

# The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer



# Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400)

- Dominant literary figure in the 14<sup>th</sup> century
- “Father of English Literature”
- Life experiences
  - child of wealthy wine merchant
  - page in a royal household
  - spoke French, Latin, & Italian
  - Soldier & diplomat
  - member of Parliament

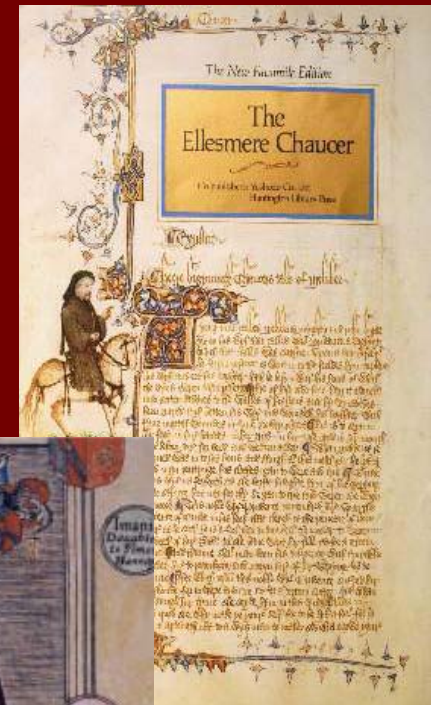
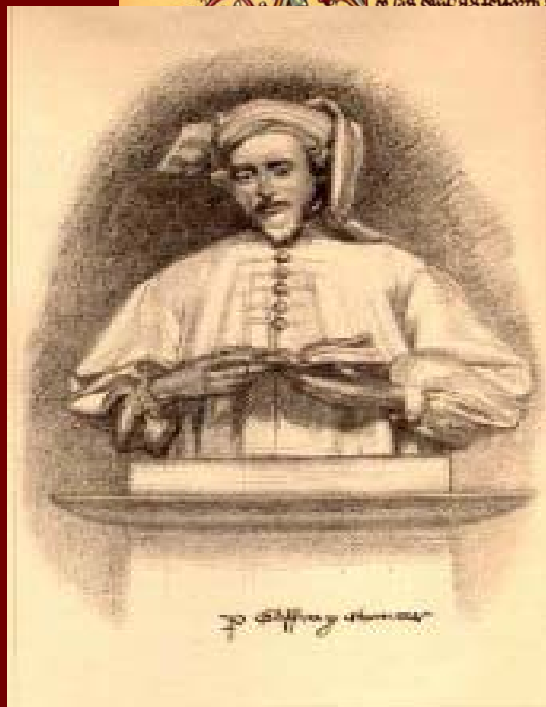
# Geoffrey Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales

- lived and wrote around 1385 A.D.
- planned many more tales, but did not complete the proposed 120 tales before his death
- wrote about all classes in The Canterbury Tales to give us a glimpse of English society at the time

# Geoffrey Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales (cont.)

- He went against tradition—should have written in French BUT he wrote them in **Middle English**
- “Father of the English Language” because he defied rules/law and wrote in the **people’s language**

