CAPITOLO

6

Chaucer's Pilgrims

Wel nyne and twenty in a companye, / Of sondry folk — "Fully twenty-nine in a company, of various people" (Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, General Prologue, ll. 24–25; translation by the editors)

OBIETTIVI

1. I can describe late 14th-century England — London, the wool trade, the three estates, pilgrimage and the critics of the Church.
2. I can present Chaucer's life and works and explain the frame, the plan and the satire of *The Canterbury Tales*.
3. I can read a passage of Middle English with glosses, scan an iambic pentameter and recognise irony in a portrait.
4. I can report what people said with precise reporting verbs and the right pattern after each one.
5. I can describe people and their personality, speculating from their appearance.
6. I can write a literary paragraph (Point, Evidence, Explanation) and compare Chaucer's frame with Boccaccio's.

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English 3 · Parte II · The Medieval World · versione 1.0
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In April 1387, or thereabouts, a London customs officer and poet began a book that never ended. He imagined some thirty people — a knight and a cook, a nun and a miller, a lawyer, a ploughman and a woman from near Bath who had buried five husbands — riding together from an inn in Southwark to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury, and telling stories to pass the time. The poet was Geoffrey Chaucer, and his unfinished book, *The Canterbury Tales*, is the first great portrait gallery of English society. In this chapter you will meet his England, his pilgrims and his language, and you will learn how to write about a literary character in a clear, convincing paragraph.

6.1 History and Society: Chaucer's England

6.1.1 London, wool and money

In the second half of the 14th century England was ruled by Edward III (1327–1377) and then by his grandson Richard II (1377–1399), who became king at the age of ten. The country had lived through terrible years: war with France had begun in 1337, and the Black Death reached England in 1348 (both are the subject of chapter 7). Yet for the people who survived, it was also a time of new opportunities. Workers were fewer, so they could ask for higher wages; towns grew richer; and money, more than land, began to decide who mattered.

The centre of this new world was London. It was by far the largest city in the kingdom, a port on the Thames where ships arrived from Flanders, France, Italy and the Baltic. Across London Bridge, on the south bank, lay Southwark, a busy suburb of inns, workshops and markets outside the authority of the City. A traveller leaving for Kent and the coast started from there, along the old Roman road, Watling Street (Figura 6.2).

England's wealth rested on sheep. Raw wool was the country's most valuable export: it was shipped to the weavers of Flanders and of Italian cities such as Florence, who turned it into fine cloth. The king taxed every sack that left the country, so wool paid for a large part of the war with France. To control the trade, the export of wool was channelled through official market towns called **staples**; from 1363 the main staple was at Calais, then an English town on the French coast. The Lord Speaker of the House of Lords still sits on the Woolsack, a cushion stuffed with wool — by tradition, a reminder of where the kingdom's money once came from.

The people who handled this money — merchants, lawyers, shipowners, the masters of the craft guilds — were not noble, but they could be richer than many knights, and they governed the towns. A wine merchant's son could become a courtier: that is exactly what happened to Chaucer.

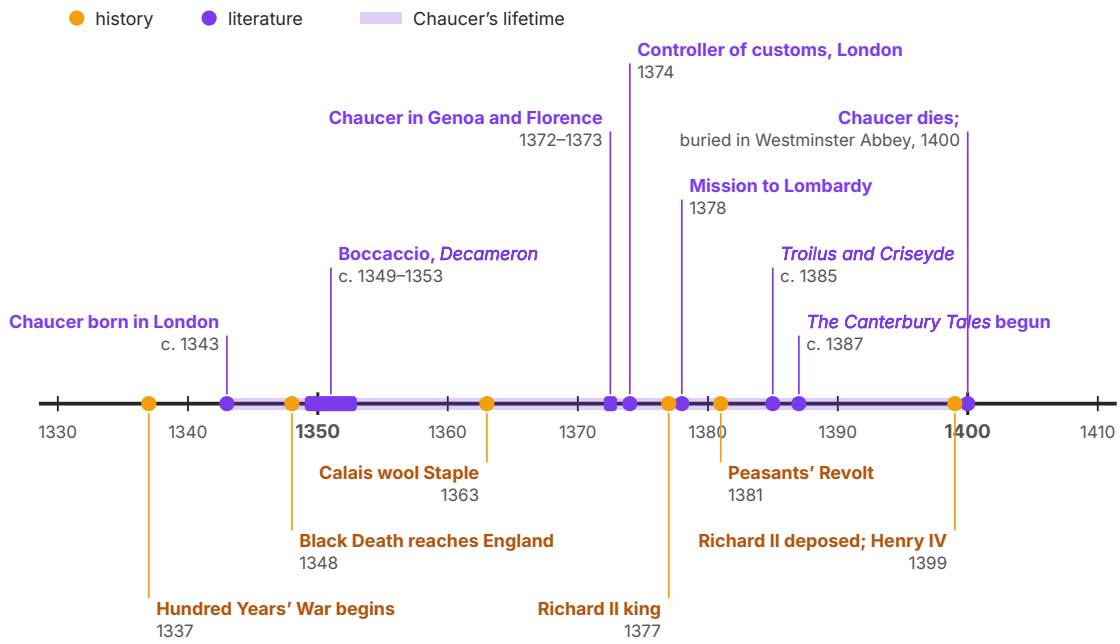


Figura 6.1 Chaucer's lifetime, 1330–1410: history (amber) and literature (violet). Dates with "c." are approximate; Chaucer's date of birth is not recorded.

6.1.2 The three estates

Medieval writers, in Latin and in English, liked to describe society as a simple, God-given order of **three estates** (in Italian, *i tre ordini*): those who pray (the clergy), those who fight (the nobility) and those who work (everyone else, above all the peasants). Each estate had its duty, and each was supposed to serve the others. By Chaucer's time this model no longer fitted reality. Where did a rich merchant belong, or a lawyer, or a woman who ran her own cloth business? Chaucer's pilgrims are, in a sense, an inventory of the estates — and a demonstration that the old boxes were too small (Figura 6.3).

6.1.3 Pilgrimage and the shrine of Saint Thomas

A **pilgrimage** is a journey to a holy place, made for religious reasons: to pray for a cure, to give thanks, to do penance for a sin. Medieval pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem, to Rome, to Santiago de Compostela in Spain — and, in England, above all to Canterbury. There, in 1170, Archbishop Thomas Becket had been murdered in his own cathedral by four of Henry II's knights (chapter 4). He was made a saint only three years later, in 1173, and in 1220 his body was moved to a magnificent **shrine** — a tomb or place made holy by the relics of a saint — behind the high altar.

For more than three centuries pilgrims from all over Europe came to it, until Henry VIII had it destroyed in 1538.

A pilgrimage was an act of faith, but also a journey in company, with inns, food and stories; critics complained that some people went for the holiday rather than for their souls. Chaucer's pilgrims include both kinds.

> **DA RICORDARE**
>
> **Thomas Becket**: archbishop of Canterbury, murdered in the cathedral in **1170**, made a saint in **1173**; his relics moved to a new shrine in **1220**; the shrine destroyed in **1538**. London to Canterbury: about 90 km, a journey of a few days on horseback.

6.1.4 The Church and its critics

The Church was everywhere in medieval life: it baptised, married and buried people, ran schools and hospitals, owned a large part of the land and had its own courts. Precisely because it was so powerful, it was also widely criticised — not for its faith, but for the behaviour of some of its men.

Three figures were favourite targets. A **friar** was a member of a religious order (Franciscans, Dominicans and others) who lived not in a monastery but among the people, preaching and begging for his food; friars had arrived in England in the 1220s, poor and admired, but by Chaucer's time many people thought them greedy. A **summoner** was an officer who called people to appear before the Church courts, which judged offences such as adultery or not paying tithes: a summoner could easily be bribed. A **pardoner** was licensed to collect money for a church or hospital and, in return, to offer **indulgences** — documents that promised the remission of the punishment due for sins already forgiven. Many pardoners simply sold them, together with fake relics. (Criticism from inside the Church, such as John Wycliffe's, is in chapter 7.)

