, 28 February 1449</td>
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</table>
Margaret Paston, in the absence of her husband, John I, was able to deal equally well with small housekeeping problems and with family disasters, including attacks against the Paston manors. While she was living at the Paston estate of Gresham, it was attacked by a Lord Moleyns, who claimed rights to the property and ejected Margaret from her home. Margaret first escaped to a friend’s house about a mile away; but later, fearing that Moleyns’s band of men might kidnap her, she fled to the city of Norwich, where she wrote the following letter to her husband.

Margaret to John I
28 February 1449

Right worshipful husband, I commend myself to you, wishing with all my heart to hear that you are well, and begging that you will not be angry at my leaving the place where you left me. On my word, such news was brought to me by various people who are sympathetic to you and me that I did not dare stay there any longer. I will tell you who the people were when you come home. They let me know that various of Lord Moleyns’ men said that if they could get their hands on me they would carry me off and keep me in the castle. They wanted you to get me out again, and said that it would not cause you much heart-ache. After I heard this news, I could not rest easy until I was here, and I did not dare go out of the place where I was until I was ready to ride away. Nobody in the place knew that I was leaving except the lady of the house, until an hour before I went. And I told her that I would come here to have clothes made for myself and the children, which I wanted made, and said I thought I would be here a fortnight1 or three

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1. **fortnight**: 14 nights, or two weeks.
weeks. Please keep the reason for my departure a secret until I talk to you, for those who warned me do not on any account want it known.

I spoke to your mother as I came this way, and she offered to let me stay in this town, if you agree. She would very much like us to stay at her place, and will send me such things as she can spare so that I can set up house until you can get a place and things of your own to set up a household. Please let me know by the man who brings this what you would like me to do. I would be very unhappy to live so close to Gresham as I was until this matter is completely settled between you and Lord Moleyns.

Barow told me that there was no better evidence in England than that Lord Moleyns has for [his title to] the manor of Gresham. I told him that I supposed the evidence was of the kind that William Hasard said yours was, and that the seals were not yet cold. That, I said, was what I expected his lord’s evidence to be like. I said I knew that your evidence was such that no one could have better evidence, and the seals on it were two hundred years older than he was. Then Barow said to me that if he came to London while you were there he would have a drink with you, to quell any anger there was between you. He said that he only acted as a servant, and as he was ordered to do. Purry will tell you about the conversation between Barow and me when I came from Walsingham. I beg you with all my heart, for reverence of God, beware of Lord Moleyns and his men, however pleasantly they speak to you, and do not eat or drink with them; for they are so false that they cannot be trusted. And please take care when you eat or drink in any other men’s company, for no one can be trusted.

I beg you with all my heart that you will be kind enough to send me word how you are, and how your affairs are going, by the man who brings this. I am very surprised that you do not send me more news than you have done.

In 1465, in still another property dispute, the Paston estate of Hellesdon was attacked by the duke of Suffolk, who had gained the support of several local officials. Although Margaret and John were not living at Hellesdon at the time, many of their servants and tenants suffered from the extensive damage. In the following two letters, Margaret tells her husband about the devastation.

Margaret to John I
17 October 1465

... On Tuesday morning John Botillere, also John Palmer, Darcy Arnald your cook and William Malthouse of Aylsham were seized at Hellesdon by the bailiff

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2. Barow: one of Lord Moleyns’s men.
3. the seals ... cold: A seal, often made by impressing a family emblem on hot wax, was placed on a document to show its authenticity. Margaret is suggesting that Lord Moleyns’s documents are recent forgeries.
4. Purry: perhaps a servant or tenant of the Pastons’.
of Eye, called Bottisforth, and taken to Costessey, and they are being kept there still without any warrant or authority from a justice of the peace; and they say they will carry them off to Eye prison and as many others of your men and tenants as they can get who are friendly towards you or have supported you, and they threaten to kill or imprison them.

The duke came to Norwich at 10 o’clock on Tuesday with five hundred men and he sent for the mayor, aldermen and sheriffs, asking them in the king’s name that they should inquire of the constables of every ward within the city which men had been on your side or had helped or supported your men at the time of any of these gatherings and if they could find any they should take them and arrest them and punish them; which the mayor did, and will do anything he can for him and his men. At this the mayor has arrested a man who was with me, called Robert Lovegold, a brazier, and threatened him that he shall be hanged by the neck. So I would be glad if you could get a writ sent down for his release, if you think it can be done. He was only with me when Harlesdon and others attacked me at Lammas. He is very true and faithful to you, so I would like him to be helped. I have no one attending me who dares to be known, except Little John. William Naunton is here with me, but he dares not be known because he is much threatened. I am told that the old lady and the duke have been frequently set against us by what Harlesdon, the bailiff of Costessey, Andrews and Doget the bailiff’s son and other false villains have told them, who want this affair pursued for their own pleasure; there are evil rumors about it in this part of the world and other places.

As for Sir John Heveningham, Sir John Wyndefeld and other respectable men, they have been made into their catspaws, which will not do their reputation any good after this, I think. . . .

The lodge and remainder of your place was demolished on Tuesday and Wednesday, and the duke rode on Wednesday to Drayton and then to Costessey while the lodge at Hellesdon was being demolished. Last night at midnight Thomas Slyford, Green, Porter and John Bottisforth the bailiff of Eye and others got a cart and took away the featherbeds and all the stuff of ours that was left at the parson’s and Thomas Water’s house for safe-keeping. I will send you lists later, as accurately as I can, of the things we have lost. Please let me know what you want me to do, whether you want me to stay at Caister or come to you in London.

I have no time to write any more. God have you in his keeping. Written at Norwich on St. Luke’s eve.

M.P.

7. Costessey: an estate owned by the duke of Suffolk.
8. brazier (brɑːˈzər): a person who makes articles of brass.
9. when Harlesdon . . . Lammas (ləmˈəs): when Harlesdon and others of the duke of Suffolk’s men attacked on Lammas, a religious feast celebrated on August 1.
10. catspaws: people who are deceived and used as tools by others; dupes.
11. Caister: one of the Paston estates.
12. St. Luke’s eve: the eve of St. Luke’s Day, a religious feast. The feasts of different saints were celebrated on different days throughout the year, and writers often dated letters with the name of a saint’s day or eve instead of using days and months.
Margaret to John I
27 October 1465

... I was at Hellesdon last Thursday and saw the place there, and indeed no one can imagine what a horrible mess it is unless they see it. Many people come out each day, both from Norwich and elsewhere, to look at it, and they talk of it as a great shame. The duke would have done better to lose £1000\(^{13}\) than to have caused this to be done, and you have all the more goodwill from people because it has been done so fouly. And they made your tenants at Hellesdon and Drayton, and others, help them to break down the walls of both the house and the lodge: God knows, it was against their will, but they did not dare do otherwise for fear. I have spoken with your tenants both at Hellesdon and Drayton, and encouraged them as best I can.

The duke’s men ransacked the church, and carried off all the goods that were left there, both ours and the tenants, and left little behind; they stood on the high altar and ransacked the images, and took away everything they could find. They shut the parson out of the church until they had finished, and ransacked everyone’s house in the town five or six times. The ringleaders in the thefts were the bailiff of Eye and the bailiff of Stradbroke, Thomas Slyford. And Slyford was the leader in robbing the church and, after the bailiff of Eye, it is he who has most of the proceeds of the robbery. As for the lead, brass, pewter, iron, doors, gates, and other household stuff, men from Costessey and Cawston have got it, and what they could not carry they hacked up in the most spiteful fashion. If possible, I would like some reputable men to be sent from the king, to see how things are both there and at the lodge, before any snows come, so that they can report the truth, because otherwise it will not be so plain as it is now. For reverence of God, finish your business now, for the expense and trouble we have each day is horrible, and it will be like this until you have finished; and your men dare not go around collecting your rents, while we keep here every day more than twenty people to save ourselves and the place; for indeed, if the place had not been strongly defended, the duke would have come here. ...\(^{13}\)

For the reverence of God, if any respectable and profitable method can be used to settle your business, do not neglect it, so that we can get out of these troubles and the great costs and expenses we have and may have in future. It is thought here that if my lord of Norfolk would act on your behalf, and got a commission to inquire into the riots and robberies committed on you and others in this part of the world, then the whole county will wait on him and do as you wish, for people love and respect him more than any other lord, except the king and my lord of Warwick.\(^{14}\) ...\(^{13}\)

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13. £1000: a thousand pounds (British money).
14. the king ... Warwick (wɔrˈtʃɪk): King Edward IV and the earl of Warwick, a figure so influential that he was known as Warwick the Kingmaker. Warwick put his friend, the Yorkist King Edward IV, on the throne but later turned against him and fought with the Lancastrian faction, who opposed the Yorkists in the War of the Roses.
Please do let me know quickly how you are and how your affairs are going, and let me know how your sons are. I came home late last night, and will be here until I hear from you again. Wykes came home on Saturday, but he did not meet your sons. God have you in his keeping and send us good news from you. Written in haste on the eve of St. Simon and St. Jude.

By yours, M.P.

During the 15th century, most marriages among the upper classes were arranged by families, usually to strengthen economic or political ties. The Paston family was greatly alarmed, therefore, when they learned that Margery, a daughter of Margaret and John I, had secretly become engaged to the Paston bailiff Richard Calle. Eventually, the two were married, in spite of bitter opposition from Margery’s family. In the following letter to Margery—the only piece of their correspondence to survive—Richard expresses his feelings about their predicament. The next letter is the response of Margery’s mother, Margaret, to the situation, written to her son John II.

Richard Calle to Margery Paston

Spring-Summer 1469

My own lady and mistress, and indeed my true wife before God,¹⁵ I commend myself to you with a very sad heart as a man who cannot be cheerful and will not be until things stand otherwise with us than they do now. This life that we lead now pleases neither God nor the world, considering the great bond of matrimony that is made between us, and also the great love that has been, and I trust still is, between us, and which for my part was never greater. So I pray that Almighty God will comfort us as soon as it pleases him, for we who ought by rights to be most together are most apart; it seems a thousand years since I last spoke to you. I would rather be with you than all the wealth in the world. Alas, also, good lady, those who keep us apart like this, scarcely realize what they are doing: those who hinder matrimony are cursed in church four times a year. It makes many men think that they can stretch a point of conscience in other matters as well as this one. But whatever happens, lady, bear it as you have done and be as cheerful as you can, for be sure, lady, that God in the long run will of his righteousness help his servants who mean to be true and want to live according to his laws.

I realize, lady, that you have had as much sorrow on my account as any gentlewoman has ever had in this world; I wish to God that all the sorrow you have had had fallen on me, so that you were freed of it; for indeed, lady, it kills me to hear that you are being treated otherwise than you should be. This is a painful life we lead; I cannot imagine that we live like this without God being displeased by it.

¹⁵. my true wife before God: In the 1400s, the vow of a man and woman spoken before God, even without a witness, was regarded as an official marriage.
You will want to know that I sent you a letter from London by my lad, and he told me he could not speak to you, because so great a watch was kept on both you and him. He told me that John Thresher came to him in your name, and said that you had sent him to my lad for a letter or token which you thought I had sent you; but he did not trust him and would not deliver anything to him. After that he brought a ring, saying that you sent it to him, commanding him to deliver the letter or token to him, which I gather since then from my lad was not sent by you, but was a plot of my mistress [i.e., Margaret Paston] and James Gloys. Alas, what do they intend? I suppose they think we are not engaged; and if this is the case I am very surprised, for they are not being sensible, remembering how plainly I told my mistress about everything at the beginning, and I think you have told her so too, if you have done as you should. And if you have denied it, as I have been told

you have done, it was done neither with a good conscience nor to the pleasure of God, unless you did it for fear and to please those who were with you at the time. If this was the reason you did it, it was justified, considering how insistently you were called on to deny it; and you were told many untrue stories about me, which, God knows, I was never guilty of.

My lad told me that your mother asked him if he had brought any letter to you, and she accused him falsely of many other things; among other things, she said to him in the end that I would not tell her about it at the beginning, but she expected that I would at the ending. As for that, God knows that she knew about it first from me and no one else. I do not know what my mistress means, for in truth there is no other gentlewoman alive who I respect more than her and whom I would be more sorry to displease, saving only yourself who by right I ought to cherish and love best, for I am bound to do so by God’s law and will do so while I live, whatever may come of it. I expect that if you tell them the sober truth, they will not damn their souls for our sake. Even if I tell them the truth they will not believe me as much as they would you. And so, good lady, for reverence of God be plain with them and tell the truth, and if they will not agree, let it be between them, God and the devil; and as for the peril we should be in, I pray God it may lie on them and not on us. I am very sad and sorry when I think of their attitude. God guide them and send them rest and peace.

I am very surprised that they are as concerned about this affair as I gather that they are, in view of the fact that nothing can be done about it, and that I deserve better; from any point of view there should be no obstacles to it. Also their honor does not depend on your marriage, but in their own marriage [i.e., John II’s]; I pray God send them a marriage which will be to their honor, to God’s pleasure and to their heart’s ease, for otherwise it would be a great pity.

Mistress, I am frightened of writing to you, for I understand that you have showed the letters that I have sent you before to others, but I beg you, let no one see this letter. As soon as you have read it, burn it, for I would not want anyone to see it. You have had nothing in writing from me for two years, and I will not send you any more: so I leave everything to your wisdom.

Almighty Jesu preserve, keep and give you your heart’s desire, which I am sure will please God. This letter was written with as great difficulty as I ever wrote anything in my life, for I have been very ill, and am not yet really recovered, may God amend it.

Margaret to her oldest son, John II
10 September 1469

. . . When I heard how she [Margery] had behaved, I ordered my servants that she was not to be allowed in my house. I had warned her, and she might have taken heed if she had been well-disposed. I sent messages to one or two others that they
should not let her in if she came. She was brought back to my house to be let in, and James Gloys told those who brought her that I had ordered them all that she should not be allowed in. So my lord of Norwich has lodged her at Roger Best’s, to stay there until the day in question; God knows it is much against his will and his wife’s, but they dare not do otherwise. I am sorry that they are burdened with her, but I am better off with her there than somewhere else, because he and his wife are sober and well-disposed to us, and she will not be allowed to play the good-for-nothing there.

Please do not take all this too hard, because I know that it is a matter close to your heart, as it is to mine and other people’s; but remember, as I do, that we have only lost a good-for-nothing in her, and take it less to heart: if she had been any good, whatever might have happened, things would not have been as they are, for even if he were dead now, she would never be as close to me as she was. . . . You can be sure that she will regret her foolishness afterwards, and I pray to God that she does. Please, for my sake, be cheerful about all this. I trust that God will help us; may he do so in all our affairs.

Although the Pastons were considered wealthy, they faced continual struggles. They even experienced occasional financial difficulties, particularly after the death of John I in 1466. John II, though frequently in London to deal with family legal matters, seems at times to have paid more attention to his own interests. The Pastons were also affected by the ravages of warfare and disease. The following three letters deal with some of their hardships.

**Margaret to John II**
28 October 1470

. . . Unless you pay more attention to your expenses, you will bring great shame on yourself and your friends, and impoverish them so that none of us will be able to help each other, to the great encouragement of our enemies.

Those who claim to be your friends in this part of the world realize in what great danger and need you stand, both from various of your friends and from your enemies. It is rumored that I have parted with so much to you that I cannot help either you or any of my friends, which is no honor to us and causes people to esteem us less. At the moment it means that I must disperse my household and lodge somewhere, which I would be very loath to do if I were free to choose. It has caused a great deal of talk in this town and I would not have needed to do it if I had held back when I could. So for God’s sake pay attention and be careful from now on, for I have handed over to you both my own property and your father’s, and have held nothing back, either for myself or for his sake. . . .
John II to Margaret  
APRIL 1471

Mother, I commend myself to you and let you know, blessed be God, my brother John is alive and well, and in no danger of dying. Nevertheless he is badly hurt by an arrow in his right arm below the elbow, and I have sent a surgeon to him, who has dressed the wound; and he tells me that he hopes he will be healed within a very short time. John Mylsent is dead. God have mercy on his soul; William Mylsent is alive and all his other servants seem to have escaped.

John II to John III  
15 SEPTEMBER 1471

. . . Please send me word if any of our friends or well-wishers are dead, for I fear that there is great mortality in Norwich and in other boroughs and towns in Norfolk: I assure you that it is the most widespread plague I ever knew of in England, for by my faith I cannot hear of pilgrims going through the country nor of any other man who rides or goes anywhere, that any town or borough in England is free from the sickness. May God put an end to it, when it please him. So, for God’s sake, get my mother to take care of my younger brothers and see that they are not anywhere where the sickness is prevalent, and that they do not amuse themselves with other young people who go where the sickness is. If anyone has died of the sickness, or is infected with it, in Norwich, for God’s sake let her send them to some friend of hers in the country; I would advise you to do the same. I would rather my mother moved her household into the country.

PRIMARY SOURCES
In this letter, what do you learn about the plague and what people do to avoid being stricken?

18. my brother John . . . escaped: John II is describing the Battle of Barnet in the War of the Roses. The Pastons fought with the Lancastrian faction, which King Edward IV’s Yorkist faction defeated.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  What occurred at the Paston family estate of Hellesdon in October 1465?

2. **Clarify**  Why does Margaret Paston consider her daughter Margery a “good-for-nothing”?

3. **Summarize**  Briefly summarize Margaret’s message to John II in her letter of 28 October 1470.

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Causes and Effects**  What were the things that threatened the Paston family’s security? Are they the same kinds of things that would threaten an American family’s security today?

5. **Recognize Writer’s Motives**  Review the chart you made as you read. Describe the motives of each letter writer and the clues from which you inferred these motives. In which letters did the writer’s motives most affect the credibility of what was said?

6. **Draw Conclusions**  What conclusions did you draw about the letter writers and the recipients? In a chart, provide an appropriate adjective to describe each person. Support your descriptions with evidence from the letters.

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<tr>
<th>Family Member</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Evidence</th>
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<tr>
<td>Margaret</td>
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<td>John I</td>
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<td>Richard Calle</td>
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<td>Margery</td>
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<tr>
<td>John II</td>
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7. **Analyze Primary Sources**  What do you learn from these letters about life in 15th-century England? Comment on what they tell you about

- the structure of society  • roles within the family
- conflicts between landowners  • the effect of the plague

8. **Analyze Style**  These letters have been translated from Middle English into Modern English, but care was taken to preserve features of their original style. What do you notice about the language used in the letters?

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations**  Critics have commented that the Paston letters should be read for their historical value, not their literary value. Do you agree? Explain why the letters are or are not “literature.”
Literature and the Common Life

Literary nonfiction is certainly informative. By reading autobiographies, such as Margery Kempe’s, and letters, such as Margaret Paston’s, a reader can learn more intimately about what life was like during the writer’s time: in this case, the Middle Ages. Nonfiction writing can also be quite entertaining when the lives of its authors are brought to life in the reader’s imagination.

Writing to Compare

Authors Margery Kempe and Margaret Paston shared certain concerns (family, children), yet their lives led them in different directions. Write a comparison of the two women, using a chart like the one shown to help you organize your thoughts. From your comparison, what generalizations can you make about women in medieval society?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Margery Kempe</th>
<th>Margaret Paston</th>
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<td>Occupation/Role</td>
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<td>Socioeconomic Status</td>
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<td>Family Relationships</td>
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<td>Hardships/Concerns</td>
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<td>Joys/Rewards</td>
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<td>Role of Religion in Life</td>
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<tr>
<td>Generalizations About Women in Medieval Society:</td>
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Extension

SPREADING & LISTENING
Imagine a meeting between Margery Kempe and Margaret Paston. What might the two discuss? With a partner, brainstorm some topics you think would come up in a conversation between the two. Then choose roles and role-play your conversation for the class. You might focus on one topic, such as family relationships, for your performance.
Medieval Narratives

Imagine you are living in London, England, in the year 1398, and you are the type of person you are now: a student reading and learning about literature. What would you be reading? As an educated person in the 14th century, what might be of interest to you?

The Medieval Reader

By the end of the 14th century, a typical Londoner who could read would have been interested in narratives—a type of writing that relates a series of events—written in verse. Typical medieval narratives included ballads, romances, allegories, and moral tales. Most of them were religious in theme, but many others were concerned with love, exemplary life and behavior, and political and societal issues. Although comedy and humor are not something we often associate with the Middle Ages, the medieval mind had a sophisticated sense of irony and a taste for comic narratives, which were, in fact, common.

Between 1350 and 1400, a large body of narrative works was produced in England. These were written in Middle English, a language that had developed and replaced the use of French, which had been the predominant language of educated people in Britain. Literacy had become more common, and new printing methods had made literature more widely available; thus, educated citizens had access to more literary works. Popular narratives of the time included Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (page 226) and the King Arthur romances (page 244), with their themes of chivalry, love, and religious devotion; William Langland’s Piers Plowman (page 120), an allegory that exposed the corruption of church, state, and society; and Geoffrey Chaucer’s groundbreaking work, The Canterbury Tales (page 140). It was Chaucer, with his sense of humor, style, and realistic characterizations, who overshadowed his peers, changed the nature of literature, and became known to subsequent generations as one of the greatest poets in the history of English literature.

Characteristics of Chaucer’s Style

Chaucer had no illusions about humanity, and yet his works show a compassion and fondness for human nature with all its faults and idiosyncrasies. Though The Canterbury Tales went unfinished, it is the work that best exhibits his unique style, which encompasses a variety of traits.
• **Imagery and Figurative Language**  Chaucer uses sparse but vivid imagery and figurative language to describe his characters’ physical appearance, as in his depiction of the Summoner: “His face on fire, like a cherubin, / For he had carbuncles.”

• **Irony**  The contrast between expectation and reality is known as irony. The ironist seems to be writing with tongue in cheek, and Chaucer is master of it. While calling attention to his characters’ faults, he also emphasizes their essential humanity. This gives his writing a tone of detachment and compassion. Note the irony he uses in his description of the Doctor, one of the pilgrims described in “The Prologue” to *The Canterbury Tales*.

  Yet he was rather close as to expenses
  And kept the gold he won in pestilences.
  Gold stimulates the heart, or so we’re told.
  He therefore had a special love of gold.

  —from “The Prologue”

• **Characterization**  A writer develops characters by describing their physical appearance, making direct statements about them, and allowing them to express their personalities through dialogue. In *The Canterbury Tales*, each of Chaucer’s characters is also clearly differentiated by the type of story he or she tells and the voice in which each tale is told. Compare these two passages, the first narrated by the Pardoner, and the second narrated by the Wife of Bath.

  It’s of three rioters I have to tell
  Who, long before the morning service bell,
  Were sitting in a tavern for a drink.

  —from “The Pardoner’s Tale”

  Others assert we women find it sweet
  When we are thought dependable, discreet
  And secret, firm of purpose and controlled,
  Never betraying things that we are told.

  —from “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

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**CHAUCER’S FRAME STORY**

The frame story is a literary device that joins together one or more stories within a larger story, or frame. Frame stories have been used throughout the world and date back to antiquity. The *Panchatantra*, a collection of Sanskrit fables gathered around 200 B.C., is an ancient Indian example of a frame story. Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (page 204) is a well-known Italian frame story in which a collection of stories are told by different characters.

*The Canterbury Tales* is one of the most famous examples of the frame story. In his innovative use of the device, Chaucer interwove the frame with the tales. The plot of the frame involves pilgrims on a pilgrimage who are challenged to compete in telling the best tale. Chaucer reveals the pilgrims’ personalities not only through their interactions between tales but also by the tales they tell. As a result, the frame itself acts as a long and engaging narrative whole.

**Close Read**

On the basis of these excerpts, how would you characterize the narrator of each tale?
Geoffrey Chaucer made an enormous mark on the language and literature of England. Writing in an age when French was widely spoken in educated circles, Chaucer was among the first writers to show that English could be a respectable literary language. Today, his work is considered a cornerstone of English literature.

Befriended by Royalty Chaucer was born sometime between 1340 and 1343, probably in London, in an era when expanding commerce was helping to bring about growth in villages and cities. His family, though not noble, was well off, and his parents were able to place him in the household of the wife of Prince Lionel, a son of King Edward III, where he served as an attendant. Such a position was a vital means of advancement; the young Chaucer learned the customs of upper-class life and came into contact with influential people. It may have been during this period that Chaucer met Lionel’s younger brother, John of Gaunt, who would become Chaucer’s lifelong patron and a leading political figure of the day.

A Knight and a Writer Although Chaucer wrote his first important work around 1370, writing was always a sideline; his primary career was in diplomacy. During Richard II’s troubled reign (1377 to 1399), Chaucer was appointed a member of Parliament and knight of the shire. When Richard II was overthrown in 1399 by Henry Bolingbroke (who became King Henry IV), Chaucer managed to retain his political position, as Henry was the son of John of Gaunt.

Despite the turmoil of the 1380s and 1390s, the last two decades of Chaucer’s life saw his finest literary achievements—the brilliant verse romance *Troilus and Criseyde* and his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of verse and prose tales of many different kinds. At the time of his death, Chaucer had penned nearly 20,000 lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, but many more tales were planned.

Uncommon Honor When he died in 1400, Chaucer was accorded a rare honor for a commoner—burial in London’s Westminster Abbey. In 1556, an admirer erected an elaborate marble monument to his memory. This was the beginning of the Abbey’s famous Poets’ Corner, where many of England’s most distinguished writers have since been buried.


**LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERIZATION**

**Characterization** refers to the techniques a writer uses to develop characters. In “The Prologue,” the introduction to *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer offers a vivid portrait of English society during the Middle Ages. Among his 30 characters are clergy, aristocrats, and commoners. To make each pilgrim memorable, Chaucer relies on the same methods of characterization that today’s writers use. These include:

- description of a character’s appearance
- examples of a character’s speech, thoughts, and actions
- the responses of others to a character
- the narrator’s direct comments about a character

As you read, look for details that reveal the **character traits**, or consistent qualities, of each pilgrim.

**READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE**

Reading age-old texts, such as *The Canterbury Tales*, can be challenging because they often contain unfamiliar words and complex sentences. One way that you can make sense of Chaucer’s work is to **paraphrase**, or restate information in your own words. A paraphrase is usually the same length as the original text but contains simpler language. As you read, paraphrase difficult passages. Here is an example.

**Chaucer’s Words**

“When in April the sweet showers fall/And pierce the drought of March to the root,...” (lines 1-2)

**Paraphrase**

When the April rains come and end the dryness of March,...

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

The following boldfaced words are critical to understanding Chaucer’s literary masterpiece. Try to figure out the meaning of each word from the context.

1. The refined gentleman always behaved with **courtliness**.
2. She remained calm and **sedately** finished her meal.
3. The popular politician was charming and **personable**.
4. When you save money in a bank, interest will **accrue**.
5. Does she suffer from heart disease or another **malady**?
6. She made an **entreaty** to the king, asking for a pardon.

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**What makes a great CHARACTER?**

**KEY IDEA** Creating a great **character** requires a sharp eye for detail, a keen understanding of people, and a brilliant imagination—all of which Chaucer possessed. Chaucer populated *The Canterbury Tales* with a colorful cast of characters whose virtues and flaws ring true even today, hundreds of years later.

**QUICKWRITE** Work with a partner to invent a character. Start with an intriguing name. Then come up with questions that will reveal basic information about the character, such as his or her age, physical appearance, family and friends, job, home, and personal tastes. Brainstorm possible answers for the questions. Then circle the responses that have the best potential for making a lively character.

**Name:** Bartholomew Throckmorton

1. What is his occupation?
   - duke
   - squire to a knight
   - sea captain
   - **town doctor**
   - grave digger

2. Where does he live?

3. 

4. 

5. 

---
When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire’s end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

It happened in that season that one day
In Southwark, at The Tabard, as I lay

BACKGROUND In “The Prologue” of The Canterbury Tales, a group gathers at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, a town just south of London, to make a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. At the suggestion of the innkeeper, the group decides to hold a storytelling competition to pass the time as they travel. “The Prologue” introduces the “sundry folk” who will tell the stories and is followed by the tales themselves—24 in all.

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
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To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

PARAPHRASE Restate lines 1–18. Why does the group make its pilgrimage in April?
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company

Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
They made us easy, all was of the best.

And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I’d spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say
What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,

According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.
There was a Knight, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign’s war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As well in Christian as in heathen places,
And ever honored for his noble graces.

When we took Alexandria, he was there.
He often sat at table in the chair
Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
No Christian man so often, of his rank.
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin;
In Anatolia he had been as well

And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene

23 hostelry (hōs’tal-rē): inn.

8 PARAPHRASE
Paraphrase lines 35–42. What does the narrator set out to accomplish in “The Prologue”?

45 chivalry (shīv’al-rē): the code of behavior of medieval knights, which stressed the values listed in line 46.

51 Alexandria: a city in Egypt, captured by European Christians in 1365. All the places named in lines 51–64 were scenes of conflicts in which medieval Christians battled Muslims and other non-Christian peoples.

64 jousted: fought with a lance in an arranged battle against another knight.
Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight.

Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armor had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.
He had his son with him, a fine young Squire,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.
In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He’d seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
Of time, in hope to win his lady’s grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.