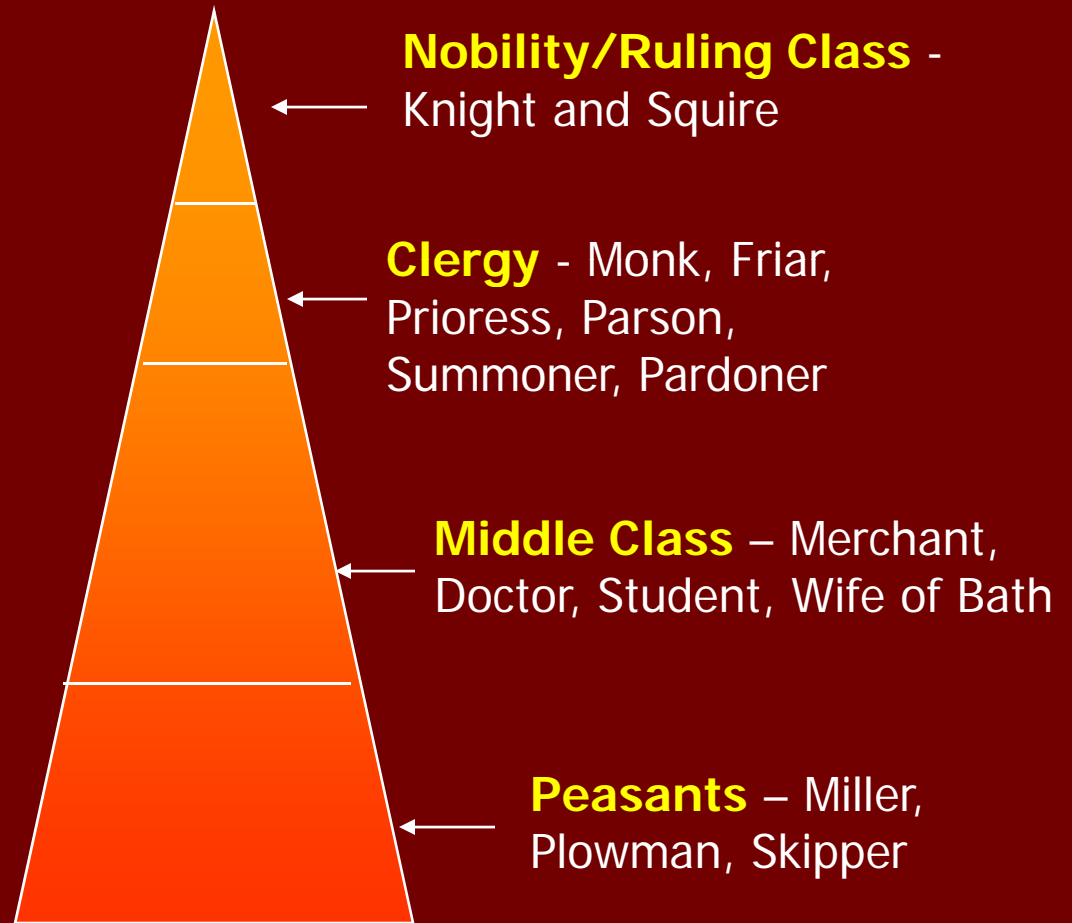
# Chaucer Images



# The Middle Ages

## Background

Hierarchy –  
Class Structure  
During Chaucer's  
Time



# Knight's Code of Chivalry

A knight must be:

1. true to his God and a defender of the faith.
2. true and loyal to his lord and king.
3. true to his lady.
4. humble and modest in daily actions.
5. brave and fierce in war and adversity.



# Code of the Clergy

A member of the clergy must:

1. be chaste and pure.
2. be devoted to God.
3. obey God and Biblical law.
4. take vows of poverty.
5. achieve heavenly reward through earthly denial.



# Seven Deadly Sins

- Gluttony
- Avarice / Greed
- Sloth
- Lust
- Vanity
- Pride
- Anger



# Moral Virtues (opposite of sins)

- Moderation
- Generosity
- Diligence
- Love
- Modesty
- Humility
- Forgiveness



# Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

- Takes representatives of English society on a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral
- Pilgrims—each has speech and tale that matches a real person during his (Chaucer's) time

# Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (cont.)

- 30 characters representing all social classes
  - Chaucer, as a parody of himself, is one of the pilgrims
  - Although fictional, does have realistic settings and occupations
    - \*Tabard Inn
    - \*Canterbury & Canterbury Cathedral
    - \*Shrine of Thomas Becket
- Chaucer's tone: **IRONIC**

# The Prologue

- Thirty pilgrims are on their way to Canterbury to pay homage at Becket's tomb.
- Each agrees to tell two tales on the way to the shrine and two tales back.
- The winner will receive a supper paid for by all.



# List of 30 Pilgrims

- Narrator – line 20
- Knight – line 43
- Squire – line 81
- Yeoman – line 103
- Prioress (+ 3) – line 122
- Monk – line 169
- Friar – line 212
- Merchant – line 280
- Oxford Cleric – line 295
- Serjeant at Law – line 319
- Franklin – line 341
- Guildsmen – (Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver, Carpet-Maker) - line 371
- Cook – line 390
- Skipper – line 398
- Doctor – line 421
- Wife of Bath – line 455
- Parson – line 488
- Plowman – line 539
- Miller – line 561
- Manciple – line 585
- Reeve – line 605
- Summoner - line 641
- Pardoner – line 689

# Assignment: Pilgrim Presentations

- Read the description of your pilgrim in the prologue
- Present a PowerPoint chart to the class with your findings
- TWO SLIDES
- Any format, font, style you like...
- Must contain the following information:

# Slide One

- Title (pilgrim's name)
- Picture of your pilgrim (according to description given)
- Specific quotes and phrases that provide evidence of your pilgrim's
  - Physical characteristics, clothing, and accessories
  - Words, experiences, personality traits

# Slide Two

- Social class and why
- Inferences (Chaucer's commentary)
  - Specific lines that lead to inferences about your pilgrim
  - Does he/she uphold the proper values of his or her social position? Any vices or virtues?
  - What is Chaucer criticizing?

# THE MILLER

*Example*

## Physical Characteristics, Clothing, and Accessories

- Chap of sixteen stone (561)
- Big in brawn and bone (562)
- Broad, knotty and short-shouldered (565)
- Broad, red beard (568-569)
- Wart with red, bristly hair growing on his nose (571-572)
- Black nostrils and mighty mouth (573-575)
- Carried a sword and buckler (574) and bagpipes (583)
- Wore blue hood with a white coat (582)



## Words, Experiences, and Personality Traits

- Likes to wrestle (564)
- Boastful of his strength (565-567)
- Likes to tell dirty jokes (576-577)
- Thief and cheater (578-581)

# The Miller

## ■ Peasant Class

- Supported by a trade

## ■ Inferences

- Chaucer compares him to a sow and fox suggesting he is wild and rough (568, 571)
- Chaucer compares mouth to a furnace door, suggesting he is uncouth and foul-mouthed (575)
- By stating he was a “master-hand” at stealing, Chaucer infers the miller has cheated customers his whole life (578). Major vice!
- Through his depiction of the miller as bawdy and belligerent, Chaucer is critiquing the peasant’s low station in life