

The Canterbury Tales

Introductory Notes



Author Info

- Author: **Geoffry Chaucer**
 - Born sometime between 1340-1343
 - His family was well off, though not nobility
 - One of the first to write in English
(French was the spoken language of the time)
 - This was very unusual! Remember, people weren't educated. Most books were written in French or Latin
 - Considered to be the greatest English writer before Shakespeare.
 - Most famous book:
The Canterbury Tales

Author Info

- Author: **Geoffry Chaucer**
 - The tales gives us a picture of life in England during this time
 - He shows us people from all 3 groups- clergy, nobility, and commoners
 - This was very unusual! Remember, people weren't educated. Most books were written in French or Latin and were for the rich
 - Chaucer is famous for his characters

The time period

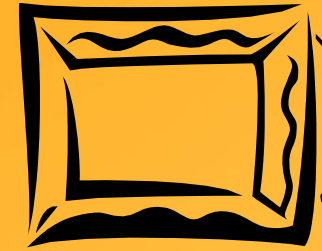


- At least once in their lifetime, people made a pilgrimage (religious journey) to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket in the city of Canterbury
 - Becket had been the archbishop of Canterbury
 - He was murdered in his own cathedral
- Chaucer uses this idea of a pilgrimage to help form his frame story.
- The characters in his story are on a pilgrimage

The Canterbury Tales

- Chaucer's most famous book
 - He himself is a character in the book as a short, plump, slightly foolish pilgrim who commands no great respect
- This book was still unfinished when he died
- Type: Stories- show the beliefs of the teller (and Chaucer's opinion of these people)
- Format: Collection of stories within a story- frame story

The Frame Story

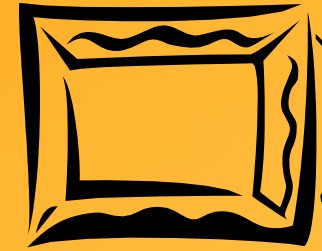


- **Group of travelers going to Canterbury**
- **Gather at Tabard Inn (outside of London, approx. 70 miles from Canterbury)**
- **Harry Bailey, the innkeeper/host suggests a storytelling competition (to pass the time while traveling)**
 - **Each person will tell 2 stories each way**

30 people
x 4 stories per person
120 stories

*1/4 completed before
Chaucer died*

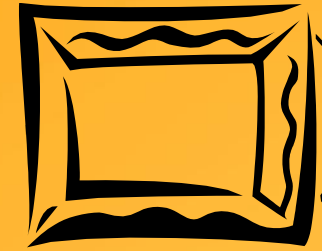
Snapshots of an Era



- In the prologue to the tales, Chaucer provided a vivid description of each pilgrim , giving us a glimpse of medieval England.
- *He leaves no one out*
 - *Nobility*
 - *Clergy*
 - *Businessmen*
 - *Craftsmen*
 - *And more*



Snapshots of an Era



- Unique to Chaucer's Prologue is the way in which he presents his characters and their ranks as real people, individuals who defy categorization.
- As a result, Chaucer's work often exposes—and obliterates—common stereotypes of medieval life and society, providing the reader with keen insights into the true realities of the medieval world.

Literary Tour

- Popular genres in Chaucer's day: romances (tales of chivalry), *fabliaux* (short, bawdy, humorous stories), stories of saint's lives, sermons, and allegories (narratives in which characters represent abstractions such as Pride and Honor).
- Within each pilgrim's tale in Chaucer's *Tales*, a major literary form of medieval literature is represented.