There was a Yeoman with him at his side,
No other servant; so he chose to ride.
This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green,
And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while

CHARACTERIZATION
Reread lines 43–74. What do the Knight’s actions on and off the battlefield reveal about his character? Cite details to support your answer.

fustian (fū’shan): a strong cloth made of linen and cotton.
Squire: a young man attending on and receiving training from a knight.
cadet: soldier in training.

Flanders and Artois (är’twā’) and Picardy (pĭk’ar-dē’): areas in what is now Belgium and northern France.
fluting: whistling.
Yeoman (yō’man): an attendant in a noble household; him: the Knight.
—For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never drooped their feathers low—
And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
His head was like a nut, his face was brown.
He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down.
A saucy brace was on his arm to ward
It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword
Hung at one side, and at the other slipped
A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped.
A medal of St. Christopher he wore
Of shining silver on his breast, and bore
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,
That dangled from a baldrick of bright green.
He was a proper forester, I guess.

There also was a Nun, a Prioress,
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.
Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!”
And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.

For courtliness she had a special zest,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
She reached a hand sedately for the meat.
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.

As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding,
And she had little dogs she would be feeding
With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.
And bitterly she wept if one were dead

**CHARACTERIZATION**
Reread lines 122–145. Which details suggest that the Prioress may be trying to appear more sophisticated than she really is?
Or someone took a stick and made it smart;
She was all sentiment and tender heart.

Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,
Almost a span across the brows, I own;
She was indeed by no means undergrown.

Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,
Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen
On which there first was graven a crowned A,
And lower, Amor vincit omnia.

Another Nun, the secretary at her cell,
Was riding with her, and three Priests as well.

A Monk there was, one of the finest sort
Who rode the country; hunting was his sport.
A manly man, to be an Abbot able;
Many a dainty horse he had in stable.
His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.
The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur
As old and strict he tended to ignore;
He let go by the things of yesterday
And took the modern world’s more spacious way.
He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
Which says that hunters are not holy men
And that a monk uncloistered is a mere
Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,
That is to say a monk out of his cloister.
That was a text he held not worth an oyster;
And I agreed and said his views were sound;
Was he to study till his head went round
Poring over books in cloisters? Must he toil
As Austin bade and till the very soil?
Was he to leave the world upon the shelf?
Let Austin have his labor to himself.

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence

159 span: a unit of length equal to nine inches. A broad forehead was considered a sign of beauty in Chaucer’s day.

163 gaudies: the larger beads in a set of prayer beads.

166 Amor vincit omnia [ä’môr wîn’kît ôm’nê-a]: Latin for “Love conquers all things.”

171 Abbot: the head of a monastery.

172 dainty: excellent.

176 Prior of the cell: head of a subsidiary group of monks.


190 Austin: St. Augustine of Hippo, who recommended that monks engage in hard agricultural labor.

194 to course: for hunting.
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin

He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;
Into a lover’s knot it seemed to pass.
His head was bald and shone like looking-glass;
So did his face, as if it had been greased.
He was a fat and personable priest;
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.
They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;
Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.
He was a prelate fit for exhibition,
He was not pale like a tormented soul.
He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

There was a Friar, a wanton one and merry,
A Limiter, a very festive fellow.
In all Four Orders there was none so mellow,
So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
He’d fixed up many a marriage, giving each
Of his young women what he could afford her.
He was a noble pillar to his Order.
Highly beloved and intimate was he
With County folk within his boundary,
And city dames of honor and possessions;
For he was qualified to hear confessions,

characterization
List three character traits of the Monk. In what ways does the narrator appear to poke fun at him?

Friar: a member of a religious group sworn to poverty and living on charitable donations; wanton: playful; jolly.
Limiter: a friar licensed to beg for donations in a limited area.
Four Orders: the four groups of friars—Dominican, Franciscan, Carmelite, and Augustinian.
confessions: church rites in which people confess their sins to clergy members. Only certain friars were licensed to hear confessions.
Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;
He had a special license from the Pope.
225
Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift
With pleasant absolution, for a gift.
He was an easy man in penance-giving
Where he could hope to make a decent living;
It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given
To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,
And should he give enough he knew in verity
The penitent repented in sincerity.
For many a fellow is so hard of heart
He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.
235
Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer
One should give silver for a poor Friar's care.
He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,
And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.
And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,
For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.
At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.
His neck was whiter than a lily-flower
But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.
He knew the taverns well in every town
And every innkeeper and barmaid too
Better than lepers, beggars and that crew.
For in so eminent a man as he
It was not fitting with the dignity
Of his position, dealing with a scum
Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers,
But only with the rich and victual-sellers.
But anywhere a profit might accrue
Courteous he was and lowly of service too.
Natural gifts like his were hard to match.
He was the finest beggar of his batch,
And, for his begging-district, paid a rent;
His brethren did no poaching where he went.
For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,
So pleasant was his holy how-d'ye-do
He got his farthing from her just the same
Before he left, and so his income came
To more than he laid out. And how he romped,
Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
255
To arbitrate disputes on settling days
(For a small fee) in many helpful ways,
Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,
But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.

Of double-worsted was the semi-cope
Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold
About him, like a bell about its mold
When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
He lisped a little out of wantonness
To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
When he had played his harp, or having sung,
His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright
As any star upon a frosty night.
This worthy’s name was Hubert, it appeared.

There was a Merchant with a forking beard
And motley dress; high on his horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat
And on his feet daintily buckled boots.
He told of his opinions and pursuits
In solemn tones, he harped on his increase
Of capital; there should be sea-police
(He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland ranges;
This estimable Merchant so had set
His wits to work, none knew he was in debt,
He was so stately in administration,
In loans and bargains and negotiation.
He was an excellent fellow all the same;
To tell the truth I do not know his name.

An Oxford Cleric, still a student though,
One who had taken logic long ago,
Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,
And he was not too fat, I undertake,
But had a hollow look, a sober stare;
The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
He had found no preferment in the church
And he was too unworldly to make search
For secular employment. By his bed
He preferred having twenty books in red
And black, of Aristotle’s philosophy,
Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.
Though a philosopher, as I have told,
He had not found the stone for making gold.
Whatever money from his friends he took
He spent on learning or another book
And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.

Paraphrase lines 284–294.
Is the Merchant a successful businessman? Why or why not?
His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need,
Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

A Sergeant at the Law who paid his calls,
Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's
There also was, of noted excellence.
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.
He often had been Justice of Assize
By letters patent, and in full commission.
His fame and learning and his high position
Had won him many a robe and many a fee.
There was no such conveyancer as he;
All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,
Not one conveyance could be called in question.
Though there was nowhere one so busy as he,
He was less busy than he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case and crime
Ever recorded since King William's time.
He could dictate defenses or draft deeds;
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds
And he knew every statute off by rote.
He wore a homely parti-colored coat,
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;
Of his appearance I have said enough.

There was a Franklin with him, it appeared;
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.
A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,
He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.
He lived for pleasure and had always done,
For he was Epicurus' very son,
In whose opinion sensual delight
Was the one true felicity in sight.
As noted as St. Julian was for bounty
He made his household free to all the County.
His bread, his ale were finest of the fine
And no one had a better stock of wine.
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies
It positively snowed with meat and drink
And all the dainties that a man could think.

CHARACTERIZATION

319 Sergeant at the Law: a lawyer appointed by the monarch to serve as a judge.
320 St. Paul's: the cathedral of London, outside which lawyers met clients when the courts were closed.
324 Justice of Assize: a judge who traveled about the country to hear cases.
325 letters patent: royal documents commissioning a judge.
328 conveyancer: a lawyer specializing in conveyances (deeds) and property disputes.
329 fee-simple: property owned without restrictions.
334 King William's time: the reign of William the Conqueror.
336 screeds: documents.

341 Franklin: a wealthy landowner.
343 sanguine (săng'gwīn): cheerful and good-natured.
346 Epicurus' very son: someone who pursues pleasure as the chief goal in life, as the ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus was supposed to have recommended.
349 St. Julian: the patron saint of hospitality; bounty: generosity.

CHARACTERIZATION
What does the narrator state directly about the Franklin in lines 341–356?
According to the seasons of the year
Changes of dish were ordered to appear.
He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,
Many a bream and pike were in his pond.
Woe to the cook unless the sauce was hot
And sharp, or if he wasn’t on the spot!
And in his hall a table stood arrayed
And ready all day long, with places laid.

As Justice at the Sessions none stood higher;
He often had been Member for the Shire.
A dagger and a little purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.
He was a model among landed gentry.

A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter,
A Weaver and a Carpet-maker were
Among our ranks, all in the livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity.

They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass
For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass
But wrought with purest silver, which avouches
A like display on girdles and on pouches.
Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace
A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.
Their wisdom would have justified a plan
To make each one of them an alderman;
They had the capital and revenue,
Besides their wives declared it was their due.
And if they did not think so, then they ought;
To be called “Madam” is a glorious thought,
And so is going to church and being seen
Having your mantle carried, like a queen.

They had a Cook with them who stood alone
For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,
Sharp flavoring-powder and a spice for savor.
He could distinguish London ale by flavor,
And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
But what a pity—so it seemed to me,
That he should have an ulcer on his knee.
As for blancmange, he made it with the best.

There was a Skipper hailing from far west;
He came from Dartmouth, so I understood.
He rode a farmer’s horse as best he could,
In a woolen gown that reached his knee.
A dagger on a lanyard falling free
Hung from his neck under his arm and down.
The summer heat had tanned his color brown,
And certainly he was an excellent fellow.
Many a draft of vintage, red and yellow,
He’d drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.
The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.
If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank,
He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.
As for his skill in reckoning his tides,
Currents and many another risk besides,
Moons, harbors, pilots, he had such dispatch
That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.
Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;
His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,
And he knew all the havens as they were
From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
The barge he owned was called The Maudelayne.

A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded;
No one alive could talk as well as he did
On points of medicine and of surgery,
For, being grounded in astronomy,
He watched his patient closely for the hours
When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers
Of favorable planets, then ascendant,
Worked on the images for his dependent.
The cause of every malady you’d got
He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;
He knew their seat, their humor and condition.
He was a perfect practicing physician.
These causes being known for what they were,
He gave the man his medicine then and there.
All his apothecaries in a tribe
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe
And each made money from the other’s guile;
They had been friendly for a goodish while.
He was well-versed in Aesculapius too
And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine.
In his own diet he observed some measure;
There were no superfluities for pleasure,
Only digestives, nutritives and such.
He did not read the Bible very much.
In blood-red garments, slashed with bluish grey
And lined with taffeta, he rode his way;
Yet he was rather close as to expenses
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.
Gold stimulates the heart, or so we’re told.
He therefore had a special love of gold.

A worthy woman from beside Bath city
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
In making cloth she showed so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.
In all the parish not a dame dared stir
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity.
Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.
A worthy woman all her life, what’s more
She’d had five husbands, all at the church door,
Apart from other company in youth;
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She’d been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
Easily on an ambling horse she sat
Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;
She had a flowing mantle that concealed
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.
In company she liked to laugh and chat
And knew the remedies for love’s mischances,
An art in which she knew the oldest dances.

A holy-minded man of good renown
There was, and poor, the Parson to a town,
Yet he was rich in holy thought and work.
He also was a learned man, a clerk,
Who truly knew Christ’s gospel and would preach it
Devoutly to parishioners, and teach it.
Benign and wonderfully diligent,
And patient when adversity was sent
(For so he proved in much adversity)
He hated cursing to extort a fee,
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt
Giving to poor parishioners round about
Both from church offerings and his property;
He could in little find sufficiency.
Wide was his parish, with houses far asunder,
Yet he neglected not in rain or thunder,
In sickness or in grief, to pay a call
On the remotest, whether great or small,
Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example to his sheep he gave
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
And it was from the Gospel he had caught
Those words, and he would add this figure too,
That if gold rust, what then will iron do?
For if a priest be foul in whom we trust
No wonder that a common man should rust;
And shame it is to see—let priests take stock—
A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.
The true example that a priest should give
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.
He did not set his benefice to hire
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
Or run to London to earn easy bread
By singing masses for the wealthy dead,
Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.
He stayed at home and watched over his fold
So that no wolf should make the sheep miscarry.
He was a shepherd and no mercenary.
Holy and virtuous he was, but then
Never contemptuous of sinful men,
Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,
But was discreet in teaching and benign.
His business was to show a fair behavior
And draw men thus to Heaven and their Savior,
Unless indeed a man were obstinate;
And such, whether of high or low estate,
He put to sharp rebuke, to say the least.
I think there never was a better priest.
He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,
No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.
Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore
He taught, but followed it himself before.

There was a Plowman with him there, his brother;
Many a load of dung one time or other
He must have carted through the morning dew.
He was an honest worker, good and true,
Living in peace and perfect charity,
And, as the gospel bade him, so did he,
Loving God best with all his heart and mind
And then his neighbor as himself, repined
At no misfortune, slacked for no content,
For steadily about his work he went
To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure
Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor
For love of Christ and never take a penny
If he could help it, and, as prompt as any,
He paid his tithes in full when they were due
On what he owned, and on his earnings too.
He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

There was a Reeve, also a Miller, there,
A College Manciple from the Inns of Court,
A papal Pardoner and, in close consort,

**CHARACTERIZATION**

Compare the Plowman with his brother, the Parson. What character traits do they seem to share?

**PARAPHRASE**

Restate lines 515–524. In what ways does the Parson serve the members of his parish?

**tabard smock:** a short loose jacket made of a heavy material.

**Reeve:** an estate manager;

**Manciple:** a servant in charge of purchasing food;

**Inns of Court:** London institutions for training law students;

**Pardoner:** a church official authorized to sell people pardons for their sins.
A Church-Court Summoner, riding at a trot,
And finally myself—that was the lot.

The Miller was a chap of sixteen stone,
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.
He did well out of them, for he could go
And win the ram at any wrestling show.

Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast
He could heave any door off hinge and post,
Or take a run and break it with his head.
His beard, like any sow or fox, was red
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;
And, at its very tip, his nose displayed
A wart on which there stood a tuft of hair
Red as the bristles in an old sow’s ear.
His nostrils were as black as they were wide.
He had a sword and buckler at his side,
His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.

A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.
His was a master-hand at stealing grain.
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew
Its quality and took three times his due—
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!
He wore a hood of blue and a white coat.
He liked to play his bagpipes up and down
And that was how he brought us out of town.

The Manciple came from the Inner Temple;
All caterers might follow his example
In buying victuals; he was never rash
Whether he bought on credit or paid cash.
He used to watch the market most precisely
And got in first, and so he did quite nicely.

Now isn’t it a marvel of God’s grace
That an illiterate fellow can outpace
The wisdom of a heap of learned men?
His masters—he had more than thirty then—
All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,
Could have produced a dozen from their College
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game
To any Peer in England you could name,
And show him how to live on what he had
Debt-free (unless of course the Peer were mad)
Or be as frugal as he might desire,
And make them fit to help about the Shire

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559 Summoner: a layman with the job of summoning sinners to church courts.
561 stone: a unit of weight equal to 14 pounds.

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GRAMMAR AND STYLE
Review lines 570–575. Notice how Chaucer uses similes, or comparisons, to create a remarkably vivid—and unflattering—portrait of the Miller.

576 wrangler (răng’gler): a loud, argumentative person; buffoon (ba-fōon’): a fool.
577 in the main: for the most part.

581 thumb of gold: a reference to a proverb, “An honest miller has a golden thumb”—perhaps meaning that there is no such thing as an honest miller.

585 Inner Temple: one of the Inns of Court.

594 his masters: the lawyers that the Manciple feeds.
595 abstrusest: most scholarly and difficult to understand.
In any legal case there was to try;
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye.

The Reeve was old and choleric and thin;
His beard was shaven closely to the skin,
His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop
Above his ears, and he was docked on top
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,
Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.
He kept his bins and garners very trim;
No auditor could gain a point on him.
And he could judge by watching drought and rain
The yield he might expect from seed and grain.
His master’s sheep, his animals and hens,
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens
Were wholly trusted to his government.
He had been under contract to present
The accounts, right from his master’s earliest years.
No one had ever caught him in arrears.
No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,
He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;
Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.
He had a lovely dwelling on a heath,
Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.
A better hand at bargains than his lord,
He had grown rich and had a store of treasure
Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure
His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,
To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.
When young he’d learnt a useful trade and still
He was a carpenter of first-rate skill.
The stallion-cob he rode at a slow trot
Was dapple-grey and bore the name of Scot.
He wore an overcoat of bluish shade
And rather long; he had a rusty blade
Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,
From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.
His coat was tucked under his belt and splayed.
He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

There was a Summoner with us at that Inn,
His face on fire, like a cherubin,
For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,
He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.
Black scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.
Children were afraid when he appeared.
No quicksilver, lead ointment, tartar creams,
No brimstone, no boracic, so it seems,
Could make a salve that had the power to bite,
Clean up or cure his whelks of knobby white
Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.
Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,
And drinking strong red wine till all was hazy.
Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,
And wouldn’t speak a word except in Latin
When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in;
He only had a few, say two or three,
That he had mugged up out of some decree;
No wonder, for he heard them every day.
And, as you know, a man can teach a jay
To call out “Walter” better than the Pope.
But had you tried to test his wits and grope
For more, you’d have found nothing in the bag.
Then “Questio quid juris” was his tag.
He was a noble varlet and a kind one,
You’d meet none better if you went to find one.
Why, he’d allow—just for a quart of wine—
Any good lad to keep a concubine
A twelvemonth and dispense him altogether!
And he had finches of his own to feather:
And if he found some rascal with a maid

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633 stallion-cob: a thickset, short-legged male horse.

638 Norfolk (nôr’fak): a county in eastern England.

642 cherubin (chôr’ä-bîn’): a type of angel—in the Middle Ages often depicted with a fiery red face.

643 carbuncles (kär’bûng’kla): big pimples, considered a sign of lechery and drunkenness in the Middle Ages.

647–648 quicksilver . . . boracic (bô-râs’îk): substances used as skin medicines in medieval times.

650 whelks (hwêlks): swellings.

656 tags: brief quotations.

658 mugged up: memorized.

660 jay: a bird that can be taught to mimic human speech without understanding it.

664 Questio quid juris (kwôs’tē-ō kwô’d yôör’îs): Latin for “The question is, What part of the law (is applicable)?”—a statement often heard in medieval courts.
He would instruct him not to be afraid
In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse
(Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)
For in his purse the punishment should be.
 "Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell," said he.
But well I know he lied in what he said;
A curse should put a guilty man in dread,
For curses kill, as shriving brings salvation.
We should beware of excommunication.
Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress
On any young fellow in the diocese.
He knew their secrets, they did what he said.
He wore a garland set upon his head
Large as the holly-bush upon a stake
Outside an ale-house, and he had a cake,
A round one, which it was his joke to wield
As if it were intended for a shield.

He and a gentle Pardoner rode together,
A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,
Just back from visiting the Court of Rome.
He loudly sang, "Come hither, love, come home!"
The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,
No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.
In driblets fell his locks behind his head
Down to his shoulders which they overspread;
Thinline they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.
He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;
The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,
He aimed at riding in the latest mode;
But for a little cap his head was bare
And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.
He'd sewed a holy relic on his cap;
His wallet lay before him on his lap,
Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.
He had the same small voice a goat has got.
His chin no beard had harbored, nor would harbor,
Smoother than ever chin was left by barber.
I judge he was a gelding, or a mare.
As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware
There was no pardoner of equal grace,
For in his trunk he had a pillow-case
Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
Saint Peter had the time when he made bold
To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.
He had a cross of metal set with stones
And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs’ bones.
And with these relics, any time he found
Some poor up-country parson to astound,
In one short day, in money down, he drew
More than the parson in a month or two,
And by his flatteries and prevarication
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.
But still to do him justice first and last
In church he was a noble ecclesiast.
How well he read a lesson or told a story!
But best of all he sang an Offertory,
For well he knew that when that song was sung
He’d have to preach and tune his honey-tongue
And (well he could) win silver from the crowd.
That’s why he sang so merrily and loud.

Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,
The rank, the array, the number and the cause
Of our assembly in this company
In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry
Known as The Tabard, close beside The Bell.
And now the time has come for me to tell
How we behaved that evening; I’ll begin
After we had alighted at the Inn,
Then I’ll report our journey, stage by stage,
All the remainder of our pilgrimage.
But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
Not to condemn me as unmannerly
If I speak plainly and with no concealings
And give account of all their words and dealings,
Using their very phrases as they fell.
For certainly, as you all know so well,
He who repeats a tale after a man
Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,
Each single word, if he remembers it,
However rudely spoken or unfit,
Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
The things pretended and the phrases new.
He may not flinch although it were his brother,
He may as well say one word as another.
And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,
Yet there is no scurrility in it,
And Plato says, for those with power to read,
“The word should be as cousin to the deed.”
Further I beg you to forgive it me
If I neglect the order and degree
And what is due to rank in what I’ve planned.
I’m short of wit as you will understand.

Our Host gave us great welcome; everyone
Was given a place and supper was begun.
He served the finest victuals you could think,
The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.
A very striking man our Host withal,
And fit to be a marshal in a hall.
His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide;
There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.

Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,
There was no manly attribute he lacked,
What’s more he was a merry-hearted man.
After our meal he jokingly began
To talk of sport, and, among other things
After we’d settled up our reckonings,
He said as follows: “Truly, gentlemen,
You’re very welcome and I can’t think when
—Upon my word I’m telling you no lie—
I’ve seen a gathering here that looked so spry,
No, not this year, as in this tavern now.
I’d think you up some fun if I knew how.
And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred
To please you, costing nothing, on my word. You’re off to Canterbury—well, God speed!

Blessed St. Thomas answer to your need!
And I don’t doubt, before the journey’s done You mean to while the time in tales and fun. Indeed, there’s little pleasure for your bones Riding along and all as dumb as stones.

So let me then propose for your enjoyment, Just as I said, a suitable employment. And if my notion suits and you agree And promise to submit yourselves to me Playing your parts exactly as I say

Tomorrow as you ride along the way, Then by my father’s soul (and he is dead) If you don’t like it you can have my head! Hold up your hands, and not another word.”

Well, our opinion was not long deferred,
It seemed not worth a serious debate;
We all agreed to it at any rate
And bade him issue what commands he would.
“My lords,” he said, “now listen for your good, And please don’t treat my notion with disdain.

This is the point. I’ll make it short and plain. Each one of you shall help to make things slip By telling two stories on the outward trip To Canterbury, that’s what I intend, And, on the homeward way to journey’s end

Another two, tales from the days of old; And then the man whose story is best told, That is to say who gives the fullest measure Of good morality and general pleasure, He shall be given a supper, paid by all,

Here in this tavern, in this very hall,
When we come back again from Canterbury. And in the hope to keep you bright and merry I’ll go along with you myself and ride All at my own expense and serve as guide.

I’ll be the judge, and those who won’t obey Shall pay for what we spend upon the way. Now if you all agree to what you’ve heard Tell me at once without another word, And I will make arrangements early for it.”
Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it
Delightedly, and made entreaty too
That he should act as he proposed to do,
Become our Governor in short, and be
Judge of our tales and general referee,

And set the supper at a certain price.
We promised to be ruled by his advice
Come high, come low; unanimously thus
We set him up in judgment over us.
More wine was fetched, the business being done;
We drank it off and up went everyone
To bed without a moment of delay.

Early next morning at the spring of day
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,
Gathering us together in a flock,
And off we rode at slightly faster pace
Than walking to St. Thomas’ watering-place;
And there our Host drew up, began to ease
His horse, and said, “Now, listen if you please,
My lords! Remember what you promised me.

If evensong and matins will agree
Let’s see who shall be first to tell a tale.
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale
I’ll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,
However much the journey costs, he pays.

Now draw for cut and then we can depart;
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start.”

CHARACTERIZATION
Examine the way the pilgrims respond to the Host in lines 830–841. What type of person do you think would appeal to so many?

843 cock: rooster (whose cry rouses people from sleep).

846 St. Thomas’ watering-place: a brook about two miles from London.

850 If evensong and matins will agree: if what you said last night is what you will do this morning.

855 draw for cut: draw lots.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  When and where does “The Prologue” take place?
2. **Recall**  What event or circumstance causes the characters to gather?
3. **Summarize**  What plan does the Host propose to the characters?

Literary Analysis

4. **Analyze Characterization**  Throughout the selection, Chaucer uses physical details—eyes, hair, clothing—to help develop his characters. Choose three pilgrims and describe how their outward appearances reflect their personalities.

5. **Identify Irony**  Much of the humor of “The Prologue” is based on irony, the discrepancy between what appears to be true and what actually is true. Explain the irony in each of the following character portraits:
   - the Nun Prioress
   - the Merchant
   - the Skipper
   - the Doctor

6. **Draw Conclusions**  Review the paraphrases you created as you read the selection. What do these passages reveal about the narrator? Describe his personality and values.

7. **Examine Satire**  When a writer pokes fun at behaviors and customs with the intent of improving society, he or she is creating satire. Review the descriptions of the Monk and the Friar in lines 169–279. What aspects of the medieval church does Chaucer satirize through these characters?

8. **Interpret Tone**  In literature, tone refers to the attitude a writer takes toward a subject or character. Tone can be serious, playful, admiring, mocking, or objective. Review lines 455–486. What is Chaucer’s tone toward the Wife of Bath? Cite specific words and phrases to support your answer.

9. **Make Judgments**  Which characters do you believe Chaucer most admires? Describe the character traits, or consistent qualities, these individuals possess. Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.

Literary Criticism

10. **Critical Interpretations**  In 1809, the English poet and artist William Blake made the following observation: “Chaucer’s pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations…. Some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves forever remain unaltered.” Do you agree or disagree that Chaucer’s characters seem timeless and universal? Support your opinion with details from the text and your own experiences.
Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
Use the details from “The Prologue” and your understanding of the boldfaced words to help you choose the answer to each question.

1. Which of these characters shows the most courtliness?
   (a) Plowman, (b) Knight, (c) Wife of Bath
2. Which of these characters seems the most personable?
   (a) Squire, (b) Summoner, (c) Oxford Cleric
3. What does the Doctor believe can cause a malady?
   (a) wealth, (b) body humors, (c) germs and bacteria
4. Which of these characters tries the most to behave sedately?
   (a) Nun Prioress, (b) Franklin, (c) Monk
5. Which character has seen money accrue in his savings?
   (a) Friar, (b) Cook, (c) Parson
6. To whom do the pilgrims make an entreaty about judging the story contest?
   (a) Yeoman, (b) Merchant, (c) Host

VOCABULARY IN WRITING
In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer shows a genuine fondness for people—warts and all. Choose one pilgrim and describe the qualities that make him or her realistic. Use at least two vocabulary words. Your opening could be like this.

Example sentence
I think the Franklin’s personable nature is realistic because . . .

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE PREFIX *mal-*
The word *malady* contains the prefix *mal-*, which means “bad” or “wrong.” This prefix appears in many English words. To understand the meaning of those words, use context clues as well as your knowledge of the prefix. If *mal-* is attached to a word or a root that you know, also take that meaning into account.

**Practice**  Answer each question in a complete sentence that uses a word from the word web. Use your knowledge of the prefix *mal-* to help you, and consult a dictionary if necessary.

1. What might a bad doctor be guilty of?
2. What might happen if a person does not get enough food?
3. What disease might a mosquito carry?
4. What physical condition might develop from chronic pain?
5. What sort of person might a loner be?
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: EXEMPLUM**

An exemplum is a short anecdote or story that illustrates a particular moral point. Developed in the late Middle Ages, this literary form was often used in sermons and other didactic literature. One famous example is Chaucer’s “The Pardoner’s Tale,” which focuses on the subject of greed. As you read the selection, pay attention to the actions of the characters and to the narrator’s description of his own practices.

*Review:* Irony

**READING SKILL: PREDICT**

When you predict, you make guesses about what will happen next in a story based on text clues and your own prior knowledge. Predicting helps you become engaged in the story and motivates you to read on. To make predictions about “The Pardoner’s Tale,” use the following strategies:

- Note foreshadowing, or hints about future plot events.
- Think about the words, actions, and personalities of the three rioters to predict their behavior throughout the story.

As you read, record your predictions and any helpful text clues in a chart like the one shown. Later, complete the chart by explaining the actual outcomes of the story’s events.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Predictions</th>
<th>Text Clues</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The rioters will experience trouble.</td>
<td>The tavern boy warns them about the plague.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

To see how many vocabulary words you already know, substitute a different word for each boldfaced term.

1. The miser demonstrated his avarice by amassing coins.
2. She used harsh words to castigate his awful behavior.
3. The two enemies came together for a secret parley.

**Examples of Corruption**

1. Corporate scandals
2.
3.
4.
"My lords," he said, "in churches where I preach I cultivate a haughty kind of speech And ring it out as roundly as a bell; I've got it all by heart, the tale I tell. I have a text, it always is the same And always has been, since I learnt the game, Old as the hills and fresher than the grass, Radix malorum est cupiditas. . . .