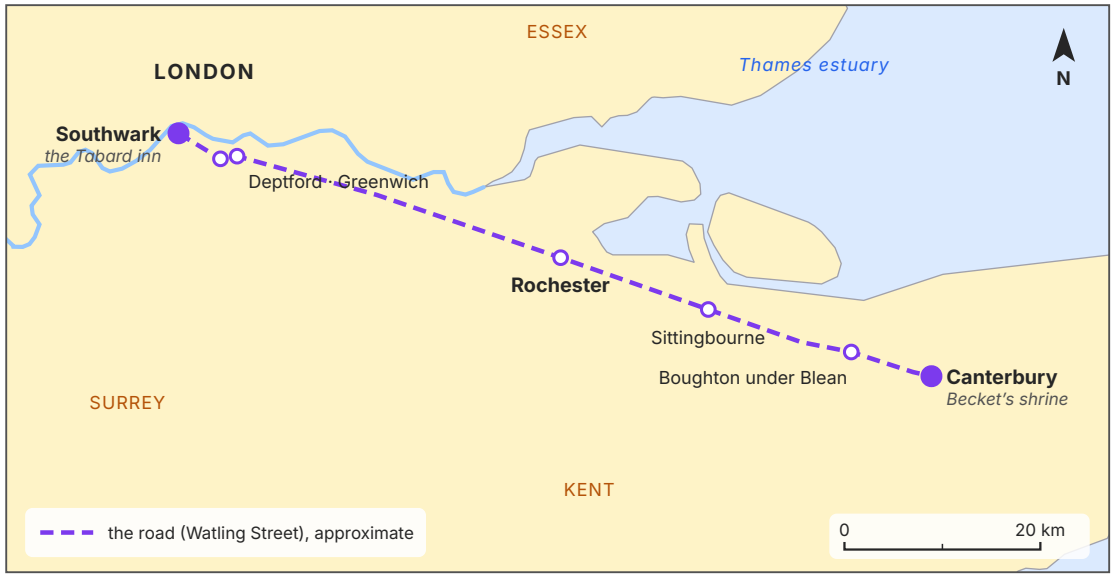


Figura 6.2 The road of Chaucer's pilgrims, from the Tabard inn in Southwark to Canterbury, along the Roman road known as Watling Street (route approximate). The places marked are named in *The Canterbury Tales*; Boughton under Blean is Chaucer's "Boghton under Blee".

6.2 Literature: Geoffrey Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*

6.2.1 A life in the king's service

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London around 1343, the son of John Chaucer, a wealthy wine merchant. We know a lot about his career from hundreds of official documents — none of which mentions his poetry. In 1357 he was a page in the household of the Countess of Ulster, the wife of one of Edward III's sons. He fought in France in 1359–1360, was taken prisoner and was ransomed, partly with the king's money. Around 1366 he married Philippa, a lady of the queen's household.

Chaucer was a **courtier** and a **diplomat**: he travelled on the king's business to France, to Flanders and, twice, to Italy — to Genoa and Florence in 1372–1373, and to Lombardy, the Milan of Bernabò Visconti, in 1378. From 1374 to 1386 he was **Controller of the wool customs** in the port of London, the official who checked the taxes paid on exported wool, and he lived in rooms above Aldgate, one of the city gates. Later he was a member of Parliament for Kent and Clerk of the King's Works (1389–1391). He died in 1400 (tradition says on 25 October) and was buried in Westminster Abbey, near which he was then living. When later poets were buried near him — Edmund Spenser in 1599 was among the first — that part of the Abbey became known as **Poets' Corner**.

6.2.2 From French to Italian to English

Critics often divide Chaucer's work into three periods, a **French**, an **Italian** and an **English** one. The division is conventional — he read French and Italian all his life — but it helps to see how he grew. His early poems, such as *The Book of the Duchess* (c. 1368–1372), an elegy for the wife of John of Gaunt, imitate French courtly dream-poems. After his Italian journeys he discovered Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385), a long love story set during the siege of Troy, is a free adaptation of Boccaccio's *Filostrato*, although Chaucer never names Boccaccio and claims to follow an ancient author, "Lollius", who never existed. *Troilus* is written in **rhyme royal** (in Italian, *rima reale*), a seven-line stanza of iambic pentameters rhyming *ababbcc*. The English period is that of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer wrote in the English of London — Middle English (chapter 4), the language of the capital, the court and, increasingly, of government. He did not invent standard English, but the prestige of his poetry helped to show that English, and not only French or Latin, could be the language of great literature. In 1700 John Dryden called him "the father of English poetry".

> **ERRORE FREQUENTE**
>
> ✗ *Chaucer scrive in inglese antico (Old English).* → ✓ Chaucer scrive in **inglese medio** (*Middle English*), la lingua di Londra del Trecento. L'inglese antico è quello di *Beowulf* (cap. 3); Shakespeare scriverà in inglese *moderno* delle origini (*Early Modern English*).
>
> ✗ *In Italia Chaucer incontrò Petrarca e Boccaccio.* → ✓ Nessun documento attesta un incontro. Il Chierico dei *Racconti* dice di aver imparato una storia da Petrarca a Padova, ma è un personaggio, non Chaucer.

6.2.3 The frame and the plan

The Canterbury Tales, begun around 1387 and still unfinished when Chaucer died, is a **frame narrative** (in Italian, *racconto a cornice*): a story that contains other stories. The frame is a pilgrimage. In the **General Prologue** the narrator tells us that one April evening he was staying at the Tabard inn in Southwark, ready to ride to Canterbury, when "wel nyne and twenty" pilgrims arrived (the count is famously inexact: with the narrator and later arrivals there are about thirty). He then describes them one by one. The innkeeper, the **Host**, proposes a game: each pilgrim will tell stories on the way, and the best storyteller will win a supper, paid for by all the others, when they return. The Host himself will ride with them as guide and judge:

That ech of yow, to shorte with your weye,

In this viage, shal telle tales tweye,

To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,

And hom-ward he shal tellen othere two,

General Prologue, ll. 791–794 (Skeat's text): *to shorte with your weye* to shorten your journey; *viage* journey; *tweye* two.

Four tales each, for about thirty pilgrims, would make some 120 tales. Chaucer wrote 24, some of them unfinished, and the pilgrims never arrive in Canterbury, let alone ride home. The tales cover almost every medieval genre: a chivalric romance (the Knight's Tale, from Boccaccio's *Teseida*), saints' lives, sermons, beast fables, and **fabliaux** (singular *fabliau*), coarse comic tales of tricks and cheated husbands, such as the Miller's Tale. In the "links" between the tales the pilgrims quarrel and interrupt: the drunk Miller insists on speaking before the Monk; the Reeve, a carpenter, is offended by the Miller's tale about a carpenter and answers with a tale about a cheating miller. The frame is a drama in which the stories become weapons.

IN SINTESI

Author	Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400)
Date	begun c. 1387; unfinished in 1400
Form	a frame narrative; mostly verse (heroic couplets), two tales in prose
Frame	a pilgrimage from the Tabard, Southwark, to Becket's shrine at Canterbury
Plan	four tales per pilgrim (about 120); 24 written
Genres	romance, fabliau, saint's life, sermon, beast fable…
Language	Middle English, the dialect of London

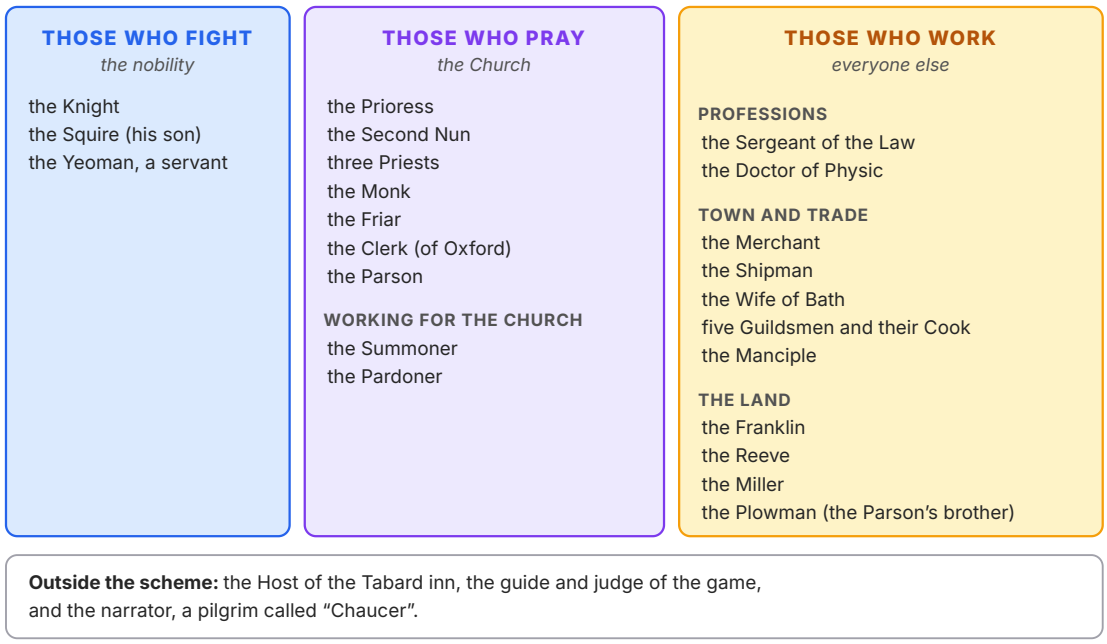


Figura 6.3 The pilgrims of the General Prologue grouped by the three estates. The grouping is simplified: a lawyer, a doctor or a rich merchant did not fit the old scheme well, and the Summoner and the Pardoner worked for the Church without being priests or monks.

6.2.4 Satire, irony and the narrator

The General Prologue is one of the masterpieces of **satire** (*satira*): writing that uses humour to expose the faults of people or institutions. Medieval moralists had a whole genre of **estates satire**, which listed the typical sins of each estate: the greedy merchant, the lazy monk, the dishonest miller. Chaucer takes these types and turns them into individuals with faces, clothes, horses, habits and voices. The Monk loves hunting and good food; the Prioress speaks French "After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe" (l. 125), the French of a convent near London, not of Paris; the Friar is "the beste beggere in his hous" (l. 252).