"I preach, as you have heard me say before, And tell a hundred lying mockeries more. I take great pains, and stretching out my neck To east and west I crane about and peck Just like a pigeon sitting on a barn. My hands and tongue together spin the yarn And all my antics are a joy to see. The curse of avarice and cupidity Is all my sermon, for it frees the pelf. Out come the pence, and specially for myself, For my exclusive purpose is to win And not at all to castigate their sin. Once dead what matter how their souls may fare? They can go blackberrying, for all I care! . . .

"And thus I preach against the very vice I make my living out of—avarice. A And yet however guilty of that sin Myself, with others I have power to win Them from it, I can bring them to repent; But that is not my principal intent.
Covetousness is both the root and stuff
30 Of all I preach. That ought to be enough.

“Well, then I give examples thick and fast
From bygone times, old stories from the past.
A yokel mind loves stories from of old,
Being the kind it can repeat and hold.

What! Do you think, as long as I can preach
And get their silver for the things I teach,
That I will live in poverty, from choice?
That’s not the counsel of my inner voice!
No! Let me preach and beg from kirk to kirk

And never do an honest job of work,
No, nor make baskets, like St. Paul, to gain
A livelihood. I do not preach in vain.
There’s no apostle I would counterfeit;
I mean to have money, wool and cheese and wheat

Though it were given me by the poorest lad
Or poorest village widow, though she had
A string of starving children, all agape.
No, let me drink the liquor of the grape
And keep a jolly wench in every town!

But listen, gentlemen; to bring things down
To a conclusion, would you like a tale?
Now as I’ve drunk a draft of corn-ripe ale,
By God it stands to reason I can strike
On some good story that you all will like.
For though I am a wholly vicious man
Don’t think I can’t tell moral tales. I can!
Here’s one I often preach when out for winning. . . .”

IRONY
Review lines 39–47. Why does the Pardoner tell his moral stories? Explain how his motive is ironic, or different from what you might have expected.

vicious: immoral; depraved.
It’s of three rioters I have to tell
Who, long before the morning service bell,
Were sitting in a tavern for a drink.
And as they sat, they heard the hand-bell clink
Before a coffin going to the grave;
One of them called the little tavern-knave
And said “Go and find out at once—look spry!—
Whose corpse is in that coffin passing by;
And see you get the name correctly too.”
“Sir,” said the boy, “no need, I promise you;
Two hours before you came here I was told.
He was a friend of yours in days of old,
And suddenly, last night, the man was slain,
Upon his bench, face up, dead drunk again.
There came a privy thief, they call him Death,
Who kills us all round here, and in a breath
He speared him through the heart, he never stirred.
And then Death went his way without a word.
He’s killed a thousand in the present plague,
And, sir, it doesn’t do to be too vague
If you should meet him; you had best be wary.
Be on your guard with such an adversary,
Be primed to meet him everywhere you go,
That’s what my mother said. It’s all I know.”

The publican joined in with, “By St. Mary,
What the child says is right; you’d best be wary,
This very year he killed, in a large village
A mile away, man, woman, serf at tillage,
Page in the household, children—all there were.
Yes, I imagine that he lives round there.
It’s well to be prepared in these alarms,
He might do you dishonor.” “Huh, God’s arms!”
The rioter said, “Is he so fierce to meet?
I’ll search for him, by Jesus, street by street.
God’s blessed bones! I’ll register a vow!

EXEMPLUM
Many characters in moral stories are allegorical—that is, they stand for abstract ideas, such as virtue and beauty. Identify the allegorical character presented in lines 72–89. Who fears him? Why?
Here, chaps! The three of us together now,
Hold up your hands, like me, and we’ll be brothers
In this affair, and each defend the others,
And we will kill this traitor Death, I say!
Away with him as he has made away
With all our friends. God’s dignity! Tonight!”

They made their bargain, swore with appetite,
These three, to live and die for one another
As brother-born might swear to his born brother.
And up they started in their drunken rage
And made towards this village which the page
And publican had spoken of before.
Many and grisly were the oaths they swore,
Tearing Christ’s blessed body to a shred;
“If we can only catch him, Death is dead!”

When they had gone not fully half a mile,
Just as they were about to cross a stile,
They came upon a very poor old man
Who humbly greeted them and thus began,
“God look to you, my lords, and give you quiet!”
To which the proudest of these men of riot
Gave back the answer, “What, old fool? Give place!
Why are you all wrapped up except your face?
Why live so long? Isn’t it time to die?”

The old, old fellow looked him in the eye
And said, “Because I never yet have found,
Though I have walked to India, searching round
Village and city on my pilgrimage,
One who would change his youth to have my age.
And so my age is mine and must be still
Upon me, for such time as God may will.

“Not even Death, alas, will take my life;
So, like a wretched prisoner at strife
Within himself, I walk alone and wait
About the earth, which is my mother’s gate,
Knock-knocking with my staff from night to noon
And crying, ‘Mother, open to me soon!
Look at me, mother, won’t you let me in?
See how I wither, flesh and blood and skin!
Alas! When will these bones be laid to rest?
Mother, I would exchange—for that were best—
The wardrobe in my chamber, standing there

D PREDICT
What qualities of the three men does Chaucer emphasize in lines 93–107? Predict what will happen to them based on these text clues.

109 stile: a stairway used to climb over a fence or wall.

129 The old man addresses the earth as his mother (recall the familiar expressions “Mother Earth” and “Mother Nature”).
So long, for yours! Aye, for a shirt of hair  
To wrap me in!’ She has refused her grace,  
Whence comes the pallor of my withered face.

“But it dishonored you when you began  
To speak so roughly, sir, to an old man,  
Unless he had injured you in word or deed.  
It says in holy writ, as you may read,  
‘Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head  
And honor it.’ And therefore be it said  
‘Do no more harm to an old man than you,  
Being now young, would have another do  
When you are old’—if you should live till then.  
And so may God be with you, gentlemen,  
For I must go whither I have to go.”

135 shirt of hair: a rough shirt made of animal hair, worn to punish oneself for one’s sins.

142 hoary: gray or white with age.
“By God,” the gambler said, “you shan’t do so,
You don’t get off so easy, by St. John!
I heard you mention, just a moment gone,
A certain traitor Death who singles out
And kills the fine young fellows hereabout.
And you’re his spy, by God! You wait a bit.
Say where he is or you shall pay for it,
By God and by the Holy Sacrament!
I say you’ve joined together by consent
To kill us younger folk, you thieving swine!”

“Well, sirs,” he said, “if it be your design
To find out Death, turn up this crooked way
Towards that grove, I left him there today
Under a tree, and there you’ll find him waiting.
He isn’t one to hide for all your prating.
You see that oak? He won’t be far to find.
And God protect you that redeemed mankind,
Aye, and amend you!” Thus that ancient man.

At once the three young rioters began
To run, and reached the tree, and there they found
A pile of golden florins on the ground,
New-coined, eight bushels of them as they thought.
No longer was it Death those fellows sought,
For they were all so thrilled to see the sight,
The florins were so beautiful and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious pile.

The wickedest spoke first after a while.
“Brothers,” he said, “you listen to what I say.
I’m pretty sharp although I joke away.
It’s clear that Fortune has bestowed this treasure
To let us live in jollity and pleasure.
Light come, light go! We’ll spend it as we ought.
God’s precious dignity! Who would have thought
This morning was to be our lucky day?

“If one could only get the gold away,
Back to my house, or else to yours, perhaps—
For as you know, the gold is ours, chaps—
We’d all be at the top of fortune, hey?
But certainly it can’t be done by day.
People would call us robbers—a strong gang,
So our own property would make us hang.
No, we must bring this treasure back by night
Some prudent way, and keep it out of sight.

**EXEMPLUM**
To best illustrate a moral point, characters in an exemplum are usually good or evil. To which category does the gambler seem to belong? Cite evidence from lines 149–158 to support your response.

**IRONY**
Reread lines 167–182. In what way is the discovery the rioters make ironic, or different from what you had anticipated?

*florins: coins.*
And so as a solution I propose
We draw for lots and see the way it goes;
The one who draws the longest, lucky man,
Shall run to town as quickly as he can
To fetch us bread and wine—but keep things dark—
While two remain in hiding here to mark
Our heap of treasure. If there’s no delay,
When night comes down we’ll carry it away,
All three of us, wherever we have planned.”

He gathered lots and hid them in his hand
Bidding them draw for where the luck should fall.
It fell upon the youngest of them all,
And off he ran at once towards the town.

As soon as he had gone the first sat down
And thus began a parley with the other:
“You know that you can trust me as a brother;
Now let me tell you where your profit lies;
You know our friend has gone to get supplies
And here’s a lot of gold that is to be
Divided equally amongst us three.
Nevertheless, if I could shape things thus
So that we shared it out—the two of us—
Wouldn’t you take it as a friendly act?”

“But how?” the other said. “He knows the fact
That all the gold was left with me and you;
What can we tell him? What are we to do?”

“Is it a bargain,” said the first, “or no?
For I can tell you in a word or so
What’s to be done to bring the thing about.”

“Trust me,” the other said, “you needn’t doubt
My word. I won’t betray you, I’ll be true.”

“Well,” said his friend, “you see that we are two,
And two are twice as powerful as one.
Now look; when he comes back, get up in fun
To have a wrestle; then, as you attack,
I’ll up and put my dagger through his back
While you and he are struggling, as in game;
Then draw your dagger too and do the same.
Then all this money will be ours to spend,
Divided equally of course, dear friend.
Then we can gratify our lusts and fill

get things dark: act in secret, without giving away what has happened.

parley (par'lē) n. a discussion or a conference
The day with dicing at our own sweet will.”
Thus these two miscreants agreed to slay
The third and youngest, as you heard me say.

The youngest, as he ran towards the town,
Kept turning over, rolling up and down
Within his heart the beauty of those bright
New florins, saying, “Lord, to think I might
Have all that treasure to myself alone!
Could there be anyone beneath the throne
Of God so happy as I then should be?”

And so the Fiend, our common enemy,
Was given power to put it in his thought
That there was always poison to be bought,
And that with poison he could kill his friends.
To men in such a state the Devil sends
Thoughts of this kind, and has a full permission
To lure them on to sorrow and perdition;
For this young man was utterly content
To kill them both and never to repent.

And on he ran, he had no thought to tarry,
Came to the town, found an apothecary
And said, “Sell me some poison if you will,
I have a lot of rats I want to kill
And there’s a polecat too about my yard
That takes my chickens and it hits me hard;
But I’ll get even, as is only right,
With vermin that destroy a man by night.”

The chemist answered, “I’ve a preparation
Which you shall have, and by my soul’s salvation
If any living creature eat or drink
A mouthful, ere he has the time to think,
Though he took less than makes a grain of wheat,
You’ll see him fall down dying at your feet;
Yes, die he must, and in so short a while
You’d hardly have the time to walk a mile,
The poison is so strong, you understand.”

This cursed fellow grabbed into his hand
The box of poison and away he ran
Into a neighboring street, and found a man
Who lent him three large bottles. He withdrew
And deftly poured the poison into two.

EXEMPLUM
Which details in lines 236–242
tell you that greed is the subject
of this moral story?

Fiend: the Devil; Satan.

perdition: damnation; hell.
He kept the third one clean, as well he might,
For his own drink, meaning to work all night
Stacking the gold and carrying it away.
And when this rioter, this devil's clay,
Had filled his bottles up with wine, all three,
Back to rejoin his comrades sauntered he.  

Why make a sermon of it? Why waste breath?
Exactly in the way they'd planned his death
They fell on him and slew him, two to one.
Then said the first of them when this was done,
“Now for a drink. Sit down and let's be merry,
For later on there'll be the corpse to bury.”
And, as it happened, reaching for a sup,
He took a bottle full of poison up
And drank; and his companion, nothing loth,
Drank from it also, and they perished both.

There is, in Avicenna's long relation
Concerning poison and its operation,
Trust me, no ghastlier section to transcend
What these two wretches suffered at their end.
Thus these two murderers received their due,
So did the treacherous young poisoner too.

O cursed sin! O blackguardly excess!
O treacherous homicide! O wickedness!
O gluttony that lusted on and diced! . . .
Dearly beloved, God forgive your sin
And keep you from the vice of avarice!
My holy pardon frees you all of this,
Provided that you make the right approaches,
That is with sterling, rings, or silver brooches.
Bow down your heads under this holy bull!
Come on, you women, offer up your wool!
I'll write your name into my ledger; so!
Into the bliss of Heaven you shall go.
For I'll absolve you by my holy power,
You that make offering, clean as at the hour
When you were born. . . . That, sirs, is how I preach.
And Jesu Christ, soul's healer, aye, the leech
Of every soul, grant pardon and relieve you
Of sin, for that is best, I won't deceive you.

One thing I should have mentioned in my tale,
Dear people. I've some relics in my bale

---

EXEMPLUM
Moral stories usually have straightforward plots, where events happen in quick succession. In what way does the story's conclusion fit this pattern?

PREDICT
What do you think will happen to the three men? Support your response with clues from the text.

---

nothing loth: not at all unwilling.

Avicenna's long relation: a medical text written by an 11th-century Islamic physician; it includes descriptions of various poisons and their effects.

EXEMPLUM
Relics are the remains of a saint—bones, hair, or clothing. In medieval times, many relics were counterfeit.
And pardons too, as full and fine, I hope,
As any in England, given me by the Pope.
If there be one among you that is willing
To have my absolution for a shilling

Devoutly given, come! and do not harden
Your hearts but kneel in humbleness for pardon;
Or else, receive my pardon as we go.
You can renew it every town or so
Always provided that you still renew

Each time, and in good money, what is due.
It is an honor to you to have found
A pardoner with his credentials sound
Who can absolve you as you ply the spur
In any accident that may occur.

For instance—we are all at Fortune’s beck—
Your horse may throw you down and break your neck.
What a security it is to all
To have me here among you and at call
With pardon for the lowly and the great

When soul leaves body for the future state!
And I advise our Host here to begin,
The most enveloped of you all in sin.
Come forward, Host, you shall be the first to pay,
And kiss my holy relics right away.

Only a groat. Come on, unbuckle your purse!

319 shilling: a coin worth twelve pence.

330–331 The Pardoner reminds the other pilgrims that death may come to them at any time.

340 groat: a silver coin worth four pence.
**Comprehension**

1. **Recall** What event prompts the three rioters to seek Death?
2. **Clarify** In what way is their discovery at the old tree unexpected?
3. **Summarize** Describe the events that directly lead to their deaths.

**Literary Analysis**

4. **Examine Predictions** Look back at your list of predictions and text clues. Were you able to correctly anticipate everything that happened, or were you surprised by how some events developed?
5. **Interpret Theme** What theme, or central message, about corruption do you think Chaucer conveys through the selection? In your response, consider how greed affects the lives of the Pardoner and the three rioters.
6. **Compare and Contrast Characters** A foil is a character who provides a striking contrast to other characters. In what way does the old man serve as a foil to the three rioters?
7. **Analyze Exemplum** For each convention of medieval exemplum listed in the chart shown, provide an example from “The Pardoner’s Tale.” In what way is this literary form in keeping with the Pardoner’s occupation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conventions of Medieval Exemplum</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>virtuous or evil characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tightly structured plot events</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allegorical or symbolic figures</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a distinct moral or lesson</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. **Make Judgments About Irony** Chaucer is widely admired for his skillful use of irony—the discrepancy between what appears to be true and what actually is true. There are three main types of irony.

   - **Verbal irony** occurs when a character says one thing but means another.
   - **Situational irony** occurs when a character or reader expects one thing to happen but something else actually happens.
   - **Dramatic irony** occurs when the reader or audience knows something that a character does not know.

   For each type of irony listed, provide an example from “The Pardoner’s Tale.” How essential is irony to the meaning of the story?

**Literary Criticism**

9. **Historical Context** During the mid-14th century, the Black Death—a massive epidemic of the bubonic plague—swept through Asia and Europe. In Europe alone, one-quarter of the population died. In what ways might these circumstances have made people vulnerable to the tricks of the Pardoner and other unscrupulous clergymen?
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**
Indicate whether each statement is true or false. Use your knowledge of the boldfaced words and the context in which they appear to help you answer.

1. Counting your money all the time may be a sign of **avarice**.
2. Wise teachers **castigate** good behavior.
3. A **parley** might lead to peace between warring factions.

**VOCABULARY IN WRITING**
Would people today be taken in by the Pardoner’s performance? Use at least two of the vocabulary words in a paragraph in which you give your opinion. Here is a sentence you might use to start.

**EXAMPLE SENTENCE**
Many people today demonstrate **avarice**.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORDS FROM FRENCH**
French has been contributing words to English since the French-speaking Normans invaded England in 1066. Knowing the French origins of a word can often help you understand its English meaning. For example, knowing that **parley** comes from the French **parler**, which means “to speak,” can help you understand that a parley is a discussion or conference.

**PRACTICE** Based on the context clues in each sentence, decide which word from the chart would best complete the sentence. Use the information on the original French meanings to help you decide. Then look up the etymology of each word in a dictionary. Note the relationship between current spellings and original French spellings.

1. The _____ actor charmed many fans with his friendly manners.
2. The ballerina made a graceful _____.
3. The art _____ explained the significance of the painting.
4. Add some spices to make the rice dish more _____.
5. The poet paid attention to every _____ of meaning.
6. The clerk had a job in the company’s lower _____.
The Wife of Bath’s Tale
from The Canterbury Tales
Poem by Geoffrey Chaucer
Translated by Nevill Coghill

LITERARY ANALYSIS: NARRATOR

The narrator of a story is the character or voice that relates the story’s events to the reader. Many narrators have distinct personalities that are revealed through the subject matter, tone, and language of their stories. In this selection, the narrator is the Wife of Bath, one of the most charismatic characters in The Canterbury Tales—and, arguably, in all of English literature. As you read, notice what she reveals about herself and medieval society in her lively tale.

READING SKILL: ANALYZE STRUCTURE

The Canterbury Tales has a sophisticated structure, or organization. The collection features a frame story—a story that surrounds and binds together one or more different narratives in a single work. The main story about the pilgrimage serves this purpose. It unifies 24 unrelated tales and provides a rationale for the entire collection.

In the interludes between the pilgrims’ tales, the characters talk—often argue—with one another. Within the tales, narrators sometimes digress in their storytelling. Both types of interruptions challenge readers. To better understand the selection, you should keep track of breaks in narration. Use a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interruptions</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Pardoner interrupts the Wife of Bath (lines 1–6).</td>
<td>The previous discussion has made him afraid to marry.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The boldfaced words help convey the wit and charm of the Wife of Bath. Use context clues to guess the meaning of each.

1. implore someone for a favor  4. bequeath a legacy
2. cackle like a crone           5. everyday temporal concerns
3. the king’s sovereignty         6. rebuke someone for a mistake

Do men understand women?

KEY IDEA

Many jokes suggest that when it comes to emotional responses and attitudes toward relationships, men and women might as well be from different planets. But is there really such a gulf between the sexes? In “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” a man becomes motivated to gain understanding of women when his life is at stake.

QUICKWRITE How difficult is it for men to understand women? Are the differences between them fundamental or superficial? Write one or two paragraphs in response to those questions.
The Pardoner started up, and thereupon
“Madam,” he said, “by God and by St. John,
That’s noble preaching no one could surpass!
I was about to take a wife; alas!
Am I to buy it on my flesh so dear?
There’ll be no marrying for me this year!”

You’ll taste another brew before I’ve done;
You’ll find it doesn’t taste as good as ale;
And when I’ve finished telling you my tale
Of tribulation in the married life
In which I’ve been an expert as a wife,
That is to say, myself have been the whip.
So please yourself whether you want to sip
At that same cask of marriage I shall broach.
Be cautious before making the approach,
For I’ll give instances, and more than ten.
And those who won’t be warned by other men,
By other men shall suffer their correction,
So Ptolemy has said, in this connection.
You read his *Almagest;* you’ll find it there.”

“Madam, I put it to you as a prayer,”
The Pardoner said, “go on as you began!
Tell us your tale, spare not for any man.
Instruct us younger men in your technique.”
“Gladly,” she said, “if you will let me speak,
But still I hope the company won’t reprove me
Though I should speak as fantasy may move me,
And please don’t be offended at my views;
They’re really only offered to amuse. . . .”

3 *noble preaching:* In the passage preceding this excerpt, the Wife of Bath has spoken at length about her view of marriage.

15 *cask:* barrel; *broach:* tap into.

20 *Ptolemy* (*tōl’mē*): a famous astronomer, mathematician, and geographer of ancient Egypt.

A NARRATOR
In lines 7–21, the narrator introduces the subject of her tale—marriage and its many difficulties. What personal opinions and experiences does she also reveal?
The WIFE OF BATH’S TALE

When good King Arthur ruled in ancient days
(A king that every Briton loves to praise)
This was a land brim-full of fairy folk.
The Elf-Queen and her courtiers joined and broke
35 Their elfin dance on many a green mead,
Or so was the opinion once, I read,
Hundreds of years ago, in days of yore.
But no one now sees fairies any more.
For now the saintly charity and prayer
Of holy friars seem to have purged the air;
They search the countryside through field and stream
As thick as motes that speckle a sun-beam,
Blessing the halls, the chambers, kitchens, bowers,
Cities and boroughs, castles, courts and towers,
And that’s the reason why there are no fairies.
Wherever there was wont to walk an elf
Today there walks the holy friar himself
As evening falls or when the daylight springs,
50 Saying his matins and his holy things,
Walking his limit round from town to town.
Women can now go safely up and down
By every bush or under every tree;
There is no other incubus but he,
So there is really no one else to hurt you
And he will do no more than take your virtue.

Now it so happened, I began to say,
Long, long ago in good King Arthur’s day,
There was a knight who was a lusty liver.
One day as he came riding from the river
He saw a maiden walking all forlorn
Ahead of him, alone as she was born.
And of that maiden, spite of all she said,
By very force he took her maidenhead.

This act of violence made such a stir,
So much petitioning to the king for her,
That he condemned the knight to lose his head
By course of law. He was as good as dead
(Its seems that then the statutes took that view)
But that the queen, and other ladies too,
Implored the king to exercise his grace
So ceaselessly, he gave the queen the case
And granted her his life, and she could choose
Whether to show him mercy or refuse.

The queen returned him thanks with all her might,
And then she sent a summons to the knight
At her convenience, and expressed her will:
“You stand, for such is the position still,
In no way certain of your life,” said she,
“Yet you shall live if you can answer me:
What is the thing that women most desire?
Beware the axe and say as I require.

“If you can’t answer on the moment, though,
I will concede you this: you are to go
A twelvemonth and a day to seek and learn
Sufficient answer, then you shall return.
I shall take gages from you to extort
Surrender of your body to the court.”

Sad was the knight and sorrowfully sighed,
But there! All other choices were denied,
And in the end he chose to go away
And to return after a year and day
Armed with such answer as there might be sent
To him by God. He took his leave and went.

He knocked at every house, searched every place,
Yes, anywhere that offered hope of grace.
What could it be that women wanted most?
But all the same he never touched a coast,
Country or town in which there seemed to be
Any two people willing to agree.

Some said that women wanted wealth and treasure,
“Honor,” said some, some “Jollity and pleasure,”
Some “Gorgeous clothes” and others “Fun in bed,”
“To be oft widowed and remarried,” said
Others again, and some that what most mattered
Was that we should be cosseted and flattered.
That’s very near the truth, it seems to me;
A man can win us best with flattery.
To dance attendance on us, make a fuss,
Ensnares us all, the best and worst of us.

Some say the things we most desire are these:
Freedom to do exactly as we please,
With no one to reprove our faults and lies,
Rather to have one call us good and wise.
Truly there’s not a woman in ten score
Who has a fault, and someone rubs the sore,
But she will kick if what he says is true;
You try it out and you will find so too.
However vicious we may be within
We like to be thought wise and void of sin.
Others assert we women find it sweet
When we are thought dependable, discreet
And secret, firm of purpose and controlled,
Never betraying things that we are told.
But that’s not worth the handle of a rake;
Women conceal a thing? For Heaven’s sake!
Remember Midas? Will you hear the tale?

Among some other little things, now stale,
Ovid relates that under his long hair
The unhappy Midas grew a splendid pair
Of ass’s ears; as subtly as he might,
He kept his foul deformity from sight;

---

NARRATOR
What is the narrator’s opinion of flattery in lines 101–110?
Consider what this view suggests about her personality.

---

106 cosseted (kōt’-tĭd): pampered.

---

107 but she will: who will not.

---

115 ten score: 200.

---

120 void of sin: sinless.

---

127 Midas: a legendary king of Phrygia, in Asia Minor.

---

129 Ovid (ō’vid’): an ancient Roman poet whose Metamorphoses is a storehouse of Greek and Roman legends. According to Ovid, it was a barber, not Midas’s wife, who told the secret of his donkey’s ears.
Save for his wife, there was not one that knew.
He loved her best, and trusted in her too.

135
He begged her not to tell a living creature
That he possessed so horrible a feature.
And she—she swore, were all the world to win,
She would not do such villainy and sin
As saddle her husband with so foul a name;

140
Besides to speak would be to share the shame.
Nevertheless she thought she would have died
Keeping this secret bottled up inside;
It seemed to swell her heart and she, no doubt,
Thought it was on the point of bursting out.

145
Fearing to speak of it to woman or man,
Down to a reedy marsh she quickly ran
And reached the sedge. Her heart was all on fire
And, as a bittern bumbles in the mire,
She whispered to the water, near the ground,

150
“Betray me not, O water, with thy sound!
To thee alone I tell it: it appears
My husband has a pair of ass’s ears!
Ah! My heart’s well again, the secret’s out!
I could no longer keep it, not a doubt.”

155
And so you see, although we may hold fast
A little while, it must come out at last,
We can’t keep secrets; as for Midas, well,
Read Ovid for his story; he will tell.

This knight that I am telling you about
Perceived at last he never would find out
What it could be that women loved the best.
Faint was the soul within his sorrowful breast,
As home he went, he dared no longer stay;
His year was up and now it was the day.

165
As he rode home in a dejected mood
Suddenly, at the margin of a wood,
He saw a dance upon the leafy floor
Of four and twenty ladies, nay, and more.
Eagerly he approached, in hope to learn

170
Some words of wisdom ere he should return;
But lo! Before he came to where they were,
Dancers and dance all vanished into air!
There wasn’t a living creature to be seen
Save one old woman crouched upon the green.

175
A fouler-looking creature I suppose
Could scarcely be imagined. She arose
And said, “Sir knight, there’s no way on from here.
Tell me what you are looking for, my dear,
For peradventure that were best for you;
We old, old women know a thing or two.”

“Dear Mother,” said the knight, “alack the day!
I am as good as dead if I can’t say
What thing it is that women most desire;
If you could tell me I would pay your hire.”

“Give me your hand,” she said, “and swear to do
Whatever I shall next require of you
—If so to do should lie within your might—
And you shall know the answer before night.”

“Upon my honor,” he answered, “I agree.”

“Then,” said the crone, “I dare to guarantee
Your life is safe; I shall make good my claim.
Upon my life the queen will say the same.
Show me the very proudest of them all
In costly coverchief or jewelled caul
That dare say no to what I have to teach.
Let us go forward without further speech.”
And then she crooned her gospel in his ear
And told him to be glad and not to fear.

They came to court. This knight, in full array,
Stood forth and said, “O Queen, I’ve kept my day
And kept my word and have my answer ready.”

There sat the noble matrons and the heady
Young girls, and widows too, that have the grace
Of wisdom, all assembled in that place,
And there the queen herself was throned to hear
And judge his answer. Then the knight drew near
And silence was commanded through the hall.

The queen gave order he should tell them all
What thing it was that women wanted most.
He stood not silent like a beast or post,
But gave his answer with the ringing word
Of a man’s voice and the assembly heard:

“My liege and lady, in general,” said he,
“A woman wants the self-same sovereignty
Over her husband as over her lover,
And master him; he must not be above her.
That is your greatest wish, whether you kill
Or spare me; please yourself. I wait your will.”

In all the court not one that shook her head
Or contradicted what the knight had said;
Maid, wife and widow cried, “He’s saved his life!”

And on the word up started the old wife,
The one the knight saw sitting on the green,
And cried, “Your mercy, sovereign lady queen!
Before the court disperses, do me right!
’Twas I who taught this answer to the knight,
For which he swore, and pledged his honor to it,
That the first thing I asked of him he'd do it,
So far as it should lie within his might.

Before this court I ask you then, sir knight,
To keep your word and take me for your wife;
For well you know that I have saved your life.
If this be false, deny it on your sword!”

“Alas!” he said, “Old lady, by the Lord
I know indeed that such was my behest,
But for God’s love think of a new request,
Take all my goods, but leave my body free.”
“A curse on us,” she said, “if I agree!
I may be foul, I may be poor and old,
Yet will not choose to be, for all the gold
That’s bedded in the earth or lies above,
Less than your wife, nay, than your very love!”

“My love?” said he. “By heaven, my damnation!
Alas that any of my race and station
Should ever make so foul a misalliance!”
Yet in the end his pleading and defiance
All went for nothing, he was forced to wed.
He takes his ancient wife and goes to bed.

Now peradventure some may well suspect
A lack of care in me since I neglect
To tell of the rejoicing and display
Made at the feast upon their wedding-day.
I have but a short answer to let fall;
I say there was no joy or feast at all,

Nothing but heaviness of heart and sorrow.
He married her in private on the morrow
And all day long stayed hidden like an owl,
It was such torture that his wife looked foul.

Great was the anguish churning in his head
When he and she were piloted to bed;
He wallowed back and forth in desperate style.
His ancient wife lay smiling all the while;
At last she said, “Bless us! Is this, my dear,
How knights and wives get on together here?
Are these the laws of good King Arthur’s house?
Are knights of his all so contemptuous?
I am your own beloved and your wife,
And I am she, indeed, that saved your life;
And certainly I never did you wrong.
Then why, this first of nights, so sad a song?
You’re carrying on as if you were half-witted.
Say, for God’s love, what sin have I committed?
I’ll put things right if you will tell me how.”

“Put right?” he cried. “That never can be now!
Nothing can ever be put right again!
You’re old, and so abominably plain,
So poor to start with, so low-bred to follow;
It’s little wonder if I twist and wallow!
God, that my heart would burst within my breast!”

“Is that,” said she, “the cause of your unrest?”

“Yes, certainly,” he said, “and can you wonder?”

“I could set right what you suppose a blunder,
That’s if I cared to, in a day or two,
If I were shown more courtesy by you.
Just now,” she said, “you spoke of gentle birth,
Such as descends from ancient wealth and worth.
If that’s the claim you make for gentlemen
Such arrogance is hardly worth a hen.
Whoever loves to work for virtuous ends,
Public and private, and who most intends
To do what deeds of gentleness he can,
Take him to be the greatest gentleman.
Christ wills we take our gentleness from Him,
Not from a wealth of ancestry long dim,
Though they bequeath their whole establishment
By which we claim to be of high descent.

piloted: led. (In the Middle Ages, the wedding party typically escorted the bride and groom to their bedchamber).

wallowed (wól’ôd): rolled around; thrashed about.

bequeath (bî-kwêth’) v. to leave in a will; to pass down as an inheritance
Our fathers cannot make us a bequest
Of all those virtues that became them best
And earned for them the name of gentlemen,
But bade us follow them as best we can.

“Thus the wise poet of the Florentines,
Dante by name, has written in these lines,
For such is the opinion Dante launches:
‘Seldom arises by these slender branches
Prowess of men, for it is God, no less,
Wills us to claim of Him our gentleness.’
For of our parents nothing can we claim
Save temporal things, and these may hurt and maim.

“But everyone knows this as well as I;
For if gentility were implanted by
The natural course of lineage down the line,
Public or private, could it cease to shine
In doing the fair work of gentle deed?
No vice or villainy could then bear seed.

“Take fire and carry it to the darkest house
Between this kingdom and the Caucasus,
And shut the doors on it and leave it there,
It will burn on, and it will burn as fair
As if ten thousand men were there to see,
For fire will keep its nature and degree,
I can assure you, sir, until it dies.

“But gentleness, as you will recognize,
Is not annexed in nature to possessions.
Men fail in living up to their professions;
But fire never ceases to be fire.
God knows you'll often find, if you enquire,
Some lording full of villainy and shame.
If you would be esteemed for the mere name
Of having been by birth a gentleman
And stemming from some virtuous, noble clan,
And do not live yourself by gentle deed
Or take your father's noble code and creed,
You are no gentleman, though duke or earl.
Vice and bad manners are what make a churl.

“Gentility is only the renown
For bounty that your fathers handed down,
Quite foreign to your person, not your own;
Gentility must come from God alone.
That we are gentle comes to us by grace
And by no means is it bequeathed with place.

“Reflect how noble (says Valerius)
Was Tullius surnamed Hostilius,
Who rose from poverty to nobleness.
And read Boethius, Seneca no less,
Thus they express themselves and are agreed:
'Thing is he that does a gentle deed.'
And therefore, my dear husband, I conclude
That even if my ancestors were rude,
Yet God on high—and so I hope He will—
Can grant me grace to live in virtue still,
A gentlewoman only when beginning
To live in virtue and to shrink from sinning.

“As for my poverty which you reprove,
Almighty God Himself in whom we move,
Believe and have our being, chose a life
Of poverty, and every man or wife,
Nay, every child can see our Heavenly King
Would never stoop to choose a shameful thing.
No shame in poverty if the heart is gay,
As Seneca and all the learned say.
He who accepts his poverty unhurt
I’d say is rich although he lacked a shirt.
But truly poor are they who whine and fret
And covet what they cannot hope to get.
And he that, having nothing, covets not,
Is rich, though you may think he is a sot.

“True poverty can find a song to sing,
Juvenal says a pleasant little thing:
‘The poor can dance and sing in the relief
Of having nothing that will tempt a thief.’
Though it be hateful, poverty is good,
A great incentive to a livelihood,
And a great help to our capacity
For wisdom, if accepted patiently.
Poverty is, though wanting in estate,
A kind of wealth that none calumniate.
Poverty often, when the heart is lowly,
Brings one to God and teaches what is holy,
Gives knowledge of oneself and even lends
A glass by which to see one’s truest friends.
And since it’s no offense, let me be plain;
Do not rebuke my poverty again.

“Lastly you taxed me, sir, with being old.
Yet even if you never had been told
By ancient books, you gentlemen engage,
Yourselves in honor to respect old age.
To call an old man ‘father’ shows good breeding,
And this could be supported from my reading.

“You say I’m old and fouler than a fen.
You need not fear to be a cuckold, then.
Filth and old age, I’m sure you will agree,
Are powerful wardens over chastity.
Nevertheless, well knowing your delights,
I shall fulfil your worldly appetites.

“You have two choices; which one will you try?
To have me old and ugly till I die,
But still a loyal, true, and humble wife
That never will displease you all her life,
Or would you rather I were young and pretty
And chance your arm what happens in a city
Where friends will visit you because of me,
Yes, and in other places too, maybe.
Which would you have? The choice is all your own."

The knight thought long, and with a piteous groan
At last he said, with all the care in life,
“My lady and my love, my dearest wife,
I leave the matter to your wise decision.
You make the choice yourself, for the provision
Of what may be agreeable and rich
In honor to us both, I don’t care which;
Whatever pleases you suffices me.”

“And have I won the mastery?” said she,
“Since I’m to choose and rule as I think fit?”
“Certainly, wife,” he answered her, “that’s it.”
“Kiss me,” she cried. “No quarrels! On my oath
And word of honor, you shall find me both,
That is, both fair and faithful as a wife;
May I go howling mad and take my life
Unless I prove to be as good and true
As ever wife was since the world was new!
And if tomorrow when the sun’s above
I seem less fair than any lady-love,
Than any queen or empress east or west,
Do with my life and death as you think best.
Cast up the curtain, husband. Look at me!”

And when indeed the knight had looked to see,
Lo, she was young and lovely, rich in charms.
In ecstasy he caught her in his arms,
His heart went bathing in a bath of blisses
And melted in a hundred thousand kisses,
And she responded in the fullest measure
With all that could delight or give him pleasure.

So they lived ever after to the end
In perfect bliss; and may Christ Jesus send
Us husbands meek and young and fresh in bed,
And grace to overbid them when we wed.
And—Jesu hear my prayer!—cut short the lives
Of those who won’t be governed by their wives;
And all old, angry niggards of their pence,
God send them soon a very pestilence!
Comprehension

1. **Recall** Describe the knight's original sentence and his revised punishment.
2. **Recall** What agreement does the knight make with the old woman?
3. **Recall** What information does the old woman share with the knight?
4. **Summarize** In what ways does the relationship between the knight and the old woman change during the course of the story?

Literary Analysis

5. **Examine Narrator** In her tale, the Wife of Bath offers **direct statements** on the following subjects. Summarize each statement and then explain what each reveals about the Wife's personality.
   - friars (lines 39–56)
   - women's desires (lines 101–126)
   - marriage (lines 433–440)
6. **Analyze Structure** Review the chart you created as you read. Unlike other pilgrims, the Wife of Bath interrupts her story with various personal comments, anecdotes, and illustrative stories. What might she be trying to convey about herself with this additional information?
7. **Draw Conclusions** Do you think Chaucer's portrayal of the Wife of Bath shows that he had a good **understanding** of women? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
8. **Evaluate Plot** Review lines 404–432. Is the conclusion of the story satisfying or disturbing? In your response, consider the knight's crime and the outcome of his actions.
9. **Make Judgments** The enduring appeal of *The Canterbury Tales* stems in part from Chaucer's remarkable ability to match stories and storytellers. In what way is the Wife of Bath's unusual tale well-suited to her personality? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
10. **Compare Texts** Compare the tales of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath. Which character tells a better, more entertaining story? Use information from both tales to support your opinion.

Literary Criticism

11. **Social Context** Around 1185, Andreas Capellanus wrote *The Art of Courtly Love*. In this influential work, Capellanus states, “Love makes an ugly and rude person shine with all beauty, knows how to endow with nobility even one of humble birth, can even lend humility to the proud.” In what ways does “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” reflect Capellanus’s understanding of love and its transforming power?
Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
Indicate whether the following pairs of words are synonyms or antonyms. Check your answers in a dictionary.

1. bequeath/inherit
2. crone/maiden
3. implore/beseech
4. rebuke/praise
5. sovereignty/rule
6. temporal/eternal

VOCABULARY IN WRITING
Write a summary of the story that might appear in a reference work about famous English literature. Use at least three of the vocabulary words. Here is a sentence you might include in your summary.

EXAMPLE SENTENCE
The crone offered to help the knight on his quest if he promised to do what she asked.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT temp
The word temporal contains the root temp, from the Latin tempus, which means “time” or “a fixed period.” Something temporal exists in time and is not eternal. The same root is found in several other English words.

PRACTICE Explain the meaning of the boldfaced word in each sentence. Use your knowledge of the root temp and the context in which each word appears. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

1. The Italian author Giovanni Boccaccio was a contemporary of Geoffrey Chaucer’s, having also lived during the mid-1300s.
2. The audience surprised the violinist by requesting an extemporaneous performance.
3. Slow the tempo of the music so that I can learn the dance.
4. The tents offered temporary shelter until more permanent structures could be built.
5. She was able to temporize and thereby avoid a crisis.
Reading-Writing Connection

**WRITING PROMPT**

**CREATE A DIALOGUE** How might the other pilgrims have reacted to “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”? Write a dialogue in which at least two pilgrims, as well as the Wife of Bath herself, comment on the story and its message about men’s and women’s roles.

**SELF-CHECK**

A lively dialogue will . . .
- use language in keeping with the personalities of the pilgrims as portrayed in “The Prologue”
- present clear opinions about the story and its message
- include stage directions to describe a pilgrim’s tone of voice or body movements

**GRAMMAR AND STYLE**

**ADD DESCRIPTIVE DETAILS** Review the Grammar and Style note on page 155. Chaucer was a keen observer who often conveyed memorable details about characters through his use of similes.

Similes are figures of speech that use the prepositions *like* or *as* to make a comparison. In the passage below, Chaucer conjures up a striking, if not complimentary, image of the balding Pardoner.

*This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,*  
*Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.*  
*In driblets fell his locks behind his head*  
*Down to his shoulders which they overspread;*  
*Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.*  
(lines 695–699)

Notice how each of the highlighted prepositions is followed by a concrete visual image. These similes greatly enrich Chaucer’s descriptions because they allow readers to form a vivid mental picture of a character.

**PRACTICE** Write sentences modeled on Chaucer’s work.

**EXAMPLE**

There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;  
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.  
There was a puppy with him, it appeared;  
Striped like a skunk, which seemed very weird.

1. His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright  
As any star upon a frosty night.
2. His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.  
They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle.
Pilgrimages: Journeys of the Spirit

The *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories written as if they were told by pilgrims on their way to a holy site. The following selections describe what it was actually like to travel on a pilgrimage in Chaucer’s time and also reveal why this ancient tradition still thrives today. As you read, consider how the information in these selections enhances your understanding of the characters in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Skill Focus: Synthesize

Whenever you put together facts, ideas, and details from different sources to form your own understanding of a topic, you are synthesizing. You can usually gain deeper insight into a topic by synthesizing from several sources than by just reading one source.

Here is a process you can use to synthesize details about pilgrims and pilgrimages:

- Create a chart such as the one shown here.
- Skim through “The Prologue” of *The Canterbury Tales*, looking for information about pilgrims and pilgrimages. Add to the chart any information that would help you answer the questions provided.
- Read the selections that follow, and add any additional information about the topic to your chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>The Canterbury Tales</th>
<th>A Distant Mirror</th>
<th>&quot;In the Footsteps of the Faithful&quot;</th>
<th>&quot;Pilgrimage Sites&quot; Map</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What kinds of people go on pilgrimages?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Why do they go?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the journey like?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How does the pilgrimage affect them?</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Travel, “the mother of tidings,” brought news of the world to castle and village, town and countryside. The rutted roads, always either too dusty or too muddy, carried an endless flow of pilgrims and peddlers, merchants with their packtrains, bishops making visitations, tax-collectors and royal officials, friars and pardoners, wandering scholars, jongleurs and preachers, messengers and couriers who wove the network of communications from city to city. Great nobles like the Coucys, bankers, prelates, abbeys, courts of justice, town governments, kings and their councils employed their own messengers. The King of England at mid-century kept twelve on hand who accompanied him at all times, ready to start, and were paid 3d. a day when on the road and 4s. 8d. a year for shoes. . . .

The voyage from London to Lyon took about 18 days and from Canterbury to Rome about 30 days depending on the Channel crossing, which was unpredictable, often dangerous, sometimes fatal, and could take anywhere from three days to a month. One knight, Sir Hervé de Léon, was kept 15 days at sea by a storm and, besides having lost his horse overboard, arrived so battered and weakened “that he never had health thereafter.” It was no wonder that, according to a ballad, when pilgrims took to sea for the voyage to Compostella or beyond, “Theyr hertes begin to fayle.” . . .

Travelers stopped before nightfall, those of the nobility taking shelter in some nearby castle or monastery where they would be admitted indoors, while the mass of ordinary travelers on foot, including pilgrims, were housed and fed in a guest house outside the gate. They were entitled to one night’s lodging at any monastery and could not be turned away unless they asked for a second night. Inns were available to merchants and others, though they were likely to be crowded, squalid, and flea-ridden, with several beds to a room and two travelers to a bed—or three to a bed in Germany, according to the disgusted report of the poet Deschamps, who was sent there on a mission for the French King. Moreover, he complained, neither bed nor table had clean linen, the innkeeper offered no choice of foods, a traveler in the Empire could find nothing to drink but beer; fleas, rats, and mice were unavoidable, and the people of Bohemia lived like pigs.

Given the hardships and the length of time consumed, people journeyed over long distances to an astonishing degree—from Paris to Florence, from Flanders to Hungary, London to Prague, Bohemia to Castile, crossing seas, alps, and rivers, walking to China like Marco Polo or three times to Jerusalem like the Wife of Bath.
Many people today still go on pilgrimages, often walking for long distances along ancient routes. Canadian writer Taras Grescoe writes about his journey to one of the most famous European pilgrimage sites.

In the Footsteps of the Faithful

Taras Grescoe

little by little, the road to Santiago de Compostela was changing me. When I started off on the Camino Francés—a 1,200-year-old route across northern Spain to one of Catholicism’s holiest shrines—I was unprepared for the camaraderie this pilgrimage fosters. Since A.D. 813, when the bones of St. James the Apostle were discovered in a cave at the western tip of Galicia, devout pilgrims from all over Europe have tramped hundreds of miles across the snow-streaked Pyrenees and the sun-baked plains of Castile in a quest for absolution and spiritual growth. Beginning the walk in the French town of St. Jean-Pied-de-Port, I was part of this rare band of travelers for three weeks.

In the shade of eucalyptus forests and olive groves, over tuna sandwiches and chocolate bars, I heard stories by turns touching and inspiring. A young mother—a Danish athlete—was alternately carrying and pushing her two blond-haired infants over the mountain trails and switchbacks, a feat of almost superhuman endurance. A 60-year-old man in disintegrating sandals and with a long white beard paused just long enough to tell me he’d walked all the way from Rome, 40 miles a day. Next to a purling stream, I came across a pilgrim who’d lost his right leg and was being borne to Santiago on his trusty mare Lorena—named after his daughter, herself only recently recovered from leukemia.
The Camino Francés, which wends past storks on the chimney stacks of Rioja and seagulls on the moss-covered church spires of Galicia, is a crash course in medieval European history, with daily seminars in Romanesque architecture and the arcane iconography of the Knights Templar. I found myself walking on the original paving stones of Roman roads, staining my shoes on the red earth of the vineyards of Rioja, and losing my way in the fog of the Pyrenees. In a little town outside Logroño, I joined the queue at an unattended tap at a stone wall, from which Navarran red wine flowed free of charge, a local winery’s gift to passing pilgrims.

As I walked, materialism and concern about self-image fell by the wayside; I divested myself of guidebooks and excess clothing, and sought only to fill my belly with nourishing food and to find simple lodgings each evening. I learned to expect the warm westerly wind that crosses the land just before sunset, the cool tramontana from the north, and the afternoon breeze that sends iridescent ripples through the fields. I realized I’d never truly seen the world go by at this human pace, three miles an hour, hour after hour, day in, day out—nor understood that the quality of one’s travel experience is inversely proportional to the speed at which one travels.

I finally walked into Santiago in the midst of a record spring heat wave. Sweaty and unshaven, I approached the wildflower- and lichen-covered cathedral where the bones of St. James the Apostle rested—a fantastic barnacle-encrusted reef looming over waves of stone houses. As I strode up the last set of stairs before my goal, I was overwhelmed by a connection with all those who, over the ages, had risked losing home, family, and life to follow their faith to some marvelous shrine at the edge of the earth.

Step by step, the Camino had made me one of its own: a pilgrim.

Pilgrims stop to kneel along the main pilgrimage route from southwest France to Santiago de Compostela.
Medieval pilgrims visited holy sites throughout Europe and in parts of Asia. These sites continue to serve as important spiritual centers as well as popular tourist attractions.

SYNTHESIZE
Use the scale on the map to measure the distances between London and the pilgrimage sites, and notice the geographic features that a pilgrim would have to cross to reach these sites. How does the map enhance your understanding of what it was like to make a pilgrimage in Chaucer’s day?

- Reliquary: At many pilgrimage sites, relics (personal items or body parts of saints) are kept in containers called reliquaries.

- Stained Glass: In this French cathedral window, Saint Mary of Egypt is shown on a boat full of pilgrims bound for Jerusalem.

- Canterbury Cathedral: Located 55 miles from London, Canterbury Cathedral became an important pilgrimage site after Archbishop Thomas à Becket was murdered there in 1170.
Comprehension

1. **Recall** According to Barbara Tuchman, what was sea travel like in Chaucer’s day?

2. **Recall** During medieval times, how did the lodging offered to the nobility differ from the lodging available to members of other social classes?

3. **Clarify** How does Taras Grescoe feel about the slow pace of travel on a pilgrimage?

Critical Analysis

4. **Analyze Author’s Message** Reread lines 83–89 of “In the Footsteps of the Faithful.” What experiences have allowed Grescoe to form the connection he describes? Use details from the selection to support your answer.

5. **Synthesize Information from Graphic Aids** Examine the photographs on page 200. How do these images help you understand the appeal of going on a pilgrimage?

Read for Information: Draw Conclusions

**WRITING PROMPT**

In a paragraph, state and support a conclusion about one of the following topics:
- travel during Chaucer’s day
- the benefits of making a pilgrimage

To answer this prompt, you will need to pick your topic and follow these steps:

1. Gather information about your topic from the three selections as well as from “The Prologue” of *The Canterbury Tales*.

2. Consider the main ideas and information you have collected. Ask yourself what conclusion you can draw from them.

3. Present your conclusion in a topic sentence, and support it with ideas and information from the texts.
Themes Across Cultures

Federigo’s Falcon: Fifth Day, Ninth Story
from The Decameron
Tale by Giovanni Boccaccio

Giovanni Boccaccio
1313–1375

Writing at the end of the medieval period, Giovanni Boccaccio helped set a new direction for literature, focusing on the human condition rather than on spiritual matters. His masterpiece, The Decameron, a strikingly modern work, established the contemporary language of his day as a legitimate mode of literary expression. The work signaled a sharp break from medieval literary traditions and helped define the literary sensibilities that held sway throughout the Renaissance.

Some scholars speculate that Boccaccio’s Decameron influenced Geoffrey Chaucer in his writing of The Canterbury Tales. Although no direct evidence exists to support this view, there are notable similarities between the two collections. Both feature a frame story construction, a treasury of tales, and various sharply drawn characters. Moreover, both works contain adaptations of age-old narratives and literary forms that strongly appealed to their educated audiences. Most significantly, few literary texts celebrate humanity as freely and completely as The Decameron and The Canterbury Tales.

An Overbearing Father Giovanni Boccaccio grew up in Florence, Italy, and he began to write poetry when he was a child. His father frowned upon his son’s literary leanings, demanding that he forget about writing and learn business. While still a teenager, Boccaccio was sent to Naples, where he was apprenticed to a banker. When he failed at banking, his father arranged for him to study religious law. Boccaccio was unsuccessful at law, too, and after about 12 years in Naples, he returned home to seek other employment.

Fame Without Funds Because his father “strove to bend” his talent, Boccaccio complained that he was never able to reach his potential as a poet. Yet upon publication of The Decameron, he became something of a celebrity. In later years, he applied himself to more scholarly pursuits, producing a number of biographical and moralistic works. His literary and scholarly efforts never brought in much money, and he was nearly always in perilous financial straits. Eventually, he was reduced to earning a meager living by working as a scribe, painstakingly copying his own works and those of others. He died in 1375, temporarily out of favor in both Florence and Naples. It was not long, however, before his works gained renewed appreciation. His reputation has endured over many centuries, influencing later writers such as Shakespeare, Dryden, Keats, Longfellow, and Tennyson.

NOTABLE QUOTE
“I would much rather have a man who lacks money than money that lacks a man.”

FYI
Did you know that Giovanni Boccaccio . . .
• survived the Black Death when it struck Florence, Italy, in 1348?
• fell in love with a woman whom he called “Fiammetta,” or “little flame,” who inspired his early writing?

Author Online
For more on Giovanni Boccaccio, visit the Literature Center at ClassZone.com.
Literary Analysis: Plot Elements

Many stories in *The Decameron* are adaptations of medieval folk tales, fables, and anecdotes. Boccaccio would borrow from such simple narratives a basic plot, or series of related events. Often he transformed his source material by adding complications—problems that make a character’s struggle more difficult. In “Federigo’s Falcon,” for example, Boccaccio introduces his main character, Federigo, in the following way:

As often happens to most men of gentle breeding, he fell in love, with a noble lady named Monna Giovanna. . . . [Yet] he lost his wealth and was reduced to poverty, . . .

Boccaccio presents Federigo as a traditional romantic hero who seeks the love of a well-born woman. However, he quickly adds a complication to this situation—Federigo’s loss of wealth. As you read the selection, notice how Boccaccio builds toward a surprising and powerful climax, or turning point, through complications in the story’s plot.

Reading Skill: Analyze Cause and Effect

In a well-crafted story, events are often related by cause and effect. The cause is an event that directly results in another event, which is the effect. Analyzing cause-and-effect relationships can help you better understand a story’s plot and its complications. As you read “Federigo’s Falcon,” keep track of examples of cause and effect by making a diagram like the one shown.

Vocabulary in Context

These boldfaced vocabulary words are key to understanding Boccaccio’s tale about love and its sacrifices. Restate each phrase, substituting a different word for the boldfaced term.

1. act with tact and discretion
2. deign to help a lowly peasant
3. behave with presumption
4. compel me to do my duty
5. offer consolation for your loss

Explore the Key Idea

What would you sacrifice for love?

Key Idea

Love is a powerful emotion—one for which some people are prepared to make a great sacrifice. “Federigo’s Falcon” is a tale of a nobleman’s idealized love for a woman and the lengths to which he goes to win her affection.

Discuss

With a partner, list examples of sacrifices for love that you have heard of, read about, or seen in television shows or movies. Discuss the results of these sacrifices. Which examples do you find reasonable? Which examples seem extreme? Compare your conclusions with those of other groups.

Examples of Sacrifices for Love

1. Romeo gives up his family, his honor, and finally his life because of his love for Juliet.
2.
3.
Filomena had already finished speaking, and when the Queen saw there was no one left to speak except for Dioneo, who was exempted because of his special privilege, she herself with a cheerful face said:

It is now my turn to tell a story and, dearest ladies, I shall do so most willingly with a tale similar in some respects to the preceding one, its purpose being not only to show you how much power your beauty has over the gentle heart, but also so that you yourselves may learn, whenever it is fitting, to be the donors of your favors instead of always leaving this act to the whim of Fortune, who, as it happens, on most occasions bestows such favors with more abundance than discretion.

You should know, then, that Coppo di Borghese Domenichi, who once lived in our city and perhaps still does, a man of great and respected authority in our times, one most illustrious and worthy of eternal fame both for his way of life and his ability much more than for the nobility of his blood, often took delight, when he was an old man, in discussing things from the past with his neighbors and with others. He knew how to do this well, for he was more logical and had a better memory and a more eloquent style of speaking than any other man. Among the many beautiful tales he told, there was one he would often tell about a young man who once lived in Florence named Federigo, the son of Messer Filippo Alberighi, renowned above all other men in Tuscany for his prowess in arms and for his courtliness.

1. Dioneo (dī’ō-nā’ō).
2. Fortune: a personification of the power that supposedly distributes good and bad luck to people.
As often happens to most men of gentle breeding, he fell in love, with a noble lady named Monna Giovanna, in her day considered to be one of the most beautiful and most charming ladies that ever there was in Florence; and in order to win her love, he participated in jousts and tournaments, organized and gave banquets, spending his money without restraint; but she, no less virtuous than beautiful, cared little for these things he did on her behalf, nor did she care for the one who did them. Now, as Federigo was spending far beyond his means and getting nowhere, as can easily happen, he lost his wealth and was reduced to poverty, and was left with nothing to his name but his little farm (from whose revenues he lived very meagerly) and one falcon, which was among the finest of its kind in the world.

More in love than ever, but knowing that he would never be able to live the way he wished to in the city, he went to live at Campi, where his farm was. There he passed his time hawking whenever he could, imposing on no one, and enduring his poverty patiently. Now one day, during the time that Federigo was reduced to these extremes, it happened that the husband of Monna Giovanna fell ill, and realizing death was near, he made his last will: he was very rich, and he left everything to his son, who was just growing up, and since he had also loved Monna Giovanna very much, he made her his heir should his son die without any legitimate children; and then he died.

Monna Giovanna was now a widow, and every summer, as our women usually do, she would go to the country with her son to one of their estates very close by to Federigo’s farm. Now this young boy of hers happened to become more and more friendly with Federigo and he began to enjoy birds and dogs; and after seeing Federigo’s falcon fly many times, it made him so happy that he very much wished it were his own, but he did not dare to ask for it, for he could see how precious it was to Federigo. During this time, it happened that the young boy took ill, and his mother was much grieved, for he was her only child and she loved him dearly; she would spend the entire day by his side, never ceasing to comfort him, asking him time and again if there was anything he wished, begging him to tell her what it might be, for if it was possible to obtain it, she would certainly do everything in her power to get it. After the young boy had heard her make this offer many times, he said:

“Mother, if you can arrange for me to have Federigo’s falcon, I think I would get well quickly.”

When the lady heard this, she was taken aback for a moment, and then she began thinking what she could do about it. She knew that Federigo had been in love with her for some time now, but she had never deigned to give him a second look; so, she said to herself:

deign (dān) v. to consider worthy of one’s dignity; to condescend

5. jousts and tournaments: competitions in which knights displayed their skill in combat.

6. he went ... hawking: He went to live in a town called Campi (kāmp’ē) in Tuscany, where he passed his time hunting with falcons, birds of prey trained to capture and retrieve small animals.
“How can I go to him, or even send someone, and ask for this falcon of his, which is, as I have heard tell, the finest that ever flew, and furthermore, his only means of support? And how can I be so insensitive as to wish to take away from this nobleman the only pleasure which is left to him?”

And involved in these thoughts, knowing that she was certain to have the bird if she asked for it, but not knowing what to say to her son, she stood there without answering him. Finally the love she bore her son persuaded her that she should make him happy, and no matter what the consequences might be, she would not send for the bird, but rather go herself to fetch it and bring it back to him; so she answered her son:

“My son, cheer up and think only of getting well, for I promise you that first thing tomorrow morning I shall go and fetch it for you.”

The child was so happy that he showed some improvement that very day. The following morning, the lady, accompanied by another woman, as if they were out for a stroll, went to Federigo’s modest little house and asked for him. Since the weather for the past few days had not been right for hawking, Federigo happened to be in his orchard attending to certain tasks, and when he heard that Monna Giovanna was asking for him at the door, he was so surprised and happy that he rushed there; as she saw him coming, she rose to greet him with womanly grace, and once Federigo had welcomed her most courteously, she said:

“How do you do, Federigo?” Then she continued, “I have come to make amends for the harm you have suffered on my account by loving me more than you should have, and in token of this, I intend to have a simple meal with you and this companion of mine this very day.”