The key to the satire is **irony** (*ironia*): saying one thing while meaning, or letting the reader see, something different. Chaucer's narrator is a pilgrim called "Chaucer", but he is a **persona** — a voice created by the author, not the author himself. This narrator is friendly, admiring and apparently naive. When the Monk explains that the old rules about monks staying in their cloister are not worth an oyster, the narrator agrees: "And I seyde, his opinioun was good" (l. 183). The reader, of course, does not agree. Because the narrator never condemns anyone, the judgement is left to us — which makes it sharper.

Not every portrait is ironic. The poor Parson, who practises what he preaches, and his brother the Plowman are described as ideal Christians; the Clerk, a poor Oxford student, loves

books more than money: "And gladly wolde he lerne, and gladly teche" (l. 308). The contrast between ideal and real figures is part of the design.

6.2.5 A new music: the heroic couplet

Most of the *Tales*, including the General Prologue, are written in lines of ten or eleven syllables with five stresses, in which an unstressed syllable is normally followed by a stressed one. A pair of syllables of this kind (da-DUM) is an iamb, and a line of five iambs is an **iambic pentameter** (*pentametro giambico*). Chaucer was the first poet to use it on a large scale in English, probably modelling it on the French ten-syllable line and the Italian *endecasillabo*. The lines rhyme in pairs, *aa bb cc*: two rhyming iambic pentameters form a **heroic couplet** (*distico eroico*), a name given to the form much later. The iambic pentameter will become the main line of English poetry for five centuries: Shakespeare's blank verse and sonnets (chapters 9–11) are built on it.

In Chaucer's English, a final *-e* was often still pronounced as a light syllable, especially at the end of a line — this is what makes his lines sound regular. But it was silent before a word beginning with a vowel or a weak *h*. Figura 6.4 shows the first two lines of the General Prologue scanned in this way.

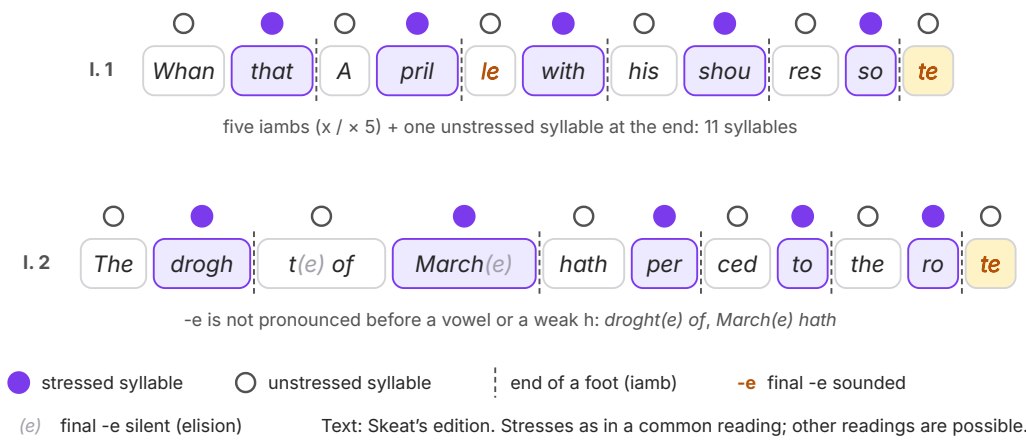


Figura 6.4 Scansion of the General Prologue, ll. 1–2 (Skeat's text). Each line has five stresses and ends with an unstressed final *-e*: an eleven-syllable iambic pentameter.

APPROFONDIMENTO

From manuscript to print. No manuscript in Chaucer's hand survives. More than 80 manuscripts of the *Tales*, complete or fragmentary, were copied in the 15th century, the best (Hengwrt and Ellesmere) soon after his death. The tales survive in blocks called *fragments*, whose order the manuscripts do not agree on. Around 1476–1477 William Caxton (chapter 7) printed the *Tales*, and again in 1483 with woodcuts of the pilgrims. From then on Chaucer was a classic: "here is God's plenty", wrote Dryden in 1700, admiring the variety of his characters.

6.3 Texts: The Pilgrims on the Page

All three passages are quoted from W. W. Skeat's edition (*The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, vol. IV, Oxford, 1894; Project Gutenberg). Skeat prints *I* for *J* (*Ierusalem*, *Iame*) and his line numbers for the General Prologue are the ones used in most editions.

6.3.1 T1 · Geoffrey Chaucer, General Prologue, ll. 1–18: "Whan that Aprille"

Context. The *Tales* open not with a person but with a season. In one long sentence of eighteen lines, Chaucer moves from rain and plants to birds, to people, to England and to Canterbury.

Tabella 6.1 T1 — *The Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, ll. 1–18 (original and translation by the editors). Middle English text from Skeat's edition (1894).

Middle English (Skeat's text)	Modern English (translation by the editors)	
Whan that Aprille with his shoures sote	When April with its sweet showers	
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,	has pierced the drought of March to the root,	
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,	and bathed every vein in such moisture	
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;	that by its power the flower is born;	
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth	when Zephyrus, too, with his sweet breath	5
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth	has breathed life, in every wood and heath,	
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne	into the tender shoots, and the young sun	
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,	has run his half-course in the Ram,	
And smale fowles maken melodye,	and little birds make melody	
That slepen al the night with open yë,	that sleep all night with open eyes	10
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages):	(so Nature spurs them in their hearts):	
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages	then people long to go on pilgrimages,	

(And palmers for to seken straunge strondes)	(and palmers to seek foreign shores)	
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;	to distant shrines, known in various lands;	
And specially, from every shires ende	and especially, from every shire's end	15
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,	of England, to Canterbury they go,	
The holy blisful martir for to seke,	to seek the holy, blessed martyr	
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.	who has helped them when they were sick.	

Glosses. *sote* sweet · *licour* moisture, sap · *vertu* power · *engendred is* is produced · *eek* also · *Zephirus* the west wind of spring · *holt* wood · *croppes* young shoots · *yonge sonne* the sun is "young" because the year was thought to begin in spring · *the Ram* Aries, the sign of the zodiac the sun passes through from mid-March to mid-April · *priketh* spurs · *hem* them · *hir corages* their hearts · *palmers* pilgrims who had been to the Holy Land and carried a palm leaf · *halwes* saints, shrines · *couthe* known · *wende* go · *martir* Thomas Becket · *holpen* helped · *seke* sick (*seke* / *seke* is a rhyme on two different words: "seek" and "sick").

Analysis

Form. Nine heroic couplets (*sote / rote, licour / flour…*) in iambic pentameter. The whole passage is a single sentence built on *Whan… whan… than*: two long "when" clauses (ll. 1–11) set the scene, and the main clause arrives only in l. 12 — *Than longen folk*. The delay imitates the slow awakening of spring.

Language and imagery. The movement goes from the cosmic to the human: rain, plants, wind, the sun, birds, people, and finally one country and one shrine. Nature "spurs" the birds as a rider spurs a horse. French and Latin words (*licour, vertu, engendred, nature, corages*) stand next to plain English ones (*droghte, rote, holt, folk*): the two worlds you met in chapter 4.

Theme. Why do people go on pilgrimage? The passage gives two answers at once: the natural restlessness of spring, which makes birds sing and people want to travel, and the religious wish to thank the saint who "hem hath holpen". The final rhyme *seke / seke* ties the two together: people *seek* the martyr because they were *sick*. Body and soul, holiday and devotion: the whole book is already here.

Guided questions. 1. Which words in ll. 1–4 suggest growth and new life? 2. Find the main verb of the sentence and its subject. 3. What do the birds and the pilgrims have in common? 4. Which places are named, and in what order? Why? 5. Read ll. 1–2 aloud following Figura 6.4: what happens to the final *-e* of *Aprille* and of *droghte*?

ESEMPIO SVOLTO

Scanning a line of Chaucer. Let us scan l. 9, *And smale fowles maken melodye*.

1. **Divide into syllables**, sounding every final *-e* that stands before a consonant or at the end of the line: *and · sma · le · fow · les · ma · ken · me · lo · dy · e* = 11 syllables. (*melodye* rhymes with *yë*, "eye", which has two syllables.)
2. **Mark the stresses** of the important words: *SMA-le, FOW-les, MA-ken, ME-lo-DY-e*.
3. **Check the pattern**: *and SMA · le FOW · les MA · ken ME · lo DY · e* — five iambs and a final unstressed syllable, exactly like ll. 1–2.
4. **Read it aloud** without stopping at the end of the line: the sense runs on into l. 10.

Remember: English metre counts stresses first. A modern reader who drops every final *-e* hears a line of eight syllables and thinks Chaucer's verse is rough; it is not.

6.3.2 T2 · Geoffrey Chaucer, General Prologue, ll. 445–468: the Wife of Bath

Context. Alisoun, the Wife of Bath, is one of the few women among the pilgrims and the only one who is not a nun. She is a cloth-maker from near Bath, in the west of England. Later in the book her own prologue — a long, comic, aggressive monologue about her five marriages — is one of Chaucer's most famous creations.

Tabella 6.2 T2 — *The Canterbury Tales*, General Prologue, ll. 445–468 (text from Skeat's edition, 1894), with glosses by the editors.