To this Federigo humbly replied: “Madonna, I have no recollection of ever suffering any harm because of you; on the contrary: so much good have I received from you that if ever I was worth anything, it was because of your worth and the love I bore for you; and your generous visit is certainly so very dear to me that I would spend all over again all that I spent in the past, but you have come to a poor host.”

And having said this, he humbly led her through the house and into his garden, and because he had no one there to keep her company, he said:

“My lady, since there is no one else, this good woman, who is the wife of the farmer here, will keep you company while I see to the table.”

Though he was very poor, Federigo until now had never realized to what extent he had wasted his wealth; but this morning, the fact that he had nothing in the house with which he could honor the lady for the love of whom he had in the past entertained countless people, gave him cause to reflect: in great anguish, he cursed himself and his fortune, and like someone out of his senses he started running here and there throughout the house, but unable to find either money or anything he might be able to pawn, and since it was getting late and he was still very much set on serving this noble lady some sort of meal, but unwilling to turn for help to

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7. **Madonna:** Italian for “my lady,” a polite form of address used in speaking to a married woman. “Monna” is a contraction of this term.
even his own farmer (not to mention anyone else), he set his eyes upon his good falcon, which was sitting on its perch in a small room, and since he had nowhere else to turn, he took the bird, and finding it plump, he decided that it would be a worthy food for such a lady. So, without giving the matter a second thought, he wrung its neck and quickly gave it to his servant girl to pluck, prepare, and place on a spit to be roasted with care; and when he had set the table with the whitest of tablecloths (a few of which he still had left), he returned, with a cheerful face, to the lady in his garden and announced that the meal, such as he was able to prepare, was ready.

The lady and her companion rose and went to the table together with Federigo, who waited upon them with the greatest devotion, and they ate the good falcon without knowing what it was they were eating. Then, having left the table and spent some time in pleasant conversation, the lady thought it time now to say what she had come to say, and so she spoke these kind words to Federigo:

“Federigo, if you recall your former way of life and my virtue, which you perhaps mistook for harshness and cruelty, I have no doubt at all that you will be amazed by my presumption when you hear what my main reason for coming here is; but if you had children, through whom you might have experienced the power of parental love, I feel certain that you would, at least in part, forgive me. But, just as you have no child, I do have one, and I cannot escape the laws common to all mothers; the force of such laws compels me to follow them, against my own will and against good manners and duty, and to ask of you a gift which I know is most precious to you; and it is naturally so, since your extreme condition has left you no other delight, no other pleasure, no other consolation; and this gift is your falcon, which my son is so taken by that if I do not bring it to him, I fear his sickness will grow so much worse that I may lose him. And therefore I beg you, not because of the love that you bear for me, which does not oblige you in the least, but because of your own nobleness, which you have shown to be greater than that of all others in practicing courtliness, that you be pleased to give it to me, so that I may say that I have saved the life of my son by means of this gift, and because of it I have placed him in your debt forever.”

When he heard what the lady requested and knew that he could not oblige her because he had given her the falcon to eat, Federigo began to weep in her presence, for he could not utter a word in reply. The lady at first thought his tears were caused more by the sorrow of having to part with the good falcon than by anything else, and she was on the verge of telling him she no longer wished it, but she held back and waited for Federigo’s reply once he stopped weeping. And he said:

“My lady, ever since it pleased God for me to place my love in you, I have felt that Fortune has been hostile to me in many ways, and I have complained of her, but all this is nothing compared to what she has just done to me, and I shall never be at peace with her again, when I think how you have come here to my poor home, where, when it was rich, you never deigned to come, and how you requested but a small gift, and Fortune worked to make it impossible for me to give it to you; and why this is so I shall tell you in a few words. When I heard that
you, out of your kindness, wished to dine with me, I considered it only fitting and proper, taking into account your excellence and your worthiness, that I should honor you, according to my possibilities, with a more precious food than that which I usually serve to other people. So I thought of the falcon for which you have just asked me and of its value and I judged it a food worthy of you, and this very day I had it roasted and served to you as best I could. But seeing now that you desired it another way, my sorrow in not being able to serve you is so great that never shall I be able to console myself again.”

And after he had said this, he laid the feathers, the feet, and the beak of the bird before her as proof. When the lady heard and saw this, she first reproached him for having killed a falcon such as this to serve as a meal to a woman. But then to herself she commended the greatness of his spirit, which no poverty was able, or would be able, to diminish; then, having lost all hope of getting the falcon and thus, perhaps, of improving the health of her son, she thanked Federigo both for the honor paid to her and for his good intentions, and then left in grief to return to her son. To his mother’s extreme sorrow, whether in disappointment in not having the falcon or because his illness inevitably led to it, the boy passed from this life only a few days later.

After the period of her mourning and her bitterness had passed, the lady was repeatedly urged by her brothers to remarry, since she was very rich and still young; and although she did not wish to do so, they became so insistent that remembering the worthiness of Federigo and his last act of generosity—that is, to have killed such a falcon to do her honor—she said to her brothers:

“I would prefer to remain a widow, if only that would be pleasing to you, but since you wish me to take a husband, you may be sure that I shall take no man other than Federigo degli Alberighi.”

In answer to this, her brothers, making fun of her, replied:

“You foolish woman, what are you saying? How can you want him? He hasn’t a penny to his name.”

To this she replied: “My brothers, I am well aware of what you say, but I would much rather have a man who lacks money than money that lacks a man.”

Her brothers, seeing that she was determined and knowing Federigo to be of noble birth, no matter how poor he was, accepted her wishes and gave her with all her riches in marriage to him; when he found himself the husband of such a great lady, whom he had loved so much and who was so wealthy besides, he managed his financial affairs with more prudence than in the past and lived with her happily the rest of his days.

Translated by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella

8.  degli (dël’ yō): Italian for “of the”; used in names as a sign of noble birth.
Comprehension

1. **Recall**  How does Federigo lose his fortune?

2. **Clarify**  Why does Monna Giovanna want Federigo’s falcon?

3. **Summarize**  Describe the events that take place during Monna Giovanna’s visit to Federigo.

Literary Analysis

4. **Examine Cause and Effect**  Review the cause-and-effect diagram you created as you read the selection. What does the story’s sequence of events suggest about the relationship between Federigo and Monna Giovanna? Use details from the story to support your answer.

5. **Understand Plot Elements**  What specific complications arise from Federigo’s feelings of love? In your response, consider how the story might be different if Federigo were less ardent and his sacrifices were fewer.

6. **Draw Conclusions About Character**  Describe Monna Giovanna’s behavior in each of the following scenes. Do you think that she is a virtuous or a vain character?

   • her response to Federigo’s lavish spending (lines 21–27)
   • the promise she makes to her son (lines 54–71)
   • her visit to Federigo’s house (lines 110–131)
   • her decision to marry Federigo (lines 168–175)

7. **Analyze Situational Irony**  In literature, situational irony occurs when a reader or character expects one thing to happen but something entirely different occurs. Explain the situational irony in lines 153–162. In what way does this scene add depth and realism to the story?

8. **Compare Texts**  Money plays an important role in both “Federigo’s Falcon” and Chaucer’s “The Pardoner’s Tale” (page 169). Compare Federigo’s attitude toward money with that of the “three rioters” in Chaucer’s tale. What do the characters’ reactions reveal about their personalities?

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations**  According to lecturer and author Walter Raleigh, “The secret of Boccaccio is no hidden talisman; it is the secret of air and light. A brilliant sunshine inundates and glorifies his tales. The scene in which they are laid is as wide and well-ventilated as the world. The spirit which inspires them is an absolute humanity, unashamed and unafraid.” How does this opinion apply to “Federigo’s Falcon”? Cite evidence from the story to support your response.
Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
Identify the antonym of the boldfaced vocabulary word.

1. **compel**: (a) instigate, (b) fascinate, (c) prevent
2. **consolation**: (a) irritation, (b) derivation, (c) comfort
3. **deign**: (a) esteem, (b) intrude, (c) condescend
4. **discretion**: (a) tactfulness, (b) recklessness, (c) strength
5. **presumption**: (a) assumption, (b) impudence, (c) timidity

VOCABULARY IN WRITING
Imagine the discussion that might have taken place among those who listened to the queen tell Federigo’s story. Write a portion of that discussion, using at least two of the vocabulary words. Here is a sentence you might include.

**EXAMPLE SENTENCE**
“For Federigo, marrying Monna Giovanna was more than **consolation** for the loss of his falcon,” said Filomena.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE LATIN ROOT *pel*

The vocabulary word **compel** contains the root *pel*, from the Latin *pellere*, which means “to drive or force.” The same root, often spelled *pell*, is found in several other English words. To understand their meaning, consider the meaning of the root as well as the context in which the word appears.

**PRACTICE** Explain the meaning of the boldfaced word in each sentence. Use your knowledge of the root *pel* and the context in which each word appears. Consult a dictionary if necessary.

1. We tried to **dispel** the rumor before more people heard it.
2. The school will **expel** any student who steals from the library.
3. The predictions of a storm **impel** me to change my plans.
4. The speed of the rollercoaster **propelled** me forward.
5. She sprayed on insect **repellent** to keep mosquitoes away.

**WORD LIST**
- compel
- consolation
- deign
- discretion
- presumption

**PRO**

**PEL**

**EXPEL**

**REPELLENT**

**PRACTICE** For more practice, go to the Vocabulary Center at ClassZone.com.
Ballads

Throughout history, life’s tragedies and comedies—real and fictional—have been depicted in song. Narrative songs called ballads were popular in England and Scotland during the medieval period, particularly among the common people, many of whom could not read or write. The best of the early ballads were transferred orally from one generation to the next. Stories often changed in the retelling, sometimes resulting in dozens of versions of the same ballad.

Popular Entertainment In the Middle Ages, just as today, audiences craved dramatic—even sensational—stories. Typical subjects of ballads included tragic love, domestic conflicts, disastrous wars and shipwrecks, sensational crimes, and the exploits of enterprising outlaws. Later ballads celebrated historical events and romantic heroes of an earlier chivalrous age. Revenge, rebellion, envy, betrayal, and superstition all found thematic expression in the ballad.

Unknown Authorship The ballad genre is thought to be nearly 1,000 years old, with the earliest known ballad dating from about 1300. Because ballads were not written down until the 18th century, early ballads are all anonymous—the names of their composers lost forever in the mists of time.

The Legacy of “Barbara Allan” When waves of English, Irish, and Scottish immigrants settled in the New World during the 18th and 19th centuries, they brought many traditions, including their beloved ballads. Over time, some examples have proven consistently popular, becoming part of the American folk heritage. Among these enduring ballads is “Barbara Allan.” In the 19th century, a young Abraham Lincoln reportedly knew and sang this tale of unrequited love. Much later, during the 1920s and 1930s, famed country singer Bradley Kincaid featured it on his radio broadcasts from Chicago and Boston. In the 1960s, there was a great resurgence of interest in folk music, particularly in ballads. Singers and political activists Bob Dylan and Joan Baez both recorded the legendary song to wide acclaim. Over the years, countless variations of “Barbara Allan” have been discovered in the United States, with roughly 100 variations observed in Virginia alone. Indeed, scholars believe that “Barbara Allan” is the most widespread folk song in the English language.
Poetic Form: Ballad

Early English and Scottish ballads are stories told in song, using the language of common people. These ballads were composed orally and passed on to subsequent generations through numerous retellings. The three ballads in this lesson are written versions of folk songs that date back centuries. Like works of fiction, ballads have characters and settings. Most examples also include certain conventions, such as
- tragic or sensational subject matter
- a simple plot involving a single incident
- dialogue

Additionally, ballads usually feature four-line stanzas, or quatrains, with rhyming second and fourth lines. The lines are heavily accented, and the stanzas contain repetition of words, phrases, and ideas. In the following example from “Barbara Allan,” observe how the patterns of rhyme and repetition help make the lines musically appealing and easy to remember:

O slowly, slowly rase she up,
To the place where he was lyin',
And when she drew the curtain by,
"Young man, I think you're dyin'."

As you read the ballads, note what each reveals about this age-old poetic form and how each reflects medieval values.

Reading Strategy: Reading Ballads

In the ballads you are about to read, certain words of Scottish dialect appear—rase and twa, for example. To help you understand the poems, including examples of dialect, follow these steps:

- Read each ballad through once, using the notes to help you decipher dialect and other difficult passages.
- Paraphrase each stanza as you read, to make sure you understand what is happening in the story.
- Read the ballad again without referring to the notes.
- Read the ballad aloud, allowing the sounds of the words to help you appreciate the texture of the poems.

As you read, note which strategies you find most useful in helping you understand the ballads.

Explore the Key Idea

Why tell stories in song?

Key Idea From time to time, you’ve probably been infected by an “earworm”—a song that gets stuck in your head and plays over and over and over until you want to scream. Although a nuisance, earworms illustrate what a potent combination rhyme, melody, and lyrics can be—something that no doubt helped ensure the survival of ballads over the centuries.

Quickwrite Think of a popular song, radio commercial jingle, or song you remember from your childhood for which you know all or most of the words. Write it down and analyze the elements that make the song so memorable.
It was in and about the Martinmas time,
When the green leaves were a-fallin';
That Sir John Graeme in the West Country
Fell in love with Barbara Allan.

He sent his man down through the town
To the place where she was dwellin':
"O haste and come to my master dear,
Gin ye be Barbara Allan."

O slowly, slowly rase she up,
To the place where he was lyin',
And when she drew the curtain by:
"Young man, I think you're dyin'."

"O it’s I’m sick, and very, very sick,
And 'tis a' for Barbara Allan."

"O the better for me ye sal never be,
Though your heart’s blood were a-spillin'.

"O dinna ye mind, young man," said she,
“When ye the cups were fillin',
That ye made the healths gae round and round,
And slighted Barbara Allan?”

1 Martinmas: November 11 (St. Martin’s Day).
8 Gin (gin): if.
9 rase (rază): rose.
15 sal: shall.
17 dinna ye mind: don’t you remember.
19–20 made . . . Allan: made toasts (drinking to people’s health) but failed to toast Barbara Allan.
He turned his face unto the wall,  
   And death with him was dealin':  
“Adieu, adieu, my dear friends all,  
   And be kind to Barbara Allan.”

25 And slowly, slowly, rase she up,  
   And slowly, slowly left him;  
And sighing said she could not stay,  
   Since death of life had reft him.

She had not gane a mile but twa,  
   When she heard the dead-bell knellin’,  
And every jow that the dead-bell ga’ed  
   It cried, “Woe to Barbara Allan!”

“O mother, mother, make my bed,  
   O make it soft and narrow:  
Since my love died for me today,  
   I’ll die for him tomorrow.”

ANALYZE VISUALS
Notice the lighting and colors in this photograph. What mood do they help convey? Explain.

23 Adieu: goodbye.

25 reft: deprived.

29 gane (gān): gone; twa: two.

30 dead-bell: a church bell rung to announce a person’s death.

31 jow (jou): stroke; ga’ed: gave.

A READING BALLADS
Reread lines 25–32. Which words capture the Scottish dialect, or regional language? Explain the strategies you used to understand these words.
There are twelve months in all the year,
As I hear many men say,
But the merriest month in all the year
Is the merry month of May.

5 Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,
   With a link-a-down and a-day,
And there he met a silly old woman,
   Was weeping on the way.

“What news? what news, thou silly old woman?
   What news hast thou for me?”
Said she, “There’s three squires in Nottingham town,
   Today is condemned to dee.”

“Oh have they parishes burnt?” he said,
   “Or have they ministers slain?
Or have they robbed any virgin,
   Or with other men’s wives have lain?”

“They have no parishes burnt, good sir,”
   Nor yet have ministers slain,
Nor have they robbed any virgin,
   Nor with other men’s wives have lain.”

“Oh what have they done?” said bold Robin Hood,
   “I pray thee tell to me.”
“It’s for slaying of the king’s fallow deer,
   Bearing their longbows with thee.”

Paraphrase lines 21–24. Why have the three squires been condemned to die?
“Dost thou not mind, old woman,” he said,  
“Since thou made me sup and dine?  
By the truth of my body,” quoth bold Robin Hood,  
“You could not tell it in better time.”

Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,  
*With a link-a-down and a-day,*  
And there he met with a silly old palmer,  
Was walking along the highway.

“What news? what news, thou silly old man?  
What news, I do thee pray?”
35 Said he, “Three squires in Nottingham town  
Are condemned to die this day.”

“Come change thine apparel with me, old man,  
Come change thine apparel for mine.  
Here is forty shillings in good silver,  
Go drink it in beer or wine.”

“O thine apparel is good,” he said,  
“And mine is ragged and torn.  
Wherever you go, wherever you ride,  
Laugh ne’er an old man to scorn.”
45 “Come change thine apparel with me, old churl,
   Come change thine apparel with mine:
Here are twenty pieces of good broad gold,
   Go feast thy brethren with wine.”

Then he put on the old man’s hat,
   It stood full high on the crown:
“The first bold bargain that I come at,
   It shall make thee come down.”

Then he put on the old man’s cloak,
   Was patched black, blue, and red:
He thought it no shame all the day long
   To wear the bags of bread.

Then he put on the old man’s breeks,
   Was patched from ballup to side:
“By the truth of my body,” bold Robin can say,
   “This man loved little pride.”

Then he put on the old man’s hose,
   Were patched from knee to wrist:
“By the truth of my body,” said bold Robin Hood,
   “I’d laugh if I had any list.”

Then he put on the old man’s shoes,
   Were patched both beneath and aboon:
Then Robin Hood swore a solemn oath,
   “It’s good habit that makes a man.”

Now Robin Hood is to Nottingham gone,
   With a link-a-down and a-down,
And there he met with the proud sheriff,
   Was walking along the town.

“O Christ you save, O sheriff,” he said,
   “O Christ you save and see:
And what will you give to a silly old man
   Today will your hangman be?”

“Some suits, some suits,” the sheriff he said,
   “Some suits I’ll give to thee;
Some suits, some suits, and pence thirteen,
   Today’s a hangman’s fee.”

Identify patterns of repetition and rhyme in lines 33–48. In what ways do these sound devices help you understand Robin’s exchange with the old man?

57–58 breeks . . . side: trousers reaching to just below the knees, patched from the center to the side.

61 hose: tight-fitting outer garment.

64 list: wish to do so.

66 aboon: above.

68 habit: clothing.

73 O Christ you save: A respectful greeting meaning “God save you” or “God be with you.”

79 pence thirteen: thirteen pennies.
Then Robin he turns him round about,
And jumps from stock to stone:
“By the truth of my body,” the sheriff he said,
“That’s well jumped, thou nimble old man.”

“I was ne’er a hangman in all my life,
Nor yet intends to trade.
But cursed be he,” said bold Robin,
“That first a hangman was made.

“I’ve a bag for meal, and a bag for malt,
And a bag for barley and corn,
A bag for bread, and a bag for beef,
And a bag for my little small horn.

“I have a horn in my pocket:
I got it from Robin Hood;
And still when I set it to my mouth,
For thee it blows little good.”

“O wind thy horn, thou proud fellow:
Of thee I have no doubt;
I wish that thou give such a blast
Till both thy eyes fall out.”

The first loud blast that he did blow,
He blew both loud and shrill,
A hundred and fifty of Robin Hood’s men
Came riding over the hill.

The next loud blast that he did give,
He blew both loud and amain,
And quickly sixty of Robin Hood’s men
Came shining over the plain.

“O who are those,” the sheriff he said,
“Come tripping over the lea?”
“They’re my attendants,” brave Robin did say,
“They’ll pay a visit to thee.”

They took the gallows from the slack,
They set it in the glen;
They hanged the proud sheriff on that,
Released their own three men.
It fell about the Martinmas time,
   And a gay time it was then,
When our goodwife got puddings to make,
   And she’s boild them in the pan.

The wind sae cauld blew south and north,
   And blew into the floor;
Quoth our goodman to our goodwife,
   “Gae out and bar the door.”

“My hand is in my hussyfskap,
   Goodman, as ye may see;
An it should nae be barrd this hundred year,
   It’s no be barrd for me.”

They made a paction tween them twa,
   They made it firm and sure,
That the first word whae’er should speak,
   Should rise and bar the door.

Then by there came two gentlemen,
   At twelve o’clock at night,
And they could neither see house nor hall,
   Nor coal nor candle-light.

“Now whether is this a rich man’s house,
   Or whether is it a poor?”

1  fell…time: happened around St. Martin’s Day, November 11.
2  goodwife…make: mistress of the household had sausages to make.
3  sae cauld: so cold.
4  Quoth (kwôth)…goodwife: This husband said to his wife.
5  Gae…door: Go out and use the bar to fasten the door shut.
6  hussyfskap: household chores.
7  An…me: If it should not be barred for a hundred years, it shall still not be barred by me.
8  paction…twa: agreement between the two of them.
9  whae’er shoud: whoever should.
But ne’er a word wad a’ them speak,
For barring of the door.
And first they ate the white puddings,
And then they ate the black;
Tho muckle thought the goodwife to hersel,
Yet ne’er a word she spake.

Then said the one unto the other,
“Here, man, tak ye my knife;
Do ye tak aff the auld man’s beard,
And I’ll kiss the goodwife.”

“But there’s nae water in the house,
And what shall we do than?”
“What ails ye at the pudding-broo,
That boils into the pan?”

O up then started our goodman,
An angry man was he:
“Will ye kiss my wife before my een,
And scad me wi’ pudding-bree?”

Then up and started our goodwife,
Gied three skips on the floor:
“Goodman, you’ve spoken the foremost word,
Get up and bar the door.”

---

27 muckle: a great deal.
28 spake: spoke.
31 tak . . . beard: take off the old man’s beard.
35–36 What . . . pan?: What’s wrong with using the broth the puddings are boiling in?
40 scad: scald; bree: broth.

BALLAD
What might account for the enduring popularity of “Get Up and Bar the Door”? Consider the ballad’s subject matter, dialogue, and musical qualities in your response.
After Reading

Comprehension

1. Recall Why does Barbara Allan want to die?

2. Summarize What specific steps does Robin Hood take to rescue the three squires from execution?

3. Clarify In “Get Up and Bar the Door,” what do the couple argue about?

Literary Analysis

4. Draw Conclusions About Characters What does each of the following events suggest about the relationship between Barbara Allan and Sir John Graeme?

- his request to see her (lines 1–8)
- the reason for his illness (lines 13–14)
- her statement “I’ll die for him tomorrow” (line 36)

5. Make Inferences Poaching, the killing of a king’s game, was punishable by death, even though poaching was often the only way common people could get meat. In “Robin Hood and the Three Squires,” what can you infer is Robin’s motive for helping the men accused of this crime?

6. Analyze Dialect Dialect often provides clues about a poem’s setting, or location and era. How does dialect help establish the setting of “Get Up and Bar the Door”? Cite evidence to support your ideas.

7. Analyze Ballad Form Select one of the three ballads in the lesson. For each poetic convention listed here, provide an example from the ballad. In what ways do the ballad’s repetition and regular rhyme help make its story memorable and entertaining?

- tragic or sensational subject matter
- a simple plot
- dialogue

- repetition
- regular rhyme/meter

8. Evaluate Strategies Review the strategies for reading ballads listed on page 213. Which reading strategy did you find most useful in helping you understand the ballads? Offer specific examples to support your answer.

Literary Criticism

Medieval Life and Times

Centuries after they were written, the colorful, dramatic tales of Chaucer and the lilting medieval ballads continue to entertain modern readers. These lively stories also provide insight into the culture of the Middle Ages. Medieval Europeans lived in a world vastly different from the secular, scientifically ordered world we know today. Consider Chaucer’s description of a doctor.

“A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded; No one alive could talk as well as he did On points of medicine and of surgery, For, being grounded in astronomy, He watched his patient closely for the hours When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers of favorable planets, then ascendent, Work on the images for his dependant.”

Can you imagine a trip to the hospital in which your doctor analyzed your horoscope? It was not only in matters of science but also in courtship, communities, religion, and daily life that the Middle Ages differed so wildly from our own contemporary age.

Writing to Analyze

Of the selections found on pages 140–221, choose three and analyze what they reveal about medieval life—not just how people looked and acted but what they believed and valued.

Consider

- the conflicts faced by the characters, as well as their goals and motivations
- the physical descriptions of the characters, their professions, their behavior, and any direct commentary on their values
- details about the communities in which they lived
- the tone displayed in the selections, and in particular the sense of humor
The Gawain Poet

The Gawain Poet’s rich imagination and skill with language have earned him recognition as one of the greatest medieval English poets. Yet his identity remains unknown. Scholars can only speculate on what the background of the Gawain Poet (as he is known) may have been.

Provincial Genius The Gawain Poet’s descriptions and language suggest that he wrote the poem during the second half of the 14th century, which would have made him a contemporary of Chaucer’s. His dialect, however, indicates that, unlike Chaucer, he was not a Londoner but probably lived somewhere in the northwestern part of England.

The only surviving early manuscript of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, produced by an anonymous copyist around 1400, also contains three religious poems—Pearl, Purity, and Patience—that are believed to be the work of the Gawain Poet. The manuscript also includes a dozen rough illustrations of the four poems, though it is impossible to verify who created the images for this manuscript. Because *Pearl* is the most technically brilliant of the four poems, the Gawain Poet is sometimes also called the Pearl Poet.

A Man for All Seasons The Gawain Poet’s works reveal that he was widely read in French and Latin and had some knowledge of law and theology. Although he was familiar with many details of medieval aristocratic life, his descriptions and metaphors also show a love of the countryside and rural life.

The Ideal Knight In the person of Sir Gawain—a nephew of the legendary King Arthur—the Gawain Poet portrays the ideals medieval knights would have striven to meet. Although real knights were far from perfect, legendary knights such as Sir Gawain dutifully obeyed a code of chivalry that represented a combination of Christian and military ideals, including faith, modesty, loyalty, courtesy, bravery, and honor.

Perhaps the most important virtue for a knight in the age of chivalry was what the Gawain Poet calls *trawthe*, a Middle English word translated variously as “truth,” “devotion,” and “fidelity.” *Trawthe* meant not only keeping one’s word but also remaining faithful to the vows taken at the ceremony of knighthood, which included both secular and religious chivalric responsibilities.
LITERARY ANALYSIS: MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

A medieval romance is a verse or prose narrative that usually involves adventurous heroes, idealized love, exotic places, and supernatural events. Romances first appeared in France during the 12th century, and they soon spread to England. Many of the best-known romances celebrate the legendary King Arthur and his knights, who often risk their lives for the love of a noble lady or to uphold the code of behavior known as chivalry. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is considered one of the finest Arthurian romances. As you read, look for these characteristics of romance:

- idealized or larger-than-life characters
- a hero motivated by love, faith, honor, or adventurousness
- exotic settings and supernatural or magical elements
- hidden or mistaken identity

**Review: Character Traits**

READING SKILL: MAKE INFERENCES

When you make inferences, you are making logical guesses about a text or character based on your own experience and the evidence or clues you find in the text. Making inferences is sometimes called “reading between the lines” because you come to an understanding of something in a story or poem that the author has not explicitly stated. For example, we can infer from the following lines that Arthur and his knights may be frightened by the Green Knight’s challenge:

*If they were like stone before, they were stiller now,*
*Every last lord in the hall, both the high and the low;*

As you read the excerpt from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, pay close attention to the Gawain Poet’s descriptions of the characters and settings. Record your inferences about the story in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details from the Text</th>
<th>Inferences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;And over his breast hung a beard as big as a bush&quot;</td>
<td>There’s something wild and uncivilized about the Green Knight.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Explore the Key Idea**

Is HONOR worth dying for?

**KEY IDEA** Whether honor is worth dying for is a question a good medieval knight would have no trouble answering. The code of chivalry made it plain that it was his duty to defend—if necessary, with his life—his church, king, and country. Today, blind obedience is often looked upon with suspicion. Many people cannot accept the belief that an abstract concept is worth dying for.

**DISCUSS** Get together with several classmates to make a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts what it means to be honorable today with what it meant to a medieval knight. Discuss how the idea of honor has changed and whether there are leaders today who might be thought of as modern-day knights.

![Venn diagram]

- **Medieval Times**
  - defend the faith
  - defend the king

- **Today**
  - defend the faith
  - defend the king
As the poem begins, Arthur and his knights are gathered to celebrate Christmas and the new year with feasting and revelry. In the midst of their festivities, an enormous man—who is entirely green—bounds through the door.

Splendid that knight errant stood in a splay of green,
And green, too, was the mane of his mighty destrier;
Fair fanning tresses enveloped the fighting man’s shoulders,
And over his breast hung a beard as big as a bush;
The beard and the huge mane burgeoning forth from his head
Were clipped off clean in a straight line over his elbows,
And the upper half of each arm was hidden underneath
As if covered by a king’s chaperon, closed round the neck.
The mane of the marvelous horse was much the same,
Well crisped and combed and carefully pranked with knots,
Threads of gold interwoven with the glorious green,
Now a thread of hair, now another thread of gold;
The tail of the horse and the forelock were tricked the same way,
And both were bound up with a band of brilliant green
Adorned with glittering jewels the length of the dock,
Then caught up tight with a thong in a criss-cross knot
Where many a bell tinkled brightly, all burnished gold.
So monstrous a mount, so mighty a man in the saddle
Was never once encountered on all this earth
till then;

1 knight errant (dr‘ant): a knight who wanders about, searching for adventure in order to prove his chivalry; splay: display
2 destrier (dës’trē-ar): war horse.
5 burgeoning (bûr’ja-nıng): growing.

8 chaperon (shäp’ə-rōn’): hood.
10 pranked with knots: decorated with bows.
13 forelock: the part of a horse’s mane that falls between the ears.
15 dock: the fleshy part of an animal’s tail.

ANALYZE VISUALS
Which details in this image correspond with the Gawain Poet’s description of the Green Knight?
His eyes, like lightning, flashed,
And it seemed to many a man,
That any man who clashed
With him would not long stand.

But the huge man came unarmed, without helmet or hauberk,
No breastplate or gorget or iron cleats on his arms;
He brought neither shield nor spearshaft to shove or to smite,
But instead he held in one hand a bough of the holly
That grows most green when all the groves are bare
And held in the other an ax, immense and unwieldy,
A pitiless battleblade terrible to tell of. . . .

ROMANCE
What details in lines 1–23 make the Green Knight a larger-than-life figure?

24 hauberk (hōˈbark): a coat of chain mail (a type of armor).
25 breastplate or gorget (gôrˈjıt) or iron cleats: armor for the chest, the throat, or the shoulders and elbows.
King Arthur stared down at the stranger before the high dais
And greeted him nobly, for nothing on earth frightened him.
And he said to him, “Sir, you are welcome in this place;
I am the head of this court. They call me Arthur.

Get down from your horse, I beg you, and join us for dinner,
And then whatever you seek we will gladly see to.”
But the stranger said, “No, so help me God on high,
My errand is hardly to sit at my ease in your castle!
But friend, since your praises are sung so far and wide,
Your castle the best ever built, people say, and your barons
The stoutest men in steel armor that ever rode steeds,
Most mighty and most worthy of all mortal men
And tough devils to toy with in tournament games,
And since courtesy is in flower in this court, they say,
All these tales, in truth, have drawn me to you at this time.
You may be assured by this holly branch I bear
That I come to you in peace, not spoiling for battle.
If I’d wanted to come in finery, fixed up for fighting,
I have back at home both a helmet and a hauberk,
A shield and a sharp spear that shines like fire,
And other weapons that I know pretty well how to use.
But since I don’t come here for battle, my clothes are mere cloth.
Now if you are truly as bold as the people all say,
You will grant me gladly the little game that I ask
as my right.”

Arthur gave him answer
And said, “Sir noble knight,
If it’s a duel you’re after,
We’ll furnish you your fight.”

“Good heavens, I want no such thing! I assure you, Sire,
You’ve nothing but beardless babes about this bench!
If I were hasped in my armor and high on my horse,
You haven’t a man that could match me, your might is so feeble.

And so all I ask of this court is a Christmas game,
For the Yule is here, and New Year’s, and here sit young men;
If any man holds himself, here in this house, so hardy,
So bold in his blood—and so brainless in his head—
That he dares to stoutly exchange one stroke for another,
I shall let him have as my present this lovely gisarme,
This ax, as heavy as he’ll need, to handle as he likes,
And I will abide the first blow, bare-necked as I sit.
If anyone here has the daring to try what I’ve offered,
Leap to me lightly, lad; lift up this weapon;
I give you the thing forever—you may think it your own;
And I will stand still for your stroke, steady on the floor,
Provided you honor my right, when my inning comes,
to repay.
But let the respite be
A twelvemonth and a day;
Come now, my boys, let’s see
What any here can say.”

If they were like stone before, they were stiller now,
Every last lord in the hall, both the high and the low;
The stranger on his destrier stirred in the saddle
And ferociously his red eyes rolled around;
He lowered his grisly eyebrows, glistening green,
And waved his beard and waited for someone to rise;
When no one answered, he coughed, as if embarrassed,
And drew himself up straight and spoke again:
“What! Can this be King Arthur’s court?” said the stranger,
“Whose renown runs through many a realm, flung far and wide?
What has become of your chivalry and your conquest,
Your greatness-of-heart and your grimness and grand words?
Behold the radiance and renown of the mighty Round Table
Overwhelmed by a word out of one man’s mouth!
You shiver and blanch before a blow’s been shown!”

And with that he laughed so loud that the lord was distressed;
In chagrin, his blood shot up in his face and limbs
so fair;
More angry he was than the wind,
And likewise each man there;
And Arthur, bravest of men,
Decided now to draw near.

And he said, “By heaven, sir, your request is strange;
But since you have come here for folly, you may as well find it.
I know no one here who’s aghast of your great words.
Give me your gisarme, then, for the love of God,
And gladly I’ll grant you the gift you have asked to be given.”
Lightly the King leaped down and clutched it in his hand;
Then quickly that other lord alighted on his feet.
Arthur lay hold of the ax, he gripped it by the handle,
And he swung it up over him sternly, as if to strike.

Why does the Green Knight taunt Arthur and his knights in lines 88–94?

folly: dangerous and foolish activity.
By a head or more than any man here in the house;
Sober and thoughtful he stood there and stroked his beard,
And with patience like a priest’s he pulled down his collar,
No more unmanned or dismayed by Arthur’s might

Then Gawain, at Guinevere’s side,
Made to the King a sign:
“I beseech you, Sire,” he said,
“Let this game be mine.

“Now if you, my worthy lord,” said Gawain to the King,
“Would command me to step from the dais and stand with you there,
That I might without bad manners move down from my place
(Though I couldn’t, of course, if my liege lady disliked it)
I’d be deeply honored to advise you before all the court;
For I think it unseemly, if I understand the matter,
That challenges such as this churl has chosen to offer
Be met by Your Majesty—much as it may amuse you—
When so many bold-hearted barons sit about the bench:
No men under Heaven, I am sure, are more hardy in will
Or better in body on the fields where battles are fought;
I myself am the weakest, of course, and in wit the most feeble;
My life would be least missed, if we let out the truth.
Only as you are my uncle have I any honor,
For excepting your blood, I bear in my body slight virtue.
And since this affair that’s befallen us here is so foolish,
And since I have asked for it first, let it fall to me.
If I’ve reasoned incorrectly, let all the court say,
without blame.”
The nobles gather round
And all advise the same:
“Let the King step down
And give Sir Gawain the game!” . . .

Arthur grants Gawain’s request to take on the Green Knight’s challenge. The Green Knight asks Gawain to identify himself, and the two agree on their pact. Gawain then prepares to strike his blow against the Green Knight.

On the ground, the Green Knight got himself into position,
His head bent forward a little, the bare flesh showing,
His long and lovely locks laid over his crown.
So that any man there might note the naked neck.
Sir Gawain laid hold of the ax and he hefted it high,
His pivot foot thrown forward before him on the floor,
And then, swiftly, he slashed at the naked neck;
The sharp of the battleblade shattered asunder the bones
And sank through the shining fat and slit it in two,
And the bit of the bright steel buried itself in the ground.
The fair head fell from the neck to the floor of the hall
And the people all kicked it away as it came near their feet.
The blood splashed up from the body and glistened on the green,
But he never faltered or fell for all of that,
But swiftly he started forth upon stout shanks
And rushed to reach out, where the King's retainers stood,
Caught hold of the lovely head, and lifted it up,
And leaped to his steed and snatched up the reins of the bridle,
Stepped into stirrups of steel and, striding aloft,
He held his head by the hair, high, in his hand;
And the stranger sat there as steadily in his saddle
As a man entirely unharmed, although he was headless
He turned his trunk about,
That baleful body that bled,
And many were faint with fright
When all his say was said.
He held his head in his hand up high before him,
Addressing the face to the dearest of all on the dais;
And the eyelids lifted wide, and the eyes looked out,
And the mouth said just this much, as you may now hear:
“Look that you go, Sir Gawain, as good as your word,
And seek till you find me, as loyally, my friend,
As you've sworn in this hall to do, in the hearing of the knights.
Come to the Green Chapel, I charge you, and take
A stroke the same as you've given, for well you deserve
To be readily requited on New Year's morn.
Many men know me, the Knight of the Green Chapel;
Therefore if you seek to find me, you shall not fail.
Come or be counted a coward, as is fitting.”
Then with a rough jerk he turned the reins
And haled away through the hall-door, his head in his hand,
And fire of the flint flew out from the hooves of the foal.
To what kingdom he was carried no man there knew,
No more than they knew what country it was he came from.

What then?
The King and Gawain there
Laugh at the thing and grin;
And yet, it was an affair
Most marvelous to men.

As the end of the year approaches, Gawain leaves on his quest to find the Green Chapel and fulfill his pledge. After riding through wild country and encountering many dangers, he comes upon a splendid castle. The lord of the castle welcomes Gawain and invites him to stay with him and his lady for a few days.

The lord proposes that he will go out to hunt each day while Gawain stays at the castle. At the end of the day, they will exchange what they have won. While the lord is out hunting, the lady attempts to seduce Gawain. Gawain resists her, however, and on the first two days accepts only kisses, which he gives to the lord at the end of each day in exchange for what the lord has gained in the hunt. On the third day Gawain continues to resist the lady, but she presses him to accept another gift.

She held toward him a ring of the yellowest gold
And, standing aloft on the band, a stone like a star
From which flew splendid beams like the light of the sun;
And mark you well, it was worth a rich king’s ransom.

But right away he refused it, replying in haste,

“My lady gay, I can hardly take gifts at the moment;
Having nothing to give, I’d be wrong to take gifts in turn.”

She implored him again, still more earnestly, but again
He refused it and swore on his knighthood that he could take nothing.

Grieved that he still would not take it, she told him then:

“If taking my ring would be wrong on account of its worth,
And being so much in my debt would be bothersome to you,
I’ll give you merely this sash that’s of slighter value.”

She swiftly unfastened the sash that encircled her waist,
Tied around her fair tunic, inside her bright mantle;

It was made of green silk and was marked of gleaming gold
Embroidered along the edges, ingeniously stitched.
This too she held out to the knight, and she earnestly begged him
To take it, trifling as it was, to remember her by.

MAKE INFERENCES
Reread lines 185–189. What can you infer about Arthur and Gawain’s feelings about their encounter with the Green Knight?

GRAMMAR AND STYLE
The Gawain Poet uses alliterative participial phrases throughout the poem, which creates a rhythmic or “musical” effect in the selection. “Gleaming gold” in line 205 is a good example.
Queen Guinevere (1858), William Morris. Oil on canvas.
But again he said no, there was nothing at all he could take,
Neither treasure nor token, until such time as the Lord
Had granted him some end to his adventure.
“And therefore, I pray you, do not be displeased,
But give up, for I cannot grant it, however fair or right.
I know your worth and price,
And my debt's by no means slight;
I swear through fire and ice
To be your humble knight.”

“Do you lay aside this silk,” said the lady then,
“Because it seems unworthy—as well it may?
Listen. Little as it is, it seems less in value,
But he who knew what charms are woven within it
Might place a better price on it, perchance.
For the man who goes to battle in this green lace,
As long as he keeps it looped around him,
No man under Heaven can hurt him, whoever may try,
For nothing on earth, however uncanny, can kill him.”
The knight cast about in distress, and it came to his heart
This might be a treasure indeed when the time came to take
The blow he had bargained to suffer beside the Green Chapel.
If the gift meant remaining alive, it might well be worth it;
So he listened in silence and suffered the lady to speak,
And she pressed the sash upon him and begged him to take it,
And Gawain did, and she gave him the gift with great pleasure
And begged him, for her sake, to say not a word,
And to keep it hidden from her lord. And he said he would,
That except for themselves, this business would never be known
to a man.
He thanked her earnestly,
And boldly his heart now ran;
And now a third time she
Leaned down and kissed her man.

When the lord returns at the end of the third day, Gawain gives him a kiss but does not reveal the gift of the sash.
On New Year’s Day Gawain must go to meet the Green Knight. Wearing the green sash, he sets out before dawn. Gawain arrives at a wild, rugged place, where he sees no chapel but hears the sound of a blade being sharpened. Gawain calls out, and the Green Knight appears with a huge ax. The Green Knight greets Gawain, who, with pounding heart, bows his head to take his blow.

Quickly then the man in the green made ready, Grabbed up his keen-ground ax to strike Sir Gawain; With all the might in his body he bore it aloft And sharply brought it down as if to slay him;

Had he made it fall with the force he first intended He would have stretched out the strongest man on earth. But Sir Gawain cast a side glance at the ax As it glided down to give him his Kingdom Come, And his shoulders jerked away from the iron a little, And the Green Knight caught the handle, holding it back, And mocked the prince with many a proud reproof:

“You can’t be Gawain,” he said, “who’s thought so good, A man who’s never been daunted on hill or dale! For look how you flinch for fear before anything’s felt!

I never heard tell that Sir Gawain was ever a coward! I never moved a muscle when you came down; In Arthur’s hall I never so much as winced. My head fell off at my feet, yet I never flickered; But you! You tremble at heart before you’re touched!

I’m bound to be called a better man than you, then, my lord.”

Said Gawain, “I shied once: No more. You have my word. But if my head falls to the stones It cannot be restored.

“But be brisk, man, by your faith, and come to the point! Deal out my doom if you can, and do it at once, For I’ll stand for one good stroke, and I’ll start no more Until your ax has hit—and that I swear.”

“Here goes, then,” said the other, and heaves it aloft And stands there waiting, scowling like a madman; He swings down sharp, then suddenly stops again, Holds back the ax with his hand before it can hurt, And Gawain stands there stirring not even a nerve; He stood there still as a stone or the stock of a tree That’s wedged in rocky ground by a hundred roots.

O, merrily then he spoke, the man in green:

MAKE INFERENCES
Reread lines 271–275. Why does the Green Knight stop his axe from falling a second time?
“Good! You’ve got your heart back! Now I can hit you. May all that glory the good King Arthur gave you Prove efficacious now—if it ever can—

And save your neck.” In rage Sir Gawain shouted, “Hit me, hero! I’m right up to here with your threats! Is it you that’s the cringing coward after all?”

“Whoo!” said the man in green, “he’s wrathful, too! No pauses, then; I’ll pay up my pledge at once, I vow!”

He takes his stride to strike And lifts his lip and brow; It’s not a thing Gawain can like, For nothing can save him now!

He raises that ax up lightly and flashes it down, And that blinding bit bites in at the knight’s bare neck— But hard as he hammered it down, it hurt him no more Than to nick the nape of his neck, so it split the skin; The sharp blade slit to the flesh through the shiny hide, And red blood shot to his shoulders and spattered the ground.

And when Gawain saw his blood where it blinked in the snow He sprang from the man with a leap to the length of a spear; He snatched up his helmet swiftly and slapped it on, Shifted his shield into place with a jerk of his shoulders, And snapped his sword out faster than sight; said boldly—

And, mortal born of his mother that he was, There was never on earth a man so happy by half— “No more strokes, my friend; you’ve had your swing! I’ve stood one swipe of your ax without resistance; If you offer me any more, I’ll repay you at once

With all the force and fire I’ve got—as you will see. I take one stroke, that’s all, For that was the compact we Arranged in Arthur’s hall; But now, no more for me!”

The Green Knight remained where he stood, relaxing on his ax— Settled the shaft on the rocks and leaned on the sharp end— And studied the young man standing there, shoulders hunched, And considered that staunch and doughty stance he took, Undaunted yet, and in his heart he liked it; And then he said merrily, with a mighty voice— With a roar like rushing wind he reproved the knight— “Here, don’t be such an ogre on your ground! Nobody here has behaved with bad manners toward you

307 compact: binding agreement.

313 staunch: firm; doughty (dou’tă): brave.
Or done a thing except as the contract said,
I owed you a stroke, and I’ve struck; consider yourself
Well paid. And now I release you from all further duties.
If I’d cared to hustle, it may be, perchance, that I might
Have hit somewhat harder, and then you might well be cross!
The first time I lifted my ax it was lighthearted sport,
I merely feinted and made no mark, as was right,
For you kept our pact of the first night with honor
And abided by your word and held yourself true to me,
Giving me all you owed as a good man should.
I feinted a second time, friend, for the morning
You kissed my pretty wife twice and returned me the kisses;
And so for the first two days, mere feints, nothing more
severe.
A man who’s true to his word,
There’s nothing he needs to fear;
You failed me, though, on the third
Exchange, so I’ve tapped you here.

“That sash you wear by your scabbard belongs to me;
My own wife gave it to you, as I ought to know.
I know, too, of your kisses and all your words
And my wife’s advances, for I myself arranged them.
It was I who sent her to test you. I’m convinced
You’re the finest man that ever walked this earth.
As a pearl is of greater price than dry white peas,
So Gawain indeed stands out above all other knights.
But you lacked a little, sir; you were less than loyal;
But since it was not for the sash itself or for lust
But because you loved your life, I blame you less.”
Sir Gawain stood in a study a long, long while,
So miserable with disgrace that he wept within,
And all the blood of his chest went up to his face
And he shrank away in shame from the man’s gentle words.
The first words Gawain could find to say were these:
“Cursed be cowardice and covetousness both,
Villainy and vice that destroy all virtue!”
He caught at the knots of the girdle and loosened them
And fiercely flung the sash at the Green Knight.
“There, there’s my fault! The foul fiend vex it!
Foolish cowardice taught me, from fear of your stroke,
To bargain, covetous, and abandon my kind,
The selflessness and loyalty suitable in knights;
Here I stand, faulty and false, much as I’ve feared them,
Both of them, untruth and treachery; may they see sorrow
and care!

I can’t deny my guilt;
My works shine none too fair!
Give me your good will
And henceforth I’ll beware.”

At that, the Green Knight laughed, saying graciously,
“Whatever harm I’ve had, I hold it amended
Since now you’re confessed so clean, acknowledging sins
And bearing the plain penance of my point;
I consider you polished as white and as perfectly clean
As if you had never fallen since first you were born.
And I give you, sir, this gold-embroidered girdle,
For the cloth is as green as my gown. Sir Gawain, think
On this when you go forth among great princes;
Remember our struggle here; recall to your mind
This rich token. Remember the Green Chapel.
And now, come on, let’s both go back to my castle
And finish the New Year’s revels with feasting and joy,
not strife,
I beg you,” said the lord,
And said, “As for my wife,
She’ll be your friend, no more
A threat against your life.”

“No, sir,” said the knight, and seized his helmet
And quickly removed it, thanking the Green Knight,
“I’ve reveled too well already; but fortune be with you;
May He who gives all honors honor you well.” . . .

And so they embraced and kissed and commended each other
To the Prince of Paradise, and parted then
in the cold;
Sir Gawain turned again
To Camelot and his lord;
And as for the man of green,
He went wherever he would.

ROMANCE
Paraphrase lines 357–365. What ideals of chivalry does Gawain believe he has betrayed?

367–371 The Green Knight is saying that Gawain has paid for his fault by admitting it and offering his head to the ax.
369 penance: punishment accepted by a person to show sorrow for wrongdoing; point: blade.
Comprehension

1. **Recall** What challenge does the Green Knight make to King Arthur and his knights?

2. **Recall** Who is the lady who tempts Sir Gawain?

3. **Summarize** What happens when Sir Gawain meets the Green Knight on New Year’s Day?

4. **Clarify** At the end of the poem, what is the Green Knight’s opinion of Gawain?

Literary Analysis

5. **Examine Medieval Romance** In medieval romances, there is often a character whose identity is hidden or mistaken. Explain how this characteristic affects the outcome of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

6. **Identify Situational Irony** Situational irony is a contrast between what is expected and what actually occurs. What is ironic about Sir Gawain’s acceptance of the sash from the lady of the castle?

7. **Analyze Character’s Motives** Why does Gawain decline the Green Knight’s invitation to celebrate the new year together at the end of the poem?

8. **Make Inferences** Review the inference chart you created as you read. Which character shows greater courage, Sir Gawain or the Green Knight? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

9. **Compare Texts** Both *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” portray knights who undergo a test. Compare the tone, or writer’s attitude toward a subject, in these two selections. Identify words and details that help convey the tone in each poem.

10. **Evaluate Character** The Green Knight and Gawain live by a code of honor called chivalry. Using examples from the poem as support, evaluate how well Sir Gawain upholds these chivalric ideals:

- courage
- loyalty to king
- honesty
- gallantry toward women

Literary Criticism

11. **Social Context** It is believed that the Gawain Poet wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* in the late 1300s, nearing the end of what is generally considered the age of chivalry. Though legend has it that Gawain was one of Arthur’s finest and most loyal knights, the Gawain Poet tells a story in which this hero is flawed. What might the poet’s intention have been to depict a fabled knight in this way as the age of chivalry was waning?
For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.

**GRAMMAR AND STYLE**

**USE ALLITERATION** Review the Grammar and Style note on page 233. The lilting quality of the Gawain Poet’s verse owes much to his use of *alliteration*, the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words—a technique that can add emphasis, heighten mood, or create a musical effect in a line or passage. Many of the alliterative elements in the poem consist of *participles*, verb forms that function as adjectives, and *participial phrases*, participles plus their modifiers and complements.

> *Fair fanning tresses enveloped the fighting man’s shoulders,*  
> *And over his breast hung a beard as big as a bush;* (lines 3–4)

Notice how the writer uses the alliterative participles *fanning* and *fighting*, repeating the consonant *f* to emphasize the Green Knight’s appearance.

**PRACTICE** Identify the participles in the following lines from the poem, then write your own passages by similarly using participles to create alliteration.

**EXAMPLE**

He lowered his grisly eyebrows, *glistening green,*  
And waved his beard and waited for someone to rise;  
He held a large ax, *blinding bright,*  
But seemed friendly enough as he sized up the knights.

1. The sharp of the battleblade shattered asunder the bones  
   And sank through the shining fat and slit it in two,

2. And then he said merrily, with a mighty voice—  
   With a roar like rushing wind he reproved the knight—

3. He raises that ax up lightly and flashes it down,  
   And that blinding bit bites in at the knight’s bare neck—
The legend of King Arthur is one of the most popular and enduring legends in Western culture. Most English-speaking readers have been introduced to the Arthurian legend through *Le Morte d’Arthur*, a work consisting of a number of interwoven tales that chronicle the rise and fall of King Arthur and his court.

**Adventurous Life** Although his identity is not certain, most scholars believe that the author of *Le Morte d’Arthur* was born into a fairly prosperous family in Warwickshire, England. As a young man, Thomas Malory fought in the Hundred Years’ War. He was knighted in about 1442 and was later elected to Parliament. Malory then became embroiled in the violent political conflicts that preceded the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses.

A staunch supporter of the house of Lancaster and its claim to the throne, Malory was imprisoned repeatedly by the Yorkist government on a variety of charges, including rape, robbery, cattle rustling, bribery, and attempted murder. He pleaded innocent to all the charges, and his guilt was never proven. It is possible that his outspoken opposition to the ruling family provoked enemies to accuse him falsely in some instances.

**Writing from Behind Bars** Malory wrote *Le Morte d’Arthur* while serving a series of prison terms that began in 1451. He finished the work in prison in 1469. At the end of the book, he asks that readers “pray . . . that God send me good deliverance. And when I am dead, I pray you all pray for my soul.”

**The Arthurian Legends** The first edition of *Le Morte d’Arthur* was published in 1485, fourteen years after Malory’s death. *Le Morte d’Arthur* remains the most complete English version of the Arthurian legends, which are believed to have existed since the sixth century as part of the oral tradition in France and England. Some historians believe that the fictional Arthur was modeled on a real fifth- or sixth-century Celtic military leader, although the historical Arthur was undoubtedly very different from Malory’s Arthur, who ruled an idealized world of romance, chivalry, and magic.

As the first prose epic written in English, *Le Morte d’Arthur* is an important milestone in English literature. It has proved to be an astonishingly popular work, having not once gone out of print since it was first published in 1485—a testament to Malory’s singular talent as a writer.
**LITERARY ANALYSIS: CONFLICT**

A romance is typically full of conflict, a struggle between opposing forces. The conflict can be external, between a character and an outside force, or it can be internal, taking place within the mind of a character. Sometimes a single event contains both types of conflict; for example, in a battle, a knight may externally struggle against an enemy warrior and internally struggle to be courageous and live up to the ideals of chivalry.

As you read *Le Morte d’Arthur*, look for examples of both types of conflict faced by King Arthur, Sir Launcelot, and the other knights.

*Review: Medieval Romance*

**READING SKILL: SUMMARIZE**

Summarizing can help you keep track of events in an action-filled narrative, such as a romance. When you summarize a narrative, you briefly describe its plot developments. An effective summary should

- describe events in the same order in which they appear in the narrative
- leave out details that are not essential to the plot

As you read, use a chart like the one shown to help you summarize the main plot developments.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage</th>
<th>Summary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lines 1–6</td>
<td>Arthur sails to France, where Launcelot has settled, and attacks Launcelot’s lands.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT**

Knowing the following boldfaced words will help you read *Le Morte d’Arthur*. To show that you understand the terms, try to replace each one with a word or phrase that has the same meaning.

1. The king established **dominion** over the nation.
2. During the war, looting led to **depredation**.
3. It is **incumbent** upon the captain to try to save his ship.
4. Having been robbed and injured, we seek **redress**.
5. Show a little **forbearance** instead of being so impatient.
6. The leader of the rebellion was able to **usurp** the throne.
7. Some people are open and frank, while others use **guile**.
8. The Red Cross offered **succor** to the hurricane victims.

**Explore the Key Idea**

**What is your ultimate LOYALTY?**

**KEY IDEA** One of the most important components of the medieval code of chivalry was the requirement that a knight be loyal to his king and country. In *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Sir Launcelot, King Arthur’s most exemplary knight, falls in love with the king’s wife and faces a crisis of loyalty of epic proportions.

**QUICKWRITE** Loyalty is still a highly valued human quality, one that sometimes requires personal sacrifice. Make a list of individuals or groups to whom you owe some loyalty. Review your list, then write a paragraph to explain which person or group is the one you would not abandon under any circumstances.
BACKGROUND  King Arthur’s favorite knight, Sir Launcelot, has fallen in love with the king’s wife, Gwynevere. The secret love affair is exposed by Sir Modred, Arthur’s son by another woman, and Gwynevere is sentenced to burn at the stake. While rescuing the imprisoned Gwynevere, Launcelot slays two knights who, unknown to him at the time, are the brothers of Sir Gawain, a favorite nephew of Arthur’s. After a reconciliation, Launcelot returns Gwynevere to Arthur to be reinstated as queen. At the urging of Sir Gawain, who still wants revenge on Launcelot, the king banishes Launcelot to France, where the following excerpt begins.

The Siege of Benwick

When Sir Launcelot had established **dominion** over France, he garrisoned the towns and settled with his army in the fortified city of Benwick, where his father King Ban had held court.

King Arthur, after appointing Sir Modred ruler in his absence, and instructing Queen Gwynevere to obey him, sailed to France with an army of sixty thousand men, and, on the advice of Sir Gawain, started laying waste to all before him.

News of the invasion reached Sir Launcelot, and his counselors advised him. Sir Bors spoke first:

“My lord Sir Launcelot, is it wise to allow King Arthur to lay your lands waste when sooner or later he will oblige you to offer him battle?”

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1. laying waste: destroying.
2. Sir Bors: Sir Bors de Ganis, Launcelot’s cousin and the son of King Bors.
Sir Lyonel spoke next: “My lord, I would recommend that we remain within the walls of our city until the invaders are weakened by cold and hunger, and then let us sally forth and destroy them.”

Next, King Bagdemagus: “Sir Launcelot, I understand that it is out of courtesy that you permit the king to ravage your lands, but where will this courtesy end? If you remain within the city, soon everything will be destroyed.”

Then Sir Galyhud: “Sir, you command knights of royal blood; you cannot expect them to remain meekly within the city walls. I pray you, let us encounter the enemy on the open field, and they will soon repent of their expedition.”

And to this the seven knights of West Britain all muttered their assent. Then Sir Launcelot spoke:

“My lords, I am reluctant to shed Christian blood in a war against my own liege; and yet I do know that these lands have already suffered depredation in the wars between King Claudas and my father and uncle, King Ban and King Bors. Therefore I will next send a messenger to King Arthur and sue for peace, for peace is always preferable to war.”

Accordingly a young noblewoman accompanied by a dwarf was sent to King Arthur. They were received by the gentle knight Sir Lucas the Butler.

“My lady, you bring a message from Sir Launcelot?” he asked.

“My lord, I do. It is for the king.”

“Alas! King Arthur would readily be reconciled to Sir Launcelot, but Sir Gawain forbids it; and it is a shame, because Sir Launcelot is certainly the greatest knight living.”

The young noblewoman was brought before the king, and when he had heard Sir Launcelot’s entreaties for peace he wept, and would readily have accepted them had not Sir Gawain spoken up:

“My liege, if we retreat now we will become a laughingstock, in this land and in our own. Surely our honor demands that we pursue this war to its proper conclusion.”

“Sir Gawain, I will do as you advise, although reluctantly, for Sir Launcelot’s terms are generous and he is still dear to me. I beg you make a reply to him on my behalf.”

Sir Gawain addressed the young noblewoman:

“Tell Sir Launcelot that we will not bandy words with him, and it is too late now to sue for peace. Further that I, Sir Gawain, shall not cease to strive against him until one of us is killed.”

The young noblewoman was escorted back to Sir Launcelot, and when she had delivered Sir Gawain’s message they both wept. Then Sir Bors spoke:

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4. sally forth: rush out suddenly in an attack.
5. liege (lēj): a lord or ruler to whom one owes loyalty and service.
6. sue: appeal; beg.
“My lord, we beseech you, do not look so dismayed! You have many trustworthy knights behind you; lead us onto the field and we will put an end to this quarrel.”

“My lords, I do not doubt you, but I pray you, be ruled by me: I will not lead you against our liege until we ourselves are endangered; only then can we honorably sally forth and defeat him.”

Sir Launcelot’s nobles submitted; but the next day it was seen that King Arthur had laid siege to the city of Benwick. Then Sir Gawain rode before the city walls and shouted a challenge:

“My lord Sir Launcelot: have you no knight who will dare to ride forth and break spears with me? It is I, Sir Gawain.”

Sir Bors accepted the challenge. He rode out of the castle gate, they encountered, and he was wounded and flung from his horse. His comrades helped him back to the castle, and then Sir Lyonel offered to joust. He too was overthrown and helped back to the castle.

Thereafter, every day for six months Sir Gawain rode before the city and overthrew whoever accepted his challenge. Meanwhile, as a result of skirmishes, numbers on both sides were beginning to dwindle. Then one day Sir Gawain challenged Sir Launcelot:

“My lord Sir Launcelot: traitor to the king and to me, come forth if you dare and meet your mortal foe, instead of lurking like a coward in your castle!”

Sir Launcelot heard the challenge, and one of his kinsmen spoke to him:

“My lord, you must accept the challenge, or be shamed forever.”

“Alas, that I should have to fight Sir Gawain!” said Sir Launcelot. “But now I am obliged to.”

Sir Launcelot gave orders for his most powerful courser^7 to be harnessed, and when he had armed, rode to the tower and addressed King Arthur:

“My lord King Arthur, it is with a heavy heart that I set forth to do battle with one of your own blood; but now it is incumbent upon my honor to do so. For six months I have suffered your majesty to lay my lands waste and to besiege me in my own city. My courtesy is repaid with insults, so deadly and shameful that now I must by force of arms seek redress.”

“Have done, Sir Launcelot, and let us to battle!” shouted Sir Gawain.

Sir Launcelot rode from the city at the head of his entire army. King Arthur was astonished at his strength and realized that Sir Launcelot had not been boasting when he claimed to have acted with forbearance. “Alas, that I should ever have come to war with him!” he said to himself.

It was agreed that the two combatants should fight to the death, with interference from none. Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain then drew apart and

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7. courser: a horse trained for battle.
galloped furiously together, and so great was their strength that their horses crashed to the ground and both riders were overthrown.

A terrible sword fight commenced, and each felt the might of the other as fresh wounds were inflicted with every blow. For three hours they fought with scarcely a pause, and the blood seeped out from their armor and trickled to the ground. Sir Launcelot found to his dismay that Sir Gawain, instead of weakening, seemed to increase in strength as they proceeded, and he began to fear that he was battling not with a knight but with a fiend incarnate. He decided to fight defensively and to conserve his strength.

It was a secret known only to King Arthur and to Sir Gawain himself that his strength increased for three hours in the morning, reaching its zenith at noon, and waning again. This was due to an enchantment that had been cast over him by a hermit when he was still a youth. Often in the past, as now, he had taken advantage of this.

Thus when the hour of noon had passed, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain’s strength return to normal, and knew that he could defeat him.

“Sir Gawain, I have endured many hard blows from you these last three hours, but now beware, for I see that you have weakened, and it is I who am the stronger.”

Thereupon Sir Launcelot redoubled his blows, and with one, catching Sir Gawain sidelong on the helmet, sent him reeling to the ground. Then he courteously stood back.

“Sir Launcelot, I still defy you!” said Sir Gawain from the ground. “Why do you not kill me now? for I warn you that if ever I recover I shall challenge you again.”

“Sir Gawain, by the grace of God I shall endure you again,” Sir Launcelot replied, and then turned to the king:

“My liege, your expedition can find no honorable conclusion at these walls, so I pray you withdraw and spare your noble knights. Remember me with kindness and be guided, as ever, by the love of God.”

“Alas!” said the king, “Sir Launcelot scruples to fight against me or those of my blood, and once more I am beholden to him.”

Sir Launcelot withdrew to the city and Sir Gawain was taken to his pavilion, where his wounds were dressed. King Arthur was doubly grieved, by his quarrel with Sir Launcelot and by the seriousness of Sir Gawain’s wounds.

For three weeks, while Sir Gawain was recovering, the siege was relaxed and both sides skirmished only halfheartedly. But once recovered, Sir Gawain rode up to the castle walls and challenged Sir Launcelot again:

“Sir Launcelot, traitor! Come forth, it is Sir Gawain who challenges you.”

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8. **fiend incarnate**: devil in human form.
9. **zenith**: highest point; peak.
10. **hermit**: a person living in solitude for religious reasons.
11. **scruples**: hesitates for reasons of principle.
“Sir Gawain, why these insults? I have the measure of your strength and you can do me but little harm.”

“Come forth, traitor, and this time I shall make good my revenge!” Sir Gawain shouted.

“Sir Gawain, I have once spared your life; should you not beware of meddling with me again?”

Sir Launcelot armed and rode out to meet him. They joust and Sir Gawain broke his spear and was flung from his horse. He leaped up immediately, and putting his shield before him, called on Sir Launcelot to fight on foot.

“The issue\textsuperscript{12} of a mare has failed me; but I am the issue of a king and a queen and I shall not fail!” he exclaimed.

As before, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain’s strength increase until noon, during which period he defended himself, and then weaken again.

“Sir Gawain, you are a proved knight, and with the increase of your strength until noon you must have overcome many of your opponents, but now your strength has gone, and once more you are at my mercy.”

Sir Launcelot struck out lustily and by chance reopened the wound he had made before. Sir Gawain fell to the ground in a faint, but when he came to he said weakly:

“Sir Launcelot, I still defy you. Make an end of me, or I shall fight you again!”

“Sir Gawain, while you stand on your two feet I will not gainsay\textsuperscript{13} you; but I will never strike a knight who has fallen. God defend me from such dishonor!”

Sir Launcelot walked away and Sir Gawain continued to call after him:

“Traitor! Until one of us is dead I shall never give in!”

For a month Sir Gawain lay recovering from his wounds, and the siege remained; but then, as Sir Gawain was preparing to fight Sir Launcelot once more, King Arthur received news which caused him to strike camp and lead his army on a forced march to the coast, and thence to embark for Britain.

\textbf{The Day of Destiny}

During the absence of King Arthur from Britain, Sir Modred, already vested with sovereign powers,\textsuperscript{14} had decided to usurp the throne. Accordingly, he had false letters written—announcing the death of King Arthur in battle—and delivered to himself. Then, calling a parliament, he ordered the letters to be read and persuaded the nobility to elect him king. The coronation took place at Canterbury and was celebrated with a fifteen-day feast.

Sir Modred then settled in Camelot and made overtures to Queen Gwynevere to marry him. The queen seemingly acquiesced, but as soon as she had won his confidence, begged leave to make a journey to London in order to prepare her

\begin{itemize}
\item \textbf{issue:} offspring.
\item \textbf{gainsay:} deny.
\item \textbf{vested with sovereign powers:} given the authority of a king.
\end{itemize}
trousseau. Sir Modred consented, and the queen rode straight to the Tower which, with the aid of her loyal nobles, she manned and provisioned for her defense.

Sir Modred, outraged, at once marched against her, and laid siege to the Tower, but despite his large army, siege engines, and guns, was unable to effect a breach. He then tried to entice the queen from the Tower, first by guile and then by threats, but she would listen to neither. Finally the Archbishop of Canterbury came forward to protest:

“Sir Modred, do you not fear God’s displeasure? First you have falsely made yourself king; now you, who were begotten by King Arthur on his aunt, try to marry your father’s wife! If you do not revoke your evil deeds I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle.”

“Fie on you! Do your worst!” Sir Modred replied.

“Sir Modred, I warn you take heed! or the wrath of the Lord will descend upon you.”

“Away, false priest, or I shall behead you!”

The Archbishop withdrew, and after excommunicating Sir Modred, abandoned his office and fled to Glastonbury. There he took up his abode as a simple hermit, and by fasting and prayer sought divine intercession in the troubled affairs of his country.

Sir Modred tried to assassinate the Archbishop, but was too late. He continued to assail the queen with entreaties and threats, both of which failed, and then the news reached him that King Arthur was returning with his army from France in order to seek revenge.

Sir Modred now appealed to the barony to support him, and it has to be told that they came forward in large numbers to do so. Why? it will be asked. Was not King Arthur, the noblest sovereign Christendom had seen, now leading his armies in a righteous cause? The answer lies in the people of Britain, who, then as now, were fickle. Those who so readily transferred their allegiance to Sir Modred did so with the excuse that whereas King Arthur’s reign had led them into war and strife, Sir Modred promised them peace and festivity.

Hence it was with an army of a hundred thousand that Sir Modred marched to Dover to battle against his own father, and to withhold from him his rightful crown.

As King Arthur with his fleet drew into the harbor, Sir Modred and his army launched forth in every available craft, and a bloody battle ensued in the ships and on the beach. If King Arthur’s army were the smaller, their courage was the higher, confident as they were of the righteousness of their cause. Without stint they battled through the burning ships, the screaming wounded, and the corpses

15. trousseau (trOZ’sō'): clothes and linens that a bride brings to her marriage.
16. begotten . . . aunt: Modred is the son of Arthur and Queen Margawse, the sister of Arthur’s mother, Queen Igraine.
17. I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle: The archbishop is threatening to excommunicate Modred—that is, to deny him participation in the rites of the church. In the medieval ritual of excommunication, a bell was rung, a book was shut, and a candle was extinguished.
18. divine intercession: assistance from God.
19. stint: holding back.
floating on the bloodstained waters. Once ashore they put Sir Modred’s entire army to flight.

The battle over, King Arthur began a search for his casualties, and on peering into one of the ships found Sir Gawain, mortally wounded. Sir Gawain fainted when King Arthur lifted him in his arms; and when he came to, the king spoke:

“Alas! dear nephew, that you lie here thus, mortally wounded! What joy is now left to me on this earth? You must know it was you and Sir Launcelot I loved above all others, and it seems that I have lost you both.”

“My good uncle, it was my pride and my stubbornness that brought all this about, for had I not urged you to war with Sir Launcelot your subjects would not now be in revolt. Alas, that Sir Launcelot is not here, for he would soon drive them out! And it is at Sir Launcelot’s hands that I suffer my own death: the wound which he dealt me has reopened. I would not wish it otherwise, because is he not the greatest and gentlest of knights?

“I know that by noon I shall be dead, and I repent bitterly that I may not be reconciled to Sir Launcelot; therefore I pray you, good uncle, give me pen, paper, and ink so that I may write to him.”

A priest was summoned and Sir Gawain confessed; then a clerk brought ink, pen, and paper, and Sir Gawain wrote to Sir Launcelot as follows:

“Sir Launcelot, flower of the knighthood: I, Sir Gawain, son of King Lot of Orkney and of King Arthur’s sister, send you my greetings!

“I am about to die; the cause of my death is the wound I received from you outside the city of Benwick; and I would make it known that my death was of my own seeking, that I was moved by the spirit of revenge and spite to provoke you to battle.

“Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I beseech you to visit my tomb and offer what prayers you will on my behalf; and for myself, I am content to die at the hands of the noblest knight living.

“One more request: that you hasten with your armies across the sea and give succor to our noble king. Sir Modred, his bastard son, has usurped the throne and now holds against him with an army of a hundred thousand. He would have won the queen, too, but she fled to the Tower of London and there charged her loyal supporters with her defense.

“Today is the tenth of May, and at noon I shall give up the ghost; this letter is written partly with my blood. This morning we fought our way ashore, against the armies of Sir Modred, and that is how my wound came to be reopened. We won the day, but my lord King Arthur needs you, and I too, that on my tomb you may bestow your blessing.”

Sir Gawain fainted when he had finished, and the king wept. When he came to he was given extreme unction, and died, as he had anticipated, at the hour of noon. The king buried him in the chapel at Dover Castle, and there many came to see him, and all noticed the wound on his head which he had received from Sir Launcelot.

**SUMMARIZE**
Reread lines 221–239. Briefly summarize Gawain’s letter to Sir Launcelot.

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20. **extreme unction**: a ritual in which a priest anoints and prays for a dying person.
Then the news reached Arthur that Sir Modred offered him battle on the field at Baron Down. Arthur hastened there with his army, they fought, and Sir Modred fled once more, this time to Canterbury.

When King Arthur had begun the search for his wounded and dead, many volunteers from all parts of the country came to fight under his flag, convinced now of the rightness of his cause. Arthur marched westward, and Sir Modred once more offered him battle. It was assigned for the Monday following Trinity Sunday, on Salisbury Down.

Sir Modred levied fresh troops from East Anglia and the places about London, and fresh volunteers came forward to help Arthur. Then, on the night of Trinity Sunday, Arthur was vouchsafed a strange dream:

He was appareled in gold cloth and seated in a chair which stood on a pivoted scaffold. Below him, many fathoms deep, was a dark well, and in the water swam serpents, dragons, and wild beasts. Suddenly the scaffold tilted and Arthur was flung into the water, where all the creatures struggled toward him and began tearing him limb from limb.

Arthur cried out in his sleep and his squires hastened to waken him. Later, as he lay between waking and sleeping, he thought he saw Sir Gawain, and with him a host of beautiful noblewomen. Arthur spoke:

“My sister’s son! I thought you had died; but now I see you live, and I thank the lord Jesu! I pray you, tell me, who are these ladies?”

“My lord, these are the ladies I championed in righteous quarrels when I was on earth. Our lord God has vouchsafed that we visit you and plead with you not to give battle to Sir Modred tomorrow, for if you do, not only will you yourself be killed, but all your noble followers too. We beg you to be warned, and to make a treaty with Sir Modred, calling a truce for a month, and granting him whatever terms he may demand. In a month Sir Launcelot will be here, and he will defeat Sir Modred.”

Thereupon Sir Gawain and the ladies vanished, and King Arthur once more summoned his squires and his counselors and told them his vision. Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere were commissioned to make a treaty with Sir Modred. They were to be accompanied by two bishops and to grant, within reason, whatever terms he demanded.

The ambassadors found Sir Modred in command of an army of a hundred thousand and unwilling to listen to overtures of peace. However, the ambassadors eventually prevailed on him, and in return for the truce granted him suzerainty of Cornwall and Kent, and succession to the British throne when King Arthur died. The treaty was to be signed by King Arthur and Sir Modred the next day. They were to meet between the two armies, and each was to be accompanied by no more than fourteen knights.

Both King Arthur and Sir Modred suspected the other of treachery, and gave orders for their armies to attack at the sight of a naked sword. When they met at the appointed place the treaty was signed and both drank a glass of wine.

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21. vouchsafed: granted.
22. championed: defended or fought for.
23. suzerainty (so0’zar-an-ti): the position of feudal lord.
Then, by chance, one of the soldiers was bitten in the foot by an adder\textsuperscript{24} which had lain concealed in the brush. The soldier unthinkingly drew his sword to kill it, and at once, as the sword flashed in the light, the alarums\textsuperscript{25} were given, trumpets sounded, and both armies galloped into the attack.

“Alas for this fateful day!” exclaimed King Arthur, as both he and Sir Modred hastily mounted and galloped back to their armies. There followed one of those rare and heartless battles in which both armies fought until they were destroyed. King Arthur, with his customary valor, led squadron after squadron of cavalry into the attack, and Sir Modred encountered him unflinchingly. As the number of dead and wounded mounted on both sides, the active combatants continued dauntless until nightfall, when four men alone survived.

King Arthur wept with dismay to see his beloved followers fallen; then, struggling toward him, unhorsed and badly wounded, he saw Sir Lucas the Butler and his brother, Sir Bedivere.\textsuperscript{26}

“Alas!” said the king, “that the day should come when I see all my noble knights destroyed! I would prefer that I myself had fallen. But what has become of the traitor Sir Modred, whose evil ambition was responsible for this carnage?”

Looking about him King Arthur then noticed Sir Modred leaning with his sword on a heap of the dead.

“Sir Lucas, I pray you give me my spear, for I have seen Sir Modred.”

“Sire, I entreat you, remember your vision—how Sir Gawain appeared with a heaven-sent message to dissuade you from fighting Sir Modred. Allow this fateful day to pass; it is ours, for we three hold the field, while the enemy is broken.”

“My lords, I care nothing for my life now! And while Sir Modred is at large I must kill him: there may not be another chance.”

“God speed you, then!” said Sir Bedivere.

When Sir Modred saw King Arthur advance with his spear, he rushed to meet him with drawn sword. Arthur caught Sir Modred below the shield and drove his spear through his body; Sir Modred, knowing that the wound was mortal, thrust himself up to the handle of the spear, and then, brandishing his sword in both hands, struck Arthur on the side of the helmet, cutting through it and into the skull beneath; then he crashed to the ground, gruesome and dead.

King Arthur fainted many times as Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere struggled with him to a small chapel nearby, where they managed to ease his wounds a little. When Arthur came to, he thought he heard cries coming from the battlefield.

“Sir Lucas, I pray you, find out who cries on the battlefield,” he said.

Wounded as he was, Sir Lucas hobbled painfully to the field, and there in the moonlight saw the camp followers stealing gold and jewels from the dead, and murdering the wounded. He returned to the king and reported to him what he had seen, and then added:

\textsuperscript{24} adder: a poisonous snake.

\textsuperscript{25} alarums: calls to arms.

\textsuperscript{26} Sir Lucas . . . Bedivere: brothers who are members of King Arthur's court.
“My lord, it surely would be better to move you to the nearest town?”

“My wounds forbid it. But alas for the good Sir Launcelot! How sadly I have missed him today! And now I must die—as Sir Gawain warned me I would—repenting our quarrel with my last breath.”

Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere made one further attempt to lift the king. He fainted as they did so. Then Sir Lucas fainted as part of his intestines broke through a wound in the stomach. When the king came to, he saw Sir Lucas lying dead with foam at his mouth.

“Sweet Jesu, give him succor!” he said. “This noble knight has died trying to save my life—alas that this was so!”
Sir Bedivere wept for his brother.

“Sir Bedivere, weep no more,” said King Arthur, “for you can save neither your brother nor me; and I would ask you to take my sword Excalibur\(^{27}\) to the shore of the lake and throw it in the water. Then return to me and tell me what you have seen.”

“My lord, as you command, it shall be done.”

Sir Bedivere took the sword, but when he came to the water’s edge, it appeared so beautiful that he could not bring himself to throw it in, so instead he hid it by a tree, and then returned to the king.

“Sir Bedivere, what did you see?”

“My lord, I saw nothing but the wind upon the waves.”

“Then you did not obey me; I pray you, go swiftly again, and this time fulfill my command.”

Sir Bedivere went and returned again, but this time too he had failed to fulfill the king’s command.

“Sir Bedivere, what did you see?”

“My lord, nothing but the lapping of the waves.”

“Sir Bedivere, twice you have betrayed me! And for the sake only of my sword: it is unworthy of you! Now I pray you, do as I command, for I have not long to live.”

This time Sir Bedivere wrapped the girdle around the sheath and hurled it as far as he could into the water. A hand appeared from below the surface, took the sword, waved it thrice, and disappeared again. Sir Bedivere returned to the king and told him what he had seen.

Sir Bedivere, I pray you now help me hence, or I fear it will be too late.”

Sir Bedivere carried the king to the water’s edge, and there found a barge in which sat many beautiful ladies with their queen. All were wearing black hoods, and when they saw the king, they raised their voices in a piteous lament.

“I pray you, set me in the barge,” said the king.

Sir Bedivere did so, and one of the ladies laid the king’s head in her lap; then the queen spoke to him:

“My dear brother, you have stayed too long: I fear that the wound on your head is already cold.”

Thereupon they rowed away from the land and Sir Bedivere wept to see them go.

“My lord King Arthur, you have deserted me! I am alone now, and among enemies.”

“Sir Bedivere, take what comfort you may, for my time is passed, and now I must be taken to Avalon\(^{28}\) for my wound to be healed. If you hear of me no more, I beg you pray for my soul.”

The barge slowly crossed the water and out of sight while the ladies wept. Sir Bedivere walked alone into the forest and there remained for the night.

In the morning he saw beyond the trees of a copse\(^{29}\) a small hermitage. He entered and found a hermit kneeling down by a fresh tomb. The hermit was

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\(^{27}\) **Excalibur** (ɪkːskɑːlˈɪər): Arthur’s remarkable sword, which originally came from the Lady of the Lake.

\(^{28}\) **Avalon**: an island paradise of Celtic legend, where heroes are taken after death.

\(^{29}\) **copse** (kɔːps): a grove of small trees.
weeping as he prayed, and then Sir Bedivere recognized him as the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been banished by Sir Modred.

“Father, I pray you, tell me, whose tomb is this?”

“My son, I do not know. At midnight the body was brought here by a company of ladies. We buried it, they lit a hundred candles for the service, and rewarded me with a thousand bezants.”

“Father, King Arthur lies buried in this tomb.”

Sir Bedivere fainted when he had spoken, and when he came to he begged the Archbishop to allow him to remain at the hermitage and end his days in fasting and prayer.

“Father, I wish only to be near to my true liege.”

“My son, you are welcome; and do I not recognize you as Sir Bedivere the Bold, brother to Sir Lucas the Butler?”

Thus the Archbishop and Sir Bedivere remained at the hermitage, wearing the habits of hermits and devoting themselves to the tomb with fasting and prayers of contrition.

Such was the death of King Arthur as written down by Sir Bedivere. By some it is told that there were three queens on the barge: Queen Morgan le Fay, the Queen of North Galys, and the Queen of the Waste Lands; and others include the name of Nyneve, the Lady of the Lake who had served King Arthur well in the past, and had married the good knight Sir Pelleas.

In many parts of Britain it is believed that King Arthur did not die and that he will return to us and win fresh glory and the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesu Christ; but for myself I do not believe this, and would leave him buried peacefully in his tomb at Glastonbury, where the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Bedivere humbled themselves, and with prayers and fasting honored his memory. And inscribed on his tomb, men say, is this legend:

HIC IACET ARTHURUS,
REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS.

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30. bezants (bē’zənts): gold coins.
31. contrition (kan-trish’an): sincere regret for wrongdoing.
32. Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam rexque futurus (hi’k yâ’kēt är-tō’dōs rāks kwŏn’dām rāk’skwē fōō-tōō’rōōs) Latin: Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.
William Caxton, the first English printer, had a significant impact on the literature of his day. In his preface to the first edition of Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* (1485), Caxton describes his anticipated audience and reveals his purpose in publishing the work.

**Preface to the First Edition of Le Morte d’Arthur**

William Caxton

I have, after the simple cunning that God hath sent to me, under the favor and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen, enprised to enprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French and reduced it into English.

And I, according to my copy, have done set it in enprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies with all other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same; wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalries. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame.
Comprehension

1. Recall What prevents Arthur from accepting Launcelot’s peace offers?
2. Recall What is Gawain’s response after Launcelot spares his life?
3. Recall Why does Arthur call off the siege of Benwick and return to Britain?
4. Clarify Why does Arthur eventually attack Modred despite the warning he receives from Gawain in a dream?

Literary Analysis

5. Summarize Review the chart you created as you read. Then summarize the ways in which Gawain’s hostility toward Launcelot contributes to Arthur’s downfall.
6. Analyze Conflict To what extent is Arthur’s conflict with Launcelot similar to his conflict with Modred? In what ways are the two conflicts different?
7. Examine Medieval Romance Review the Literary Analysis instruction on page 225. Le Morte d’Arthur is one of the most influential medieval romances. What characteristics of medieval romance appear in the following passages?
   - Gawain’s first battle with Launcelot (lines 58–119)
   - the final battle between Arthur and Modred (lines 298–318)
   - Arthur’s command regarding Excalibur (lines 338–359)
8. Compare and Contrast Characters Gawain and Launcelot are the most heroic and loyal of King Arthur’s knights. Make a Venn diagram like the one shown to help you compare and contrast their character traits. In your opinion, which character best exemplifies the ideals of chivalry? Support your answer with evidence from the text.
9. Evaluate Texts In his preface on page 258, William Caxton explains that he has published Le Morte d’Arthur to provide a model for good behavior. How well does this selection from Malory’s romance fulfill Caxton’s purpose? Support your opinion with examples from the text.

Literary Criticism

10. Critical Interpretations One critic has suggested that when “confronted by a need to make a decision in a moment of crisis,” Arthur “invariably chooses the wrong course of action” because he is unable or unwilling to see the situation as it really is. Think about the various conflicts, both internal and external, that Arthur struggles with in the selection, and consider the important decisions he makes. Do you agree or disagree that he “invariably chooses the wrong course of action”? Give examples from the text to support your opinion.
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Choose the vocabulary word that best completes each sentence. Use the context clues in the sentence to help you decide.

1. It is _____ on you to work hard if you want to succeed.
2. Others were impatient, but she showed great _____.
3. The queen had _____ over six new colonies.
4. During the war, looters caused great _____ in the land.
5. The king’s nephew tried to _____ power for himself.
6. The earthquake victims are desperate for _____.
7. He demanded that someone offer _____ for his grievances.
8. Clever but dishonest, she often used _____ to trick others.

**VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

Write a brief obituary, or newspaper death notice, for King Arthur. Use at least three of the vocabulary words. You might start with this sentence.

**EXAMPLE SENTENCE**

Arthur had **dominion** over much of Britain.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS**

*Incumbent* has more than one possible meaning. To determine which meaning applies in a particular instance, consider the context, or surroundings. For instance, in the sentence “It is *incumbent* on my honor to do so,” the context suggests that *incumbent* means “required as a duty or obligation.”

**PRACTICE** Use the context to determine the likely meaning of each boldfaced word.

1. The shock sent him **reeling** to the ground.
   (a) winding, (b) lurching or staggering
2. She was the wisest **sovereign** the country had ever known.
   (a) independent, (b) supreme authority
3. She was very generous and gave to our charity without **stint**.
   (a) holding back, (b) an assigned period of time
4. I **demand** to see your boss.
   (a) urgently request, (b) am sought after
5. This **legend** appears on his tomb.
   (a) tall tale, (b) label or inscription

**WORD LIST**

depredation
dominion
forbearance
guile
incumbent
redress
succor
usurp

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
For more practice, go to the Vocabulary Center at ClassZone.com.
The Legacy of Medieval Romance

Firmly embedded in the tradition of Arthurian romance is the code of chivalry prescribed for all knights. Along with the traits of bravery, courtesy, and personal honor, this code of conduct required that men behave gallantly toward women. It is this treatment of women that, even today, is most often associated with mention of the chivalric code.

Writing to Persuade

Re-examine the selections on pages 226–257 for examples of chivalric behavior, but look for more than just gallantry toward women. Find examples of knights displaying the other ideals of chivalry you’ve learned about: loyalty, modesty, faith, honor, bravery, and courtesy. Use these examples to write an essay persuading a contemporary audience—your peers, parents, and teachers—that chivalry is or is not an outmoded virtue in the 21st century.

Consider

- which details from the selections will provide you with the best support for your argument
- what language will best persuade your audience
- how to organize your writing to prove your argument clearly and logically

Extension

SPEAKING & LISTENING

Divide into teams to debate this statement: Chivalry is dead. You may use your persuasive essays as a jumping-off point, but with your team members find additional examples from today’s world to prove that chivalry is alive and well or has withered and died in the face of our modern sensibilities and values.

The Holy Grail Appears to the Knights of the Round Table (1450).
KEY IDEA A legend is an unverified story passed down from earlier times. Legends often change over time as storytellers embellish some details and diminish others. In addition, each society may impose its own values on a legendary figure. In examining two very different film versions of King Arthur, one of the Western world’s oldest legends, you’ll see how the era in which the films were created determined how the legendary king was portrayed.

Background

A Tale of Two Arthurs Some historians believe the Arthurian legend is based on the exploits of a real 5th- or 6th-century British military leader who defended Britain against invading Anglo-Saxons. In the 15th century, Sir Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte d’Arthur* combined various versions of the legend to include supernatural elements, love stories, and detailed adventures of the Knights of the Round Table. Malory’s interpretation of the Arthurian legend is the most widely read English language version in history.

Nearly 500 years after Malory’s version, in December of 1960, Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe debuted *Camelot*, their musical retelling of the Arthurian legend. The tenor of the time was upbeat: the United States was a world superpower and had experienced eight years of unprecedented economic growth. Lerner and Loewe’s Arthur reflects that time. Eschewing the brutal battle tales and death-defying adventures of Arthur and his brave knights, the musical focuses on the love triangle between Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot. The first clip you’ll view is from the film version of *Camelot*, which was released in 1967.

The second clip you’ll view is from *King Arthur*, the 2004 film version of the Arthurian legend. It reflects its time as well. Filmed in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and during the U.S. war in Iraq, *King Arthur* reflects the earliest known sources of Arthur’s history, presenting him as a valiant but brutal defender of the failing Roman Empire and the British people under its rule. You’ll view a clip from each film. As you analyze these very different interpretations of the King Arthur legend, consider the time in which each film was made and how it may have impacted the filmmakers’ choices.
Filmmakers adapting an old tale may go beyond a simple retelling. They can weave their own interpretations and beliefs into a film through *mise en scène*, a term that refers to the staging of a scene’s action and the way in which it is photographed. The elements of *mise en scène* include *setting, props, lighting, composition, facial expressions, body language, costumes,* and *makeup.* Filmmakers carefully choose and combine each detail to form their overall vision. As you watch a legend adapted to film, think about how the filmmakers used *mise en scène* to reflect the issues of their time.

*from Camelot*

*from King Arthur*

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### ANALYZING MISE EN SCÈNE

- **Notice how the setting and props establish the world of the film.**
- **Lighting** helps create mood and guide the audience’s attention.
- **Notice the composition**—camera angles and movement, and the placement of characters and objects within the frame.
- **Watch the actors’ facial expressions and body language.**
- **Consider the actors’ costumes and makeup.**

### OPTIMISTIC TIMES

- An upbeat time may be reflected in lavish studio sets.
- To reflect a positive time, soft lighting may bathe a scene in a tranquil glow.
- Characters moving closer together within the frame can convey a growing feeling of good will.
- In an era of idealism, an actor may portray a legendary hero as friendly and unguarded, even playful.
- Idealized characters of traditional legends may display a surprising ability to remain clean and neat.

### PESSIMISTIC TIMES

- Less innocent times call for films shot on grim, realistic locations.
- The shadows and glares of harder, direct lighting can create a harsh mood of bleak reality.
- Choppy cuts and distance between two characters in an argument can imply conflict and create a disjointed feeling.
- In more cynical times, a hero might be more closed-off, carrying the tense posture and set jaw of grim determination.
- On the other hand, heroes in cynical times may be dirty and rumpled under the best of circumstances.

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To critically analyze these clips, you may need to view them more than once. Both scenes depict Arthur and Guinevere’s first meeting. Notice how the directors stage the scenes and how the actors portray their characters. Look for ways you think the *Camelot* clip might reflect the hopeful idealism of the 1960s and how the *King Arthur* clip might reflect a post-9/11 United States at war in 2004. Consider the following questions to help you examine the clips.

**CLOSE VIEWING: Media Literacy**

1. **Compare Performances** Guinevere is prominent in both of these clips. Compare the two actresses’ portrayals of the queen-to-be. Describe the portrayals and cite details that create your impression of each. Consider
   - facial expressions
   - body language
   - costumes and makeup

2. **Make Judgments** Consider your own perceptions of how a king should act—especially a legendary king like Arthur. Of the two very different portrayals in these clips, which Arthur seems more like a truly legendary king? Cite examples from the clips to support your answer.

3. **Analyze Film Technique** Think about each element of mise en scène in the scenes you viewed. For each clip, describe the decisions the director made and the effect they had on the look and mood of the scene.
Write or Discuss

**Analyze Historical Context**  Think about the eras in which these films were released. The musical that the film *Camelot* was based on came out in 1960, a time when many Americans were optimistic about the future. *King Arthur* was released in 2004, three years after the United States had been attacked by terrorists and during the U.S. war in Iraq. Write a paragraph describing whether you think these films reflect their times. Cite evidence from the clips to explain your answer. Consider

- the look of the films
- the way the characters are portrayed
- your knowledge of the eras in which the movies were released
- how the audiences of the day might have reacted to or interpreted the films

Produce Your Own Media

**Create a Film Treatment**  A film treatment is a brief written description of a proposed film. It covers the basic plot lines and conflicts, the characters, and even location ideas. The purpose of a treatment is twofold: to interest financial backers, directors, and actors, and to provide those same people with a fully conceived and visualized sense of what the movie will be.

Choose a famous myth or legend on which to base a movie treatment. What message do you want to convey with your interpretation? What might the story offer today’s society? How do you want audiences to perceive this legend? Your treatment should be as detailed as possible about the story you’re going to tell, as well as how you’re going to tell it.

**HERE’S HOW**  Keep the following in mind as you write your treatment:

- Include details of the major plot lines.
- Describe the events in a detailed manner so readers can visualize them.
- Include information on costuming, setting, lighting, and composition.
- Include some representative dialogue from a key moment in the film.

Further Exploration

**Many More Arthurs**  There have been many different film adaptations of the Arthurian legend, some that treat the legend respectfully and others that poke fun at the ancient story. While many movies concentrate on the romantic entanglements between King Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot, others highlight the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table. Research some of the adaptations that have been filmed over the years, and choose a few that were made at different time periods. Watch them in a small group. Analyze the films to see how Arthur and the other main characters are presented. Are they heroic? comical? romantic? tragic? Present your findings to the class.
Comparison-Contrast Essay

In this unit, you learned that literature written hundreds of years ago has elements of suspense, romance, and humor, just as modern literature does. Consult the Writer’s Road Map to find out how to compare and contrast two creative works.

**WRITER’S ROAD MAP**

**Comparison-Contrast Essay**

**WRITING PROMPT 1**

**Writing from Literature** Write an essay comparing and/or contrasting two literary works. Concentrate on key elements of the literature, such as theme, setting, or characters, and explain how those elements affect the overall meaning. Your essay should help a reader gain a new understanding of the works.

**Literature to Compare**

- “The Death of Beowulf” from *Beowulf* and “A Grace Given in Sorrow” from the *Iliad*
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Le Morte D'Arthur*
- “The Wife's Lament” from the *Exeter Book* and *The Paston Letters*

**WRITING PROMPT 2**

**Writing from the Real World** Write an essay comparing two creative works that interest you. Base your comparison on key elements of the works. Your essay should offer new insight into the works.

**Creative Works to Consider**

- portraits painted in different artistic styles
- residential buildings designed in different architectural styles
- love songs written in different musical styles

**KEY TRAITS**

1. **Ideas**
   - Clearly identifies the works being compared
   - Includes a thesis statement that identifies the similarities and/or differences
   - Supports key ideas with specific examples

2. **Organization**
   - Includes an intriguing introduction and a strong conclusion
   - Follows a consistent organization
   - Uses transitions to connect ideas

3. **Voice**
   - Uses appropriate language for the audience and purpose

4. **Word Choice**
   - Uses precise words to explain similarities and differences

5. **Sentence Fluency**
   - Varies sentence lengths

6. **Conventions**
   - Employs correct grammar and usage

**WRITING TOOLS**

For prewriting, revision, and editing tools, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.
Chaucer and Boccaccio: Advice to the Lovelorn

Open a newspaper or magazine from almost anywhere in the world and you will find a column offering hints to men and women on how to get along better. Conflict between the sexes is not new, however. Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio gave their own suggestions over seven centuries ago, when the code of chivalry dictated that men should idealize women. In “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and “Federigo’s Falcon,” these two authors use distinctive styles to provide conflicting advice for achieving domestic happiness—one approach that defies chivalry and one that defends it.

Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” tells the story of a knight who violates a young girl and is ordered to die. The queen agrees to save him, however, if he can find out what women want from men. After a long quest, he agrees to marry an old, ugly woman if she will tell him the secret. Women want to rule men, she says, and a husband “must not be above her.” The knight then tries to back out of the marriage, but the woman destroys his arguments about her age and appearance with elegant logic, and he lets himself be mastered. She then magically transforms into a young beauty, and they marry happily, having overturned the medieval code of chivalry. Chaucer’s advice to the lovelorn is: Women—stand up for yourselves and master men; men—agree to be mastered.

The style of “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” contributes to this surprising message, which defies the beliefs of Chaucer’s time. The tone is bold and lively, mostly due to its self-confident narrator. She pokes fun at herself, saying that she was “the whip” in her own marriage, and also at women in general. The tale is also told in verse, with every two lines rhyming. These repeated sounds give the story a bouncy rhythm that propels readers along—preparing them for Chaucer’s forward-looking advice.
Boccaccio’s “Federigo’s Falcon,” like “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” is about a knight and his relationship with women. In contrast to the knight in Chaucer’s tale, however, Boccaccio’s knight adores his lady from the start. He loses almost everything he has trying to win her, but she ignores him because she is richer than he is and belongs to a higher social class. When she needs Federigo, though, she doesn’t hesitate to ask him for help; and he remains devoted, killing his beloved falcon so she can dine in style. Finally realizing the value of his devotion, the lady admits, “I would much rather have a man who lacks money than money that lacks a man.” This tale, too, ends happily; but with both the knight and his lady adhering to the code of chivalry, not rejecting it, as in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.” Boccaccio’s advice to the lovelorn is: Men—adore women; women—let yourselves be adored.

The style of “Federigo’s Falcon” helps to convey this straightforward message, which reflects the chivalric code of the era. Unlike the bold, lively tone of “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” the tone of Boccaccio’s tale is serious, formal, and direct. “Federigo’s Falcon” uses simple prose. The story has no interruptions or asides like those the Wife of Bath interjects. Chaucer’s style in communicating his innovative message shakes up readers, but Boccaccio’s clear, unsurprising presentation reassures them that things are fine as they are.

Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and Boccaccio’s “Federigo’s Falcon” offer nearly opposite views of the 14th-century code of chivalry between men and women. The style of each tale supports and reinforces its author’s message to the lovelorn. This advice, straight out of the Middle Ages, sheds as much light on the war between the sexes as the Dear Abby column in today’s newspaper.
Part 2: Apply the Writing Process

PREWRITING

What Should I Do?

1. Know the requirements.
   Choose one of the writing prompts on page 266 and read it carefully. Circle the format of your writing and underline details about its purpose. If no audience is specified, write for your teacher and classmates.

2. Select two subjects to compare.
   Use the bulleted points in the writing prompts on page 266 to jump-start your thinking. Create a Venn diagram or a two-column chart to note similarities and differences.

3. Develop a thesis statement.
   Your working thesis statement should express the most important similarities and/or differences between the two works.
   TIP: Revise your thesis statement as necessary during the drafting and revising stages.

4. Gather support for your ideas.
   Find details within the works that provide evidence for the points in your thesis statement. Use a chart to organize your thoughts.

What Does It Look Like?

WRITING PROMPT
   Write an essay comparing and/or contrasting two literary works. Concentrate on key elements of the literature, such as theme, setting, or characters, and explain how those elements affect the overall meaning. Your essay should help a reader gain a new understanding of the works.

I should pick two works from this unit, since they are the ones that are fresh in my mind.

Working Thesis:
   "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and "Federigo's Falcon" have different styles and give different advice for finding domestic happiness. Chaucer rejects chivalry and Boccaccio accepts it.

"Wife of Bath" "Federigo"
• old woman says that women want to rule men
• contradicts rules of chivalry
• sacrifices his most valuable possession for the lady he adores
• conforms to rules of chivalry

Both
• medieval tales
• end happily in marriage
**What Should I Do?**

1. **Organize your essay.**
   Here are two basic frameworks in which to compare and contrast your works. The writer of the student model chose the subject-by-subject method.
   - **Subject by Subject**
     Presents all the elements of one work first, then all the elements of the other
   - **Point by Point**
     Compares and contrasts both subjects, one point at a time

2. **Incorporate supporting evidence.**
   For each point you make in your essay, ask yourself, “How do I know this?” Give solid examples and logical reasons from the works to back up your main ideas.

3. **Add transitions to clarify your ideas.**
   Try using **too, both, and like** to indicate similarity; try **but, in contrast,** and **on the other hand** to show difference.
   See page 272: Add Transitions

**What Does It Look Like?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT BY SUBJECT</th>
<th>POINT BY POINT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject A: “The Wife of Bath’s Tale”</strong></td>
<td><strong>Point 1: Plot</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• <strong>Plot:</strong> Knight allows woman to master him</td>
<td>• “Wife”: Knight allows woman to master him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Advice:</strong> Women should control men</td>
<td>• “Federigo”: Man wins lady with devotion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Style:</strong> jaunty, defiant, rejects chivalry</td>
<td><strong>Point 2: Advice</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject B: “Federigo’s Falcon”</strong></td>
<td>• “Wife”: Women should control men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Plot:</strong> Man wins lady with devotion</td>
<td>• “Federigo”: Men should adore and idealize women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Advice:</strong> Men should adore and idealize women</td>
<td><strong>Point 3: Style</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• <strong>Style:</strong> serious, straightforward, upholds chivalry</td>
<td>• “Wife”: jaunty, defiant, rejects chivalry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Federigo”: serious, straightforward, upholds chivalry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The style of “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” contributes to this surprising message, which defies the beliefs of Chaucer’s time. The tone is bold and lively, mostly due to its self-confident narrator. She pokes fun at herself, saying that she was “the whip” in her own marriage. Repeated sounds give the story a bouncy rhythm that propels readers along—preparing them for Chaucer’s forward-looking advice.

This tale, too, ends happily, but with both the knight and his lady adhering to the code of chivalry, not rejecting it, as in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale.”
# Revising and Editing

## What Should I Do?

1. **Make your introduction a “grabber.”**
   - **Underline** the first few sentences of your introduction.
   - If they seem vague or drab, **add interesting details or a question** to grab the reader’s interest or connect with his or her life.

2. **Review comparisons and contrasts.**
   - Ask a peer reader to **circle** any comparisons or contrasts that are unclear.
   - If necessary, **add transitions**. Using a variety of transitions will help to keep your essay lively.
   - See page 272: Ask a Peer Reader

3. **Smoothly incorporate supporting evidence.**
   - Put an **asterisk** next to each detail, quotation, and example you used. Did you skillfully weave in each one, or is your essay just a list of facts and details?
   - Consider **adding explanations** so that readers will know why you included each piece of evidence.
   - See page 272: Check Your Grammar

4. **Conclude creatively.**
   - Reread your conclusion. Is it a concise summary or just repeated information? Does it leave your reader with something to think about?
   - **Revise your concluding paragraph** if it seems weak. The writer of the student model added an appropriate final thought that relates to the introduction.

## What Does It Look Like?

- Open a newspaper or magazine from almost anywhere in the world and you will find a column offering hints to men and women on how to get along better. Conflict between the sexes is not new, however. Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio gave their own suggestions about conflict between men and women over seven centuries ago, when the code of chivalry dictated that men should idealize women.

- Boccaccio’s “Federigo’s Falcon,” like “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” is about a knight and his relationship with women. Boccaccio’s knight adores his lady from the start.

- In contrast to the knight in Chaucer’s tale, however, finally realizing the value of his devotion, the lady admits, “I would much rather have a man who lacks money than money that lacks a man.”

- Chaucer’s “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” and Boccaccio’s “Federigo’s Falcon” offer nearly opposite views of the 14th-century code of chivalry between men and women. The style of each tale supports and reinforces its author’s message to the lovelorn.

- This advice, straight out of the Middle Ages, sheds as much light on the war between the sexes as the Dear Abby column in today’s newspaper.
**Consider the Criteria**

Use this checklist to make sure your comparison-contrast essay is on track.

**Ideas**
- ✔ identifies the authors and works in an engaging introduction
- ✔ spells out important similarities and/or differences of the works in a clear thesis statement
- ✔ includes supporting evidence

**Organization**
- ✔ uses transitions to explain comparisons and contrasts
- ✔ organizes ideas consistently
- ✔ has insightful conclusion

**Voice**
- ✔ uses appropriate language for the audience and purpose

**Word Choice**
- ✔ uses precise words

**Sentence Fluency**
- ✔ varies sentence length

**Conventions**
- ✔ uses correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation

**Ask a Peer Reader**
- Which comparison or contrast did I explain most clearly? Least clearly?
- Do I need to improve my essay’s organization? If so, how?
- What new insight about the works did you gain from my conclusion?

**Add Transitions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>For Comparing</th>
<th>For Contrasting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>also</td>
<td>but</td>
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<td>and</td>
<td>however</td>
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<td>another</td>
<td>in contrast</td>
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<tr>
<td>both</td>
<td>instead</td>
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<tr>
<td>in addition to</td>
<td>nevertheless</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the same way</td>
<td>on the other hand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>like</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similarly</td>
<td>yet</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check Your Grammar**

Use parallel structure for similar grammatical elements.

She ignores him because she is richer than he is and belonging to a higher social class.

This tale, too, ends happily, but with both the knight and his lady adhering to the code of chivalry, not to reject it, as in “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” rejecting.

**Writing Online**

**Publishing Options**
For publishing options, visit the Writing Center at ClassZone.com.

**Assessment Preparation**
For writing and grammar assessment practice, go to the Assessment Center at ClassZone.com.
Delivering an Oral Report

Giving an oral report allows you to share comparisons and contrasts with a wider audience.

Planning the Report

1. **Outline the similarities and differences you will cover.** Decide which comparisons and contrasts from your essay are strongest and how you want to present them. For example, you might use simpler language, a more conversational style, or visual aids. Note the evidence you will include to support each key point.

2. **Create a visual.** Transfer your notes to a flip chart or presentation software. Use one page or slide for your introduction, one for your conclusion, and one for each key idea. Remember, the words must be large enough to be readable from the back of the room.

3. **Practice your presentation.** Rehearse a few times in front of a mirror or before family and friends.

Presenting the Report

1. **Be confident and direct.** Make eye contact with your listeners to show your self-assurance and interest in their responses.

2. **Make your voice and gestures work for you.** Speak a bit more slowly and loudly than you would naturally, but maintain a conversational tone. Adjust the speed of your delivery for emphasis, incorporating facial expressions and hand gestures to provide added stress. For instance, you might smile when describing a work’s lighthearted tone, or you might point to your visual aid to emphasize an important detail.

3. **Involve your listeners.** Pause, if necessary, during your presentation to let your audience assimilate what you have said or to wait for fidgeting or talking to die down. Leave time at the end of your report for questions and comments and answer them respectfully.

See page R85: Evaluating an Oral Response to Literature
DIRECTIONS  Read this selection and answer the questions that follow.

from Beowulf

“My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes’
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,

Dripping with my enemies’ blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one

By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
Together, and I’ve come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,

Oh shelterer of warriors and your people’s loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,
Too, that the monster’s scorn of men

Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac
Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield: my hands

Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to death’s cold grip.
Grendel’s plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall

And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
There’ll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones

And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!”

Hrothgar replied, protector of the Danes:
“Beowulf, you’ve come to us in friendship, and because
Of the reception your father found at our court.
Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,
Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:
Your father’s countrymen were afraid of war,
If he returned to his home, and they turned him away.
Then he traveled across the curving waves
To the land of the Danes.”

Comprehension

DIRECTIONS Answer these questions about the excerpt from Beowulf.

1. Reread lines 1–3. Which lofty ideal do Beowulf’s people expect him to uphold?
   A honesty in all situations
   B mercy toward his enemies
   C charity for the less fortunate
   D responsibility toward those in need

2. Which phrase is a kenning for the word sea?
   A “blackness of night” (line 8)
   B “this noble place” (line 13)
   C “hammered / Mail” (lines 38–39)
   D “curving waves” (line 49)

3. Beowulf’s boasting in lines 5–11 focuses on his legendary
   A fear and need to overcome it
   B pride and tendency to exaggerate
   C kindness and desire to do good deeds
   D hunting skills and belief in fate

4. In lines 11–18, Beowulf identifies the battle with Grendel as one between
   A humans and monsters
   B intellect and emotion
   C life and death
   D good and evil

5. What is ironic about Beowulf’s statement in lines 36–37?
   A The Danes will not mourn Beowulf.
   B Beowulf and his men will survive.
   C There will be no corpses if Grendel wins.
   D Beowulf does not trust the Danes.

6. In line 45, the alliteration in “begun a bitter feud” helps to
   A clarify the meaning of words
   B create rhythm and unify ideas
   C convey a sensory experience
   D explain metaphors and similes

GO ON
7. In line 41, Beowulf exclaims, “Fate will unwind as it must!” What can you infer about his beliefs from this statement?

8. In lines 19–27, Beowulf says that he, like Grendel, needs no weapons to fight. What can you infer about Beowulf’s character from these lines?

DIRECTIONS Read this excerpt from “The Prologue” of The Canterbury Tales and answer the questions that follow.

from The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer

He had his son with him, a fine young Squire,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.

In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He’d seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space

Of time, in hope to win his lady’s grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.

Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale

He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.
Comprehension

**DIRECTIONS** Answer these questions about the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*.

9. Chaucer develops the Squire’s character by
   A describing his appearance and talents
   B comparing him to other young nobles
   C showing other characters’ reactions to him
   D relating conversations between characters

10. Reread lines 7–14. Why might it be ironic that the Squire is described as “singing he was, or fluting all the day”?
   A The reader assumes that all cadets receive musical instruction as part of their training.
   B Chaucer suggests that the Squire is more interested in traveling than in pleasing his lady.
   C The reader expects the Squire to be training for battle rather than playing music.
   D Chaucer depicts the Squire first as a wild horseman and then as a polite cadet.

11. Reread lines 11–15. The Squire’s style of dress suggests that he is
    A youthful and vain
    B timid and scholarly
    C rugged and unkempt
    D strange and mysterious

12. Which one of the Squire’s character traits emerges in lines 21–22?
    A bravery
    B innocence
    C respectfulness
    D leadership

13. Chaucer’s gently ironic depiction of the Squire comes from the contrast between the young man’s
    A artistic talents and his well-groomed appearance
    B occupation as a knight in training and his personal interests
    C average height and his impressive athletic abilities
    D love of family and his loyalty to his country

14. Which lines in the excerpt characterize the Squire as a well-educated nobleman?
    A lines 1–3
    B lines 4–6
    C lines 7–10
    D lines 16–18

**Written Response**

**SHORT RESPONSE** Write three or four sentences to answer this question.

15. List three character traits of the Squire. Cite line references from the excerpt to support your choices.

**EXTENDED RESPONSE** Write two or three paragraphs to answer this question.

16. Chaucer compares the Squire to different things in nature. Identify two of these comparisons and explain what they reveal about the Squire.
Vocabulary

DIRECTIONS Use context clues and the Latin word definitions to answer the following questions.

1. The Latin word *statura* means “an upright posture.” What is the most likely meaning of the word *stature* as it is used in line 5 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A physical endurance  
   B general intelligence  
   C height when standing  
   D professional reputation

2. The Latin word *moderari* means “to keep within measure.” What is the most likely meaning of the word *moderate* as it is used in line 5 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A ideal  
   B average  
   C unusual  
   D changeable

3. The Latin word *valere* means “to be strong.” What is the most likely meaning of *valiantly* as it is used in line 9 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A bravely  
   B angrily  
   C tirelessly  
   D remarkably

4. The Latin word *iuxta* means “nearby.” The meaning of *joust* as it is used in line 18 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales* is to
   A tell amusing stories  
   B engage in close combat  
   C meet and merge with  
   D travel over long distances

DIRECTIONS Use context clues and your knowledge of multiple-meaning words to answer the following questions.

5. Which meaning of *shield* is used in line 24 of the excerpt from *Beowulf*?
   A decorative emblem  
   B large lowland area  
   C military officer’s badge  
   D piece of hand-held armor

6. Which meaning of *locks* is used in line 3 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A lengths or curls of human hair  
   B devices operated by keys or combinations  
   C sections of a waterway closed off with gates  
   D holds used in wrestling and self-defense

7. Which meaning of *pressed* is used in line 3 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A crowded closely  
   B urged to take action  
   C squeezed into shape  
   D forced into military service

8. Which meaning of *grace* is used in line 10 of the excerpt from *The Canterbury Tales*?
   A charm  
   B short prayer  
   C approval  
   D exemption
Writing & Grammar

DIRECTIONS Read this passage and answer the questions that follow.

(1) In the mid-14th century, the Black Death swept across Europe. (2) The plague had traveled along North African and European trade routes. (3) Its victims suffered from symptoms such as a high fever and bad headaches and usually died. (4) In some cities, corpses were gathered in the streets. (5) The stench of bodies permeated the air. (6) By the year 1400, the awful plague had killed approximately 25 million Europeans.

1. How might you add a participial phrase to sentence 1?
   A In the mid-14th century, the Black Death swept across Europe and killed one-third of its population.
   B In the mid-14th century, the Black Death swept across Europe, leaving a trail of dead in its wake.
   C In the mid-14th century, the Black Death swept across Europe without mercy.
   D In the mid-14th century, the Black Death swept across Europe, which suffered many deaths as a result.

2. How might you add a participial phrase to sentence 2?
   A For a while, the plague had traveled along North African and European trade routes.
   B The plague had traveled along North African and European trade routes, and it quickly spread between countries.
   C Originating in Central Asia, the plague had traveled along North African and European trade routes.
   D The plague had traveled on merchant ships along North African and European trade routes.

3. Replace the underlined words in sentence 3 with adjectives that best improve the imagery.
   A hot; scary
   B serious; terrible
   C burning; excruciating
   D dreadful; uncomfortable

4. Replace the underlined word in sentence 4 with a verb that best improves the imagery.
   A grouped
   B piled
   C placed
   D assembled

5. How might you add a participle to sentence 5?
   A The foul stench of bodies permeated the air.
   B The stench of bodies permeated the stale air.
   C The stench of decaying bodies permeated the air.
   D The stench of dead bodies permeated the air.

6. Replace the underlined word in sentence 6 with an adjective that best improves the imagery.
   A ghastly
   B serious
   C harmful
   D unpleasant
Ideas for Independent Reading

Continue exploring the Questions of the Times on pages 16–17 with these additional works.

What makes a true HERO?

Beowulf
translated by Seamus Heaney
In this translation of Beowulf, Nobel-prize-winning poet Seamus Heaney uses direct, rich, and moving language to tell the tale of Beowulf’s battles with the monster Grendel, Grendel’s equally monstrous mother, and the dragon who brings about Beowulf’s death. Heaney’s translation is vivid and engaging, drawing new audiences into this ancient tale of honor and heroism.

Grendel
by John Gardner
In Beowulf, Grendel is a fearsome beast whose demise makes Beowulf a lauded hero. This modern retelling of the epic, however, views the whole story from a new perspective—namely, Grendel’s. What is it like to be Grendel? What makes Grendel tick? When everyone thinks you’re a monster, how does it change the way you look at yourself?

The Death of King Arthur
translated by James Cable
This story of Arthur begins with a sadly depleted Round Table as knight after knight heads to a strange land, searching for glory and the Holy Grail. Meanwhile, King Arthur is humiliated by the continuing romance between his queen, Guinevere, and his most famous knight, Lancelot. Weakened from within, Arthur’s kingdom is attacked by the evil Mordred, and Arthur must rouse himself and his flawed yet loyal band to avert the worst.

Who really shapes SOCIETY?

Life in a Medieval Village
by Frances and Joseph Gies
Most people of the Middle Ages lived in villages, not castles or cities. This description of the medieval English village of Elton gives modern readers a sense of the everyday lives and concerns of the people who lived during this period. Many aspects of life are examined—dress, diet, housing, marriage, work, and the relationship between peasants and their lords.

The History of the Kings of Britain
by Geoffrey of Monmouth
By what right did the elite families of Britain come to rule over everyone else? In this influential volume written in the 12th century, Geoffrey of Monmouth shows that in many cases, becoming king was more the result of fast-talking and brute force than anything such as divine right. The author tears through the royal lines of Britain, touching upon such notables as Brutus of Rome, King Lear, and the legendary King Arthur. While unreliable as history, this chronicle’s no-nonsense yet lyrical style makes it hard to put down.
Does FATE control our lives?

The Anglo-Saxon World: An Anthology
translated by Kevin Crossley-Holland

This anthology presents a wide selection of Anglo-Saxon poetry and prose, including chronicles, letters, and many of the greatest surviving poems printed in their entirety. Works such as The Seafarer, The Wanderer, the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, and Beowulf give readers a fine sense of the values and lifestyles of the Anglo-Saxon people.

Can people live up to high IDEALS?

The Once and Future King
by T. H. White

This retelling of the Arthurian legend follows Arthur from birth to death. Based largely on Sir Thomas Malory’s Le Morte d’Arthur, this volume contains four full novels: The Sword in the Stone, The Queen of Air and Darkness, The Ill-made Knight, and The Candle in the Wind. Author T. H. White brings life, passion, and humor to a beloved legend.

Everyman and Other Miracle and Morality Plays

In Everyman, an ordinary man faced with impending death gathers about him his friends, his family, and his best personal qualities. Everyman is an allegory, so these abstract qualities take bodily form in characters such as Good Deeds, Knowledge, and Beauty. Yet as his fate draws near, Everyman’s friends and family—even his wife—desert him, leaving him with only his Good Deeds to accompany him to his reckoning.

The Letters of Abelard and Heloise
translated by Betty Radice

The most famous love story from medieval times is actually a true story told through the letters of two real-life lovers. Peter Abelard was a Parisian scholar and cleric who fell in love with his gifted pupil Heloise. Marrying in secret, Heloise bore Abelard’s child. Yet the scandal associated with the marriage drove them apart. Abelard became a monk and Heloise the abbess of a convent, yet even as they tried to live according to their ideals, their feelings for one another remained strong.