Middle English (Skeat's text)	Glosses	
A good Wyf was ther of bisyde Bathe,	*Wyf* woman; *of bisyde* from near	445
But she was som-del deef, and that was scathe.	*som-del* somewhat; *scathe* a pity	
Of clooth-making she hadde swiche an haunt,	*swiche an haunt* such skill	
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.	*passed* surpassed; *Gaunt* Ghent	
In al the parisshe wyf ne was ther noon	there was no woman	
That to the offring bifore hir sholde goon;	*offring* the offering at Mass	450
And if ther dide, certeyn, so wrooth was she,	*wrooth* angry	
That she was out of alle charitee.	*charitee* Christian love	
Hir coverchiefs ful fyne were of ground;	*coverchiefs* headscarves; *ground* texture	
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound	*dorste* would dare; *weyeden* weighed	
That on a Sonday were upon hir heed.	*heed* head	455

Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,	*hosen* stockings; *reed* red	
Ful streite y-teyd, and shoos ful moiste and newe.	*streite* tightly; *moiste* soft	
Bold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.	*hewe* colour	
She was a worthy womman al hir lyve,	*worthy* respectable	
Housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde fyve,	weddings took place at the church door	460
Withouten other companye in youthe;	not counting other company	
But therof nedeth nat to speke as nouthe.	*as nouthe* now	
And thryes hadde she been at Ierusalem;	*thryes* three times	
She hadde passed many a straunge streem;	*straunge* foreign	
At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,	*Boloigne* Boulogne	465
In Galice at seint Iame, and at Coloigne.	Santiago de Compostela; Cologne	
She coude muche of wandring by the weye.	*coude* knew	
Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.	*gat-tothed* gap-toothed; *soothly* truly	

Analysis

Form and method. Twelve heroic couplets that jump from one detail to another, as if the narrator were noting things while he watched her: her deafness, her trade, her behaviour in church, her clothes, her face, her husbands, her travels, her teeth. There is no judgement, only facts — and the facts judge her.

Irony. She is "a worthy womman" (l. 459), but the proof of her worth is five husbands and "other companye in youthe", which the narrator politely declines to discuss (ll. 461–462). She goes first to the offering in church, and if another woman goes before her she is "out of alle charitee" (l. 452): she is angry at the one moment when she should be most humble. Her Sunday headscarves weigh, the narrator swears, ten pounds — an exaggeration that shows how much she likes to be seen. And she knew a lot about "wandring by the weye" (l. 467): wandering on the road, but also straying from the right path.

Theme. The Wife is a woman of the new economy: she earns her own money with cloth and competes with the weavers of Ypres and Ghent. She has travelled more than any other pilgrim. She is a satirical type, the worldly woman of the moralists, but she is so alive that she escapes the type.

Guided questions. 1. List the details about her clothes. What do they tell you about her? 2. Why is her behaviour at the offering ironic? 3. How does the narrator avoid talking about her youth? 4. Which places has she visited, and what does this suggest about her pilgrimage to Canterbury? 5. Find a line with two meanings and explain both.

6.3.3 T3 · Geoffrey Chaucer, the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

Context. In the General Prologue the Pardoner has long yellow hair, a voice "as smal as hath a goot" (l. 688) and a bag "Bret-ful of pardoun come from Rome al hoot" (l. 687) — full to the brim of pardons, hot from Rome — and some "pigges bones" (l. 700) that he passes off as holy relics. When the Host asks him for a tale, he first explains, with astonishing frankness, how he preaches to simple people.

Tabella 6.3 T3 — *The Canterbury Tales*, the Pardoner's Prologue, ll. 329–334 and 427–428 (original and translation by the editors). Middle English text from Skeat's edition (1894).

Middle English (Skeat's text)	Modern English (translation by the editors)	
'Lordings,' quod he, 'in chirches whan I preche,	"Gentlemen," he said, "when I preach in churches,	
I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,	I take pains to have a lofty way of speaking,	330
And ringe it out as round as gooth a belle,	and I ring it out as round as a bell,	
For I can al by rote that I telle.	for I know by heart all that I say.	
My theme is alwey oon, and ever was—	My theme is always one, and always was:	
"Radix malorum est Cupiditas."	'Greed is the root of evils.'	
…	…	
Thus can I preche agayn that same vyce	So I can preach against the very vice	
Which that I use, and that is avaryce.	that I practise, and that is avarice.	

Glosses. *quod* said · *peyne me* take pains · *hauteyn* loud, solemn · *can… by rote* know by heart · *oon* one · *use* practise. The Latin motto comes from the Bible, Paul's first letter to Timothy (6:10), which calls greed — the love of money — the root of all evils.

The tale (summary by the editors). To show how well he preaches, the Pardoner tells an **exemplum** (plural *exempla*), a short story used in a sermon to illustrate a moral lesson. In a tavern in Flanders three young rioters learn that a friend has been killed by a thief called Death, who has killed thousands in this plague. Drunk, they swear to find Death and kill him. An old man who longs to die tells them that Death is under an oak tree; there they find a heap of gold florins. They send the youngest to town for bread and wine; the other two agree to kill him when he returns, while he buys poison for them. They stab him, drink the wine — and die. All three have found Death under the tree. At the end the Pardoner invites the pilgrims to buy his pardons and suggests that the Host, "most envoluped in sinne", should begin; the Host answers with a crude insult, and the Knight has to make them kiss and make peace.

Analysis

Form. The Pardoner's Tale is a perfect little machine: three characters, one object (the gold), one place (the tree), and an ending that turns their own plans against them. The irony is *situational*: the rioters set out to kill Death and find him in the gold they think will make them rich.

The double irony. The tale condemns greed — and its teller is the greediest man on the pilgrimage, who boasts that he preaches against avarice only to make people give him money (ll. 427–428). Chaucer lets the Pardoner condemn himself with his own words. Can a good sermon come from a bad preacher? The Pardoner says yes: "though my-self be gilty in that sinne, / Yet can I maken other folk to twinne" (ll. 429–430), that is, to turn away from it.

Guided questions. 1. What does the Pardoner say about his way of preaching? 2. Translate the Latin motto into Italian. Do you know a similar proverb? 3. Why do the rioters want to "kill Death"? 4. Who or what is the old man, in your opinion? (Readings differ.) 5. Explain the irony of a greedy man preaching against greed.

LEARNING TO LEARN

Reading Middle English. A page of Chaucer looks foreign, but most of it is English you already know in disguise. Try this method:

1. **Sound it out.** Read aloud: the eye is confused by the spelling, the ear often is not. *droghte* → drought, *shoures* → showers, *slepen* → sleep.
2. **Look for modern cousins.** *sote* → sweet, *rote* → root, *fowles* → fowl (birds), *holpen* → helped, *ferne* → far. Often only one vowel has changed.
3. **Use Italian and Latin** for the French and Latin words: *licour ~ liquore*, *vertu ~ virtù*, *corages ~ coraggio* (here "heart"), *straunge ~ estraneo*.
4. **Use the glosses last**, for the words that are really lost (*holt, halwes, couthe*). Then reread the whole passage.

The same method works for Dante's Italian and for old Latin texts: sound, cousins, glosses, reread.

6.4 Language: Reporting Verbs and Their Patterns

A precise reporting verb gives not only the words but the speaker's **intention**: an accusation, an apology, advice, a boast. In English 2 (Unit 7) you met *explain, promise, refuse, offer, suggest, warn* and *tell / ask* + object + *to*. At B2 you need more verbs and the right **pattern** after each one — often different from the Italian. Compare: *"Yes, I sold pigs' bones as relics."* → *The Pardoner* ***admitted selling*** *pigs' bones as relics.*

Tabella 6.4 Reporting verbs: the four main patterns

Pattern	Verbs	Examples from the chapter
1 verb + *-ing*	*admit, deny, suggest, recommend* (also *mention, propose*)	*The Host* ***suggested telling*** *tales on the way. · The Pardoner* ***admitted using*** *pigs' bones.*
2 verb + object + *to*-infinitive	*advise, persuade, remind, warn, urge, encourage, invite, order*	*The Knight* ***persuaded the Host to kiss*** *the Pardoner. · The Pardoner* ***urged the pilgrims to buy*** *his pardons.*
3 verb + (object) + preposition + *-ing*	*accuse sb of, blame sb for, apologise (to sb) for, insist on, congratulate sb on, thank sb for*	*The Reeve* ***accused the Miller of insulting*** *carpenters. · The Miller* ***insisted on telling*** *his tale next.*
4 verb + *that*-clause	*claim, explain, complain, boast*; also *admit, deny, insist, suggest, recommend, agree*	*The Pardoner* ***claimed that*** *an old pillowcase* ***was*** *the Virgin's veil.*

6.4.1 Verb + *-ing*, and the perfect *-ing*

admit (ammettere), *deny* (negare), *suggest* and *recommend* are followed by the *-ing* form, never by *to*. When the action reported happened **before** the reporting, you can use the perfect form *having* + past participle, but the simple *-ing* is also correct when the order is clear:

- *"I didn't steal the gold!" → He* ***denied stealing*** */* ***having stolen*** *the gold.*
- *"I really have been to Jerusalem three times." → She* ***admitted having been*** *to Jerusalem three times.*
- *"Why don't we start with the General Prologue?" → Mrs Hill* ***suggested starting*** *with the General Prologue. / Mrs Hill suggested* ***that we (should) start*** *with it.*
- *"Read the Pardoner's Tale first — it's short." → Sam* ***recommended reading*** *the Pardoner's Tale first.*

suggest and *recommend* do not take a person + *to*: use *-ing* or a *that*-clause. (*recommend* + object + *to* is possible in British English, but less common: learn the safe patterns.) *admit* and *deny* can also take a *that*-clause: *He admitted that he had lied.*

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

Verbo + *-ing* (gerundio). *admit, deny, suggest, recommend* + *-ing*; per un'azione anteriore anche *having* + participio passato (*denied having stolen*).

Confronto con l'italiano. In italiano diciamo *ammettere* ***di*** *aver fatto, negare* ***di*** *aver detto, suggerire* ***di*** *partire*, con *di* + infinito. L'inglese non ha questa preposizione e non usa *to*: ✗ *he admitted to have lied* → ✓ *he admitted* ***lying*** */* ***having lied***. Con *suggest* l'italiano ha spesso un complemento di termine (*gli ho suggerito di…*): in inglese si usa *suggest that he (should) do something*.

6.4.2 Verb + object + *to*-infinitive

advise, persuade, remind, warn, urge, encourage, invite and *order* need the person who receives the advice, warning or order, and then *to* + base form; the negative is **object + *not to***. *persuade* means you succeeded; *urge* means you pushed hard:

- *"You really must buy my pardons, all of you!" → The Pardoner **urged the pilgrims to buy** his pardons.*
- *"Don't forget your quotations." → Mrs Hill **reminded us to bring** our quotations.* (but *remind somebody **of** something*: *The Wife reminds me of my aunt.*)

> **GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO**
>
> **Verbo + persona + *to* + forma base.** *advise / persuade / remind / warn / urge / encourage / invite / order somebody (not) to do*.
>
> **Confronto con l'italiano.** Le strutture italiane variano: *convincere qualcuno **a** fare, invitare qualcuno **a** fare, ricordare **a** qualcuno **di** fare, consigliare **a** qualcuno **di** fare*. In inglese la persona è sempre un complemento **diretto**, senza preposizione, e segue sempre *to*: ✗ *She reminded to me to call* → ✓ *She reminded **me to call***; ✗ *He advised to me to wait* → ✓ *He advised **me to wait***.

6.4.3 Verb + preposition + *-ing*; verb + *that*

Many reporting verbs are followed by a fixed preposition, a **dependent preposition**, and after a preposition English always uses the *-ing* form: *accuse somebody **of**, blame somebody **for**, apologise **for**, insist **on**, congratulate somebody **on**, thank somebody **for***. Learn the verb and its preposition as a single unit.

- *"You told that story to insult me!" said the Reeve. → The Reeve **accused the Miller of telling** that story to insult him.*
- *"Forgive me if I haven't put people in order of rank." → The narrator **apologises for not putting** the pilgrims in order of rank.*
- *"I'm going to tell my tale now, whatever you say!" → The Miller **insisted on telling** his tale.*

Verbs such as *claim* (sostenere, affermare — often something that may not be true), *explain*, *complain* and *boast* (vantarsi) introduce a *that*-clause, with the usual backshift after a past reporting verb: *"This is Our Lady's veil." → He **claimed that** it **was** Our Lady's veil. claim* can also take *to* + infinitive when the subject is the same: *He **claimed to have come** straight from Rome.*

No backshift (recall from English 2). If the reporting verb is in the present, or if the fact is still true, the tense need not change: *Mrs Hill **says** that the Tales **are** unfinished. She **explained** that the Tales **are** (or **were**) unfinished.* In literary essays we normally report with the **present** tense: *Chaucer **suggests** that..., the narrator **admits** that..., the Pardoner **boasts** that...* — you will use this in the Writing section.

GRAMMAR IN ITALIANO

Verbo + preposizione + *-ing*; verbo + *that*. *accuse of, blame for, apologise for, insist on, congratulate on, thank for* + *-ing*; *claim, explain, complain, boast* + *that*.

Confronto con l'italiano. Le preposizioni inglesi non corrispondono a quelle italiane: *accusare* ***di*** = *accuse* ***of*** (✗ *for*); *incolpare qualcuno* ***di*** = *blame somebody* ***for***; *insistere* ***per*** *fare* = *insist* ***on*** *doing*; *scusarsi* ***di / per*** = *apologise* ***for***. Dopo la preposizione, sempre *-ing*, mai l'infinito. Nel commento letterario, come in italiano (*Chaucer* ***suggerisce*** *che…*), si usa il presente.

ERRORE FREQUENTE

✗ *The Host suggested the pilgrims to tell tales.* → ✓ *The Host suggested* ***telling*** *tales.* / ✓ *suggested* ***that*** *the pilgrims (should)* ***tell*** *tales.* · ✗ *He explained me the rules.* → ✓ *He explained the rules* ***to me***.

✗ *They accused him for lying.* → ✓ *accused him* ***of*** *lying*. · ✗ *She insisted to pay.* → ✓ *She insisted* ***on paying***. · ✗ *He denied to have taken the gold.* → ✓ *He denied* ***taking / having taken*** *the gold.* · ✗ *I apologise to be late.* → ✓ *I apologise* ***for being*** *late.*

6.5 Skills: Describing People and Writing About Characters

6.5.1 Vocabulary: people and character

Chaucer describes his pilgrims through what they wear, what they do and what they say. To talk about them you need adjectives of character, positive and negative (Tabella 6.5).

Tabella 6.5 People and character

Word	Meaning	Example
greedy (≠ *generous*)	wanting more money, food or things than you need	*The Pardoner is greedy: he preaches only to get money.*
hypocritical (n. *hypocrite, hypocrisy*)	pretending to have moral standards you do not have	*A friar who preaches poverty and loves the rich is hypocritical.*
generous	happy to give money, time or help	*The Parson is generous to the poor of his parish.*
shrewd	clever and practical, good at judging situations, especially to get an advantage	*The Merchant is a shrewd businessman.*
pious (n. *piety*)	deeply religious, devoted to prayer	*The Parson is truly pious; the Prioress only looks pious.*
vain (n. *vanity*)	too proud of your appearance or abilities	*The Squire is a little vain about his curly hair.*
cheerful	happy and positive, pleasant to be with	*The Host is a cheerful, loud man.*
worldly (≠ *spiritual*)	interested in money, pleasure and success rather than in spiritual things	*The Monk is worldly: he loves hunting and good food.*

Word formation: adjectives with *-ous, -ive, -ic, -ical*

Many adjectives of character and of literary analysis are formed with these suffixes (Tabella 6.6). Watch the spelling changes (*ambition → ambitious, satire → satirical*) and the stress, which in *-ic* and *-ical* words always falls on the syllable before the suffix: *DRAMa → draMATic, HIStory → hisTORical*.

Tabella 6.6 Adjectives with *-ous*, *-ive*, *-ic*, *-ical*

Suffix	Examples
-ous	*fame → famous · religion → religious · ambition → ambitious · envy → envious · courage → courageous · humour → humorous*
-ive	*create → creative · attract → attractive · impress → impressive · talk → talkative · offend → offensive · persuade → persuasive*
-ic	*hero → heroic · poet → poetic · drama → dramatic · irony → ironic · romance → romantic*
-ical	*history → historical · satire → satirical · hypocrite → hypocritical · politics → political*
-ic ≠ *-ical*	*economic* (of the economy) / *economical* (not wasting money) · *historic* (important in history) / *historical* (about the past) · *classic* (typical, excellent of its kind) / *classical* (of ancient Greece and Rome; serious music) · *comic* (meant to be funny) / *comical* (funny, often without meaning to be)

6.5.2 Listening: Two Tales on the Road

Listen (books closed) while two classmates read the script. Sam and Callum record an episode of *Trail Talk*, the Literature Trail podcast, while they walk the last stage of the old road from London to Canterbury (Tabella 6.7). First listening: which two tales do they tell? Second listening: note every reporting verb you hear.

Tabella 6.7 Listening script — Two Tales on the Road

Sam	Hi, everyone, and welcome to *Trail Talk*, the Literature Trail podcast. I'm Sam…
Callum	…and I'm Callum, and today we're recording on the road. Literally on the road.
Sam	We're walking the last stage of the old road from London to Canterbury, the one Chaucer's pilgrims took. We started this morning in Boughton under Blean — Chaucer calls it "Boghton under Blee".
Callum	About eight kilometres to the cathedral. Mrs Hill suggested walking it before we write our essays — and she persuaded my dad to drive us here at seven on a Saturday.
Sam	The rules: like Chaucer's Host, we each tell a tale, and you, our listeners, vote for the best one. Callum, you first.
Callum	OK. A modern pardoner. There's a man online who sells a "detox" tea. He claims that it cleans your blood and makes you cleverer. When a journalist asked if he drank it himself, he admitted never having tried it. He even boasted that his best customers believed everything. When people accused him of lying, he apologised for "any confusion" — and went on selling.
Sam	That's the Pardoner exactly. He preaches against greed, and he's the greediest man on the road.
Callum	Your turn. No spoilers… oh, wait. It's six hundred years old.
Sam	The Pardoner's own tale. Three drunk young men swear to kill Death. An old man tells them Death is under an oak tree — but there they find gold. They send the youngest to town for wine, and while he's away one of the others suggests killing him when he gets back. His friend agrees. But the youngest has bought poison…
Callum	Don't tell me. They all die.
Sam	They all die. The old man was right: they found Death under the tree.
Callum	Grim, but brilliant. Hang on — I can see the cathedral tower!
Sam	Bell Harry. It was built about a hundred years after Chaucer's death, so his pilgrims never saw it.
Callum	Listeners, vote on the blog. The winner buys the loser dinner.
Sam	That's not the Host's rule! Everybody else pays for the winner.
Callum	In that case, I insist on winning.

6.5.3 Speaking: describing people and their personality

Chaucer's narrator reads character from appearance. When you describe a person — in a photo, a painting or a text — separate what you **see** from what you **deduce**, and show how sure you are (Tabella 6.8).

Tabella 6.8 Useful language — describing people and speculating from appearance

Function	Phrases
Describing appearance	*He's wearing… · She's got… · He's in his twenties / about forty · She's dressed in… · What strikes me first is…*
Speculating from details	*He looks + adjective (worried, wealthy) · He looks like + noun (a businessman) · She looks as if / as though she… · Judging by her clothes, she must be… · He might / could be… · He can't be…*
Describing personality	*She comes across as… · He seems to be the kind of person who… · I get the impression that… · On the surface he's…, but deep down…*
Being careful	*It's hard to say, but… · I may be wrong, but… · Apparently… · There's something about him that…*

1. **Guess the pilgrim.** In pairs, A chooses a pilgrim from T1, T2, T3 or Figura 6.3 and describes his or her appearance and behaviour, without saying the name or the job (*She looks as if she has travelled a lot; judging by her clothes, she must be quite rich…*). B speculates and guesses. Then swap roles.
2. **A pilgrim today.** In groups, invent a 21st-century pilgrim for a modern *Canterbury Tales*: a shrewd influencer, a pious cyclist, a talkative taxi driver… Describe his or her appearance and personality to the class (one minute), using at least four phrases from the table. The class decides which estate he or she would belong to today.

6.5.4 Writing: a literary paragraph (PEE)

From this chapter on, every time you write about literature you will use the same building block: the **PEE paragraph** — **P**oint, **E**vidence, **E**xplanation. A final sentence links it back to the question. Read the model (Tabella 6.9) and its structure (Tabella 6.10).

Tabella 6.9 Model text — a literary paragraph on the Wife of Bath (question: "How does Chaucer present the Wife of Bath?")

Chaucer presents the Wife of Bath as a woman who wants to be seen and respected, but his narrator's praise quietly undermines her. In church, for example, she insists on going to the offering before every other woman of the parish, and if anyone goes first, "she was out of alle charitee" (l. 452). The irony is clear: the offering is a moment of Christian humility, yet it is exactly there that she shows her pride and her anger. The word "charitee" is the key, because it means love for others — the very virtue she loses. Her Sunday headscarves, which the narrator swears "weyeden ten pound" (l. 454), make the same point through comic exaggeration: for her, church is a stage on which to display her wealth. Even the statement that she was "a worthy womman al hir lyve" (l. 459) is followed at once by her five husbands, and the reader begins to wonder what "worthy" really means. Chaucer never condemns her directly; he lets the details speak, and in this way he turns a traditional satirical type into a character who is both ridiculous and fascinating.

Tabella 6.10 The structure of a PEE paragraph

Step	What it does	Useful language
Point	one sentence that answers the question	*Chaucer presents… as… · The narrator suggests that…*
Evidence	a short quotation (a few words, max. one line), embedded in your sentence, with the line number	*…if anyone goes first, "she was out of alle charitee" (l. 452).*
Explanation	what the words show: one or two key words analysed; the effect on the reader; the device (irony, exaggeration)	*The irony is clear… · The word "…" is the key, because… · This suggests / implies / reveals…*
Link	back to the question, or forward to the next point	*In this way Chaucer… · This is why…*

Checklist. ✓ One main point per paragraph. ✓ Present tense for what happens in the text (*she insists*, not *she insisted*). ✓ Short quotations, copied exactly, in quotation marks, with line numbers. ✓ More explanation than quotation: never leave a quotation alone. ✓ Precise reporting verbs: *Chaucer suggests / implies / reveals / admits*. ✓ No retelling of the plot. ✓ About 180–220 words.

Task. Write a PEE paragraph (180–220 words) answering the question: "How does Chaucer make the Pardoner condemn himself?" Use at least two short quotations from T3 or from the lines of the General Prologue quoted in this chapter.

6.6 Connections: Chaucer and the *Tre Corone*

6.6.1 Two frames: the *Decameron* and the *Tales*

The most famous frame narrative in European literature before Chaucer is Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1349–1353). In the Introduction to the first day, during the plague of 1348 in Florence, a group of young people meet in the church of Santa Maria Novella: first «si ritrovarono sette gio-

vani donne» ("seven young women found themselves together"), and then «e ecco entrar nella chiesa tre giovani» ("and look, three young men came into the church"). They leave the city for the hills, and Pampinea proposes to spend the hot hours «non giucando… ma novellando» ("not playing games… but telling stories"). For ten days each of them tells a story, ten stories a day: one hundred *novelle*. (Italian quotations from Vittore Branca's edition, as given by the Decameron Web of Brown University.)

The two frames share a group of storytellers, a leader who sets the rules and comments between the tales, but they are built in opposite ways (Figura 6.5). Boccaccio's *brigata* is small and socially uniform — ten young, rich, well-educated Florentines — and it escapes from the world and its death into an ordered garden. Chaucer's company is large and mixed, a cross-section of all the estates, and it moves through the real world, on a real road, towards a real shrine. Boccaccio's book is complete and perfectly symmetrical; Chaucer's is unfinished and full of quarrels. Boccaccio's storytellers share one elegant prose; Chaucer's pilgrims speak in voices that match their class.

Did Chaucer read the *Decameron*? Nobody knows. He certainly knew other works by Boccaccio — he adapted the *Filostrato* in *Troilus* and the *Teseida* in the Knight's Tale — and several Canterbury tales have parallels in the *Decameron*. But none of them follows Boccaccio's text closely enough to prove a direct link, and the idea of a frame of stories was common in the Middle Ages. Scholars still disagree.

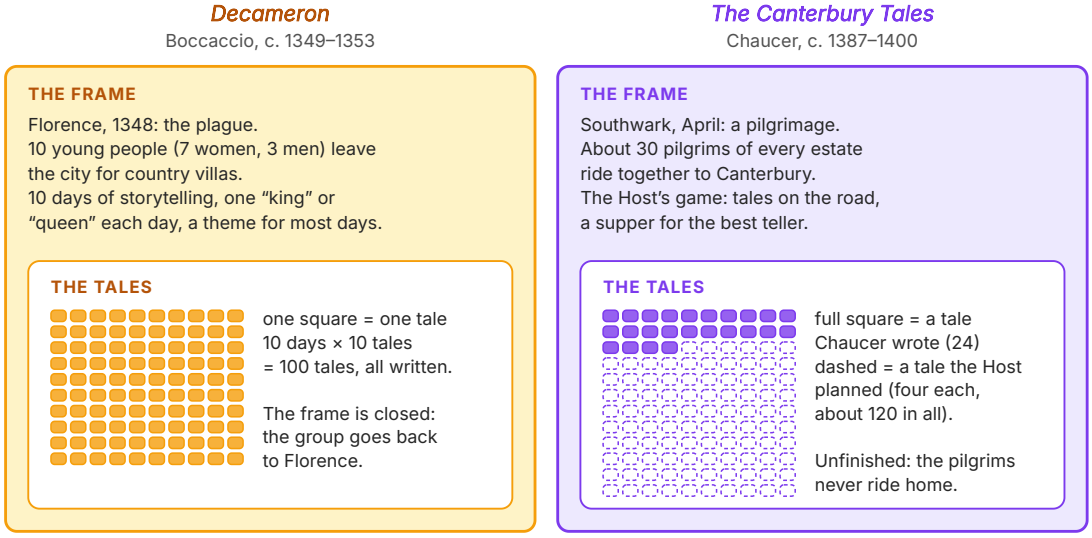


Figura 6.5 Two frame narratives compared: the closed, complete frame of the *Decameron* (100 tales) and the open, unfinished frame of *The Canterbury Tales* (24 tales written out of about 120 planned).

6.6.2 The journey of Griselda

One story shows how texts travelled between Italy and England. The last tale of the *Decameron* (X.10) tells of Gualtieri, marquis of Saluzzo, who marries a poor girl, Griselda, and tests her obedience with cruel tricks — he pretends to have their children killed and to send her away — until he is satisfied and gives everything back. Boccaccio's narrator, Dioneo, does not admire the marquis: he announces that he will tell «non cosa magnifica ma una matta bestialità» ("not a noble deed but a mad piece of cruelty"). In 1373–1374 Petrarch translated the story into Latin in a letter to Boccaccio and turned it into a moral example of patience and constancy. Chaucer's Clerk tells the same story in *The Canterbury Tales*, following Petrarch's version, and says that he learned it "at Padowe of a worthy clerk": "Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete" (Clerk's Prologue, ll. 27, 31). So the same tale passed from Italian to Latin to English — and changed its meaning on the way, from Boccaccio's irony to Petrarch's moral lesson.

COLLEGAMENTI

Economics · The economy of wool. In the 14th century England was, in modern terms, an exporter of a **raw material**: the wool of its sheep was spun and woven into fine cloth abroad, in Flanders and in Italian cities such as Florence, where the powerful *Arte della Lana* organised the industry. The **added value** — the difference between the price of the raw wool and that of the finished cloth — stayed with the foreign weavers and merchants. For the English king, however, wool was a perfect thing to tax: it left the country through a few ports, in sacks that could be counted, and officials like Chaucer checked the payments. Kings also borrowed against these taxes: Edward III borrowed huge sums from the Florentine banks of the Bardi and the Peruzzi to pay for his war in France, and historians think that his failure to repay contributed to their collapse in the 1340s. Discuss: why do countries today prefer to export finished products rather than raw materials?

SINTESI

- In the late 14th century, under Edward III and Richard II, London grew rich on trade; raw wool was England's most valuable export, taxed by the king and channelled through the staple (Calais from 1363).
- Society was described as **three estates** — those who pray, those who fight, those who work — but merchants, lawyers and craftsmen no longer fitted the old model.
- Pilgrims travelled to the **shrine** of Thomas Becket at Canterbury (murdered 1170, saint 1173); friars, summoners and pardoners were the most criticised men of the Church.
- Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) was a courtier, diplomat and Controller of the wool customs; he travelled to Italy in 1372–1373 and 1378, and was buried in Westminster Abbey, the origin of Poets' Corner.
- His work is conventionally divided into French, Italian and English periods; *Troilus and Criseyde* (c. 1385, rhyme royal) adapts Boccaccio's *Filostrato*.
- *The Canterbury Tales* (begun c. 1387, unfinished) is a **frame narrative**: about thirty pilgrims ride from the Tabard in Southwark to Canterbury; the Host plans four tales each, but only 24 were written.
- The General Prologue is an **estates satire**; its **irony** comes from a naive narrator-pilgrim, a **persona** distinct from the author.
- Chaucer used the **iambic pentameter** in rhyming pairs, the **heroic couplet**; his final *-e* is often sounded, except before a vowel or a weak *h*.
- T1 moves from spring to pilgrimage in one long sentence; T2 portrays the Wife of Bath through ironic detail; T3 shows a greedy Pardoner preaching against greed, with an **exemplum** in which three rioters find Death in gold.
- Reporting verbs: *admit / deny / suggest / recommend + -ing*; *advise / persuade / remind / warn / urge + object + to*; *accuse of, blame for, apologise for, insist on + -ing*; *claim / explain / complain / boast + that*; in literary essays, report in the present.
- Skills: adjectives of character (*greedy, hypocritical, shrewd, pious, vain, worldly*), suffixes *-ous / -ive / -ic / -ical* (*economic ≠ economical*), speculating from appearance, and the **PEE paragraph** (Point, Evidence, Explanation).
- The *Decameron* has a closed, complete frame with ten young Florentines; the *Tales* an open, unfinished one with all the estates. Whether Chaucer read the *Decameron* is uncertain; the Griselda story reached him through Petrarch's Latin.

ESERCIZI

History and Literature

1. ● Where did Chaucer's pilgrims meet before leaving for Canterbury?
   A. in Westminster Abbey
   B. at Canterbury Cathedral
   C. at the Tabard inn in Southwark
   D. at Aldgate, in the City of London

2. ● Which work by Boccaccio did Chaucer adapt in *Troilus and Criseyde*?
   A. the *Filostrato*
   B. the *Decameron*
   C. the *Teseida*
   D. the *Trattatello in laude di Dante*

3. ● According to the Host's plan, how many tales should each pilgrim tell?
   A. one
   B. two
   C. three
   D. four

4. ● True or false? Correct the false statements. a Raw wool was England's most valuable export in the 14th century. b Thomas Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1220. c Chaucer was Controller of the wool customs in the port of London. d Documents show that Chaucer met Petrarch in Padua. e *The Canterbury Tales* was finished just before Chaucer's death. f Chaucer was buried in Westminster Abbey.

5. ●● Complete the timeline with the dates: *1170 · c. 1343 · 1372–1373 · 1374 · c. 1385 · c. 1387 · 1400*. a Chaucer is born in London. b Becket is murdered. c Chaucer travels to Genoa and Florence. d He becomes Controller of the wool customs. e *Troilus and Criseyde*. f *The Canterbury Tales* begun. g Chaucer dies.

6. ●● Explain these terms in your own words (one sentence each) and give an example from the chapter: a frame narrative · b estates satire · c irony · d persona · e heroic couplet · f exemplum.

7. ●●● Answer in 40–60 words. a Why is the society of the late 14th century hard to describe with the model of the three estates? b Why does Chaucer use a pilgrimage as the frame of his book? Give two reasons.

Text Analysis

8. ● In T1, what is the subject of the main verb *longen* (l. 12)?

   A. *folk*
   B. *smale fowles*
   C. *Zephirus*
   D. *the yonge sonne*

9. ● T1. Find the Middle English words that correspond to these modern words: a sweet · b root · c flower · d birds · e sleep · f eye · g shores · h helped · i sick.

10. ●● T1. Answer the questions. a Which natural phenomena are mentioned in ll. 1–11? b Where does the main clause begin, and why does Chaucer delay it? c Which two reasons for going on pilgrimage does the passage suggest? d Explain the rhyme *seke / seke* (ll. 17–18).

11. ●● Scansion. Write l. 5 of T1, *Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth*, in syllables, and mark the five stresses in capitals. Which final *-e* is sounded? (Hint: the line has ten syllables; *Zephirus* is stressed on the first syllable.)

12. ●● T2. Answer the questions. a What is the Wife's job, and how good is she at it? b What do her clothes tell you about her? c How many times has she been to Jerusalem, and which other places has she visited? d Why does the narrator say "therof nedeth nat to speke as nouthe" (l. 462)?

13. ●●● T2. Find two examples of irony in the portrait of the Wife of Bath and explain each one in two or three sentences.

14. ●●● T3. Write a PEE paragraph (120–150 words): "How does the Pardoner's Tale illustrate the motto *Radix malorum est Cupiditas*?" Use one quotation from T3 and refer to the ending of the tale.

Language

15. ● Complete with the correct form of the verbs in brackets (*-ing*, *to*-infinitive or base form). a The Host suggested _____ (tell) two tales each. b The Knight persuaded the Host _____ (make) peace with the Pardoner. c The Pardoner admitted _____ (preach) only for money. d Mrs Hill reminded us _____ (bring) our copies of the text. e The Miller insisted on _____ (speak) before the Monk. f The old man advised them _____ (look) under the oak tree. g Callum denied _____ (eat) Sam's sandwiches. h Giulia recommended _____ (read) the Wife of Bath's portrait aloud.

16. ● The Summoner accused the Friar _____ lying to the poor.

   A. of
   B. for
   C. about
   D. to

17. ● Our teacher suggested _____ the General Prologue before the tales.

    A. us to read

    B. to read

    C. us reading

    D. that we read

18. ●● Report the sentences with the verbs in brackets. a “I’m sorry I’m late,” said Callum. (apologise) b “You broke the rules of the game!” the Host said to the Miller. (accuse) c “I didn’t take the gold,” said the youngest rioter. (deny) d “Don’t forget to write the line numbers,” Mrs Hill told the class. (remind) e “You should read the Clerk’s Tale,” Sam said to Giulia. (advise) f “This pillowcase is the Virgin’s veil,” said the Pardoner. (claim) g “The road is too long and too muddy,” said Callum. (complain) h “Come on, buy my pardons!” the Pardoner said to the pilgrims. (urge)

19. ●● Rewrite the sentences using the perfect *-ing* (*having* + past participle). a She admitted that she had been married five times. b He denied that he had sold false relics. c They apologised because they had arrived late at the inn. d The Host thanked the Knight because he had told a noble tale. e The Reeve accused the Miller: he had insulted all carpenters.

20. ●● Correct the mistakes (✗). a ✗ The Pardoner suggested the Host to kiss his relics. b ✗ Mrs Hill explained us the rhyme scheme. c ✗ They blamed the Pardoner of their bad luck. d ✗ He insisted to tell his story first. e ✗ She advised to me to start with the Prologue. f ✗ I apologise to have interrupted you.

21. ●● Build sentences with a dependent preposition and the *-ing* form. a the narrator / apologise / not put the pilgrims in order of rank b Giulia / congratulate / Sam / win the podcast vote c people / blame / the friars / take money from the poor d Callum / thank / his dad / drive them to Kent e the Miller / insist / tell his tale next f the Host / accuse / the Pardoner / try to cheat him

22. ●● Backshift or no backshift? Report the sentences twice where both are possible. a Mrs Hill: “The *Tales* are unfinished.” (Mrs Hill explained…) b Sam: “I’m tired.” (yesterday — Sam complained…) c Giulia: “Chaucer was born in London.” (Giulia says…) d Callum: “I’ll win the vote.” (last week — Callum boasted…)

23. ●●● Translate into English. a Il professore ci ha suggerito di leggere il Prologo ad alta voce. b Il Perdonatore ha ammesso di aver venduto false reliquie, ma ha negato di aver mentito ai poveri. c Callum ha convinto Sam a camminare fino a Canterbury e poi si è scusato di averlo fatto alzare alle sei.

Vocabulary

24. ● Complete with the adjectives: *cheerful · generous · greedy · hypocritical · pious · shrewd · vain · worldly*. a The Monk loves hunting and fine clothes: he is very _____ . b The Parson gives his own money to the poor: he is _____ . c The Pardoner wants more and more money: he is _____ . d The Host laughs and jokes all the time: he is _____ . e The Squire spends hours on his hair: he is a little _____ . f The Friar preaches poverty but only visits the rich: he is _____ . g The Merchant always knows how to make a profit: he is _____ . h The Parson lives as he preaches and prays every day: he is truly _____ .

25. ●● Word formation. Write the adjective. a fame → … b attract → … c hero → … d satire → … e ambition → … f talk → … g irony → … h history → … i offend → … j courage → …

26. ●● Choose the correct adjective. a The wool trade was England's most important _____ activity. (economic / economical) b Canterbury Cathedral is a _____ building visited by millions. (historic / historical) c The Miller's Tale is a _____ story full of tricks. (comic / comical) d Latin and Greek are _____ languages. (classic / classical) e A small car is more _____ than a big one. (economic / economical) f *The Canterbury Tales* is a _____ example of a frame narrative. (classic / classical)

Writing and Speaking

27. ●● Write a PEE paragraph (180–220 words): "How does Chaucer make the Pardoner condemn himself?" Follow the model and the checklist in the Writing section.

28. ●● Speaking. Describe the Wife of Bath (or another pilgrim of the General Prologue) to a partner for about one minute, as if you were looking at her: her appearance, what you can deduce from it and her personality. Use at least five phrases from the Useful language table.

Towards B2

29. ●● Multiple-choice cloze. Choose the correct answer (A, B, C or D) for each gap.
In the Middle Ages pilgrims (1) _____ from all over Europe to the shrine of Thomas Becket. Many of them hoped to be (2) _____ of an illness, while others wanted to give thanks for a prayer that had been (3) _____ . Critics complained that some people went on pilgrimage just to (4) _____ a holiday, and Chaucer seems to (5) _____ : several of his pilgrims are more interested in food and company than in prayer. Yet the book never (6) _____ the journey itself.
1 A came B arrived C reached D visited · 2 A cured B recovered C treated D improved · 3 A replied B answered C responded D returned · 4 A make B take C do D go · 5 A accept B admit C agree D allow · 6 A complains B accuses C criticises D objects

30. ●● Open cloze. Write ONE word in each gap.
Chaucer's pilgrims are not just types; (1) _____ of them has a face, a voice and a story. The Host suggested (2) _____ tales on the road and promised a supper to the pilgrim (3) _____ told the best one. Nobody objected (4) _____ the plan, and the Knight began. Later the Miller insisted (5) _____ speaking next, even (6) _____ he was so drunk that he could hardly sit (7) _____ his horse. The Reeve accused him (8) _____ insulting carpenters.

31. ●● Word formation cloze. Use the word in CAPITALS to form a word that fits the gap.
The Pardoner is one of Chaucer's most (1) _____ (MEMORY) characters. He is (2) _____ (AMBITION) and completely (3) _____ (HYPOCRITE): he preaches against greed with great (4) _____ (ENTHUSIAST), but his only real interest is money. His sermons are (5) _____ (PERSUADE) because he knows how to frighten simple people. The final scene, when the Host insults him, is both (6) _____ (COMEDY) and disturbing.

32. ●●● Key-word transformation. Complete the second sentence so that it means the same as the first, using the word in bold. Use between two and five words. a "I didn't steal the gold," said the rioter. **HAVING** The rioter … the gold. b "Why don't we stop at the inn?" said Sam. **STOPPING** Sam … at the inn. c "You told lies to the pilgrims!" the Host said to the Pardoner. **OF** The Host … lies to the pilgrims. d "Remember to bring your notes," Mrs Hill told us. **REMINDED** Mrs Hill … our notes. e "I'm sorry I interrupted the Knight," said the Miller. **FOR** The Miller … the Knight.

PER APPROFONDIRE

- [NOR] S. Greenblatt (ed.), *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, vol. A: the introduction to Chaucer and the General Prologue with full glosses.
- [SAN] A. Sanders, *The Short Oxford History of English Literature*: the chapter on Chaucer and the literature of the late 14th century.
- [MOR] K. O. Morgan (ed.), *The Oxford History of Britain*: the chapter on the later Middle Ages, for trade, wool and the Church.
- [BAU] A. C. Baugh, T. Cable, *A History of the English Language*: the pages on Middle English and the rise of the London standard.
- [SWA] M. Swan, *Practical English Usage*: the entries on reporting verbs and on verb + *-ing* / infinitive patterns.

Glossario del capitolo

Dependent preposition
preposizione retta (dal verbo) — the fixed preposition that follows a verb, noun or adjective: *accuse **of**, insist **on**, blame **for***; it is followed by *-ing*.

Estates satire
satira degli stati / dei ceti — a medieval genre that lists and mocks the typical faults of each social group; Chaucer's General Prologue is the most famous example.

Exemplum
exemplum, racconto esemplare (pl. *exempla*) — a short story told in a sermon to illustrate a moral lesson, like the Pardoner's Tale.

Fabliau
fabliau (pl. *fabliaux*) — a short, coarse comic tale in verse about tricks, sex and deceived husbands, such as the Miller's Tale.

Frame narrative
racconto a cornice — a story that contains other stories: the pilgrimage of *The Canterbury Tales*, the *brigata* of the *Decameron*.

Friar
frate (di un ordine mendicante) — a member of an order such as the Franciscans or Dominicans, who lived among the people, preaching and begging.

Heroic couplet
distico eroico — two rhyming lines of iambic pentameter (*aa*), the verse of most of *The Canterbury Tales*; the name is later than Chaucer.

Iambic pentameter
pentametro giambico — a line of five iambs (da-DUM × 5), usually ten syllables, sometimes eleven with an unstressed ending.

Indulgence
indulgenza — in the medieval Church, the remission of the punishment due for sins already forgiven, often granted in return for prayers or gifts of money.

Irony
ironia — saying one thing while meaning, or letting the reader see, something different: "And I seyde, his opinioun was good."

Pardoner
venditore di indulgenze, perdonatore — a man licensed to collect money for the Church and to offer indulgences in return.

PEE paragraph
paragrafo PEE (Point, Evidence, Explanation) — a paragraph of literary analysis: a point, a short quotation as evidence, and an explanation of how the words prove the point.

Persona
persona, maschera dell'autore — the voice or character created by an author to tell a story, not to be confused with the author: the narrator-pilgrim "Chaucer".

Pilgrimage
pellegrinaggio — a journey to a holy place for religious reasons: to pray, to give thanks or to do penance.

Rhyme royal
rima reale — a stanza of seven iambic pentameters rhyming *ababbcc*, used by Chaucer in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

Satire
satira — writing that uses humour, irony and exaggeration to expose the faults of people or institutions.

Shrine
santuario, reliquiario — a holy place, often the tomb of a saint with his or her relics, visited by pilgrims: Becket's shrine at Canterbury.

Staple
emporio (della lana), staple — an official market town through which a product, especially wool, had to be exported (Calais from 1363).

Summoner
apparitore (del tribunale ecclesiastico) — an officer who called people to appear before the Church courts.

Three estates
i tre ordini (o stati) — the medieval model of society: those who pray (clergy), those who fight (nobility), those who work (everyone else).

Soluzioni

1. C (at the Tabard inn in Southwark, GP l. 20).

2. A (the *Filostrato*; the *Teseida* is the source of the Knight's Tale).

3. D (four: two on the way to Canterbury, two on the way home, GP ll. 791–794).

4. a T. b F: he was murdered in 1170; in 1220 his relics were moved to the new shrine. c T. d F: no document shows that Chaucer met Petrarch; it is the Clerk, a character, who says he learned a tale from him at Padua. e F: it was unfinished; only 24 tales were written. f T.

5. a c. 1343 · b 1170 · c 1372–1373 · d 1374 · e c. 1385 · f c. 1387 · g 1400.

6. Model answers. a A frame narrative is a story that contains other stories (the pilgrimage of *The Canterbury Tales*; the *brigata* of the *Decameron*). b Estates satire lists and mocks the typical faults of each social group (the worldly Monk, the greedy Friar). c Irony means saying one thing and letting the reader understand another ("And I seyde, his opinioun was good", l. 183). d A persona is a voice created by the author, not the author himself (the naive narrator-pilgrim "Chaucer"). e A heroic couplet is two rhyming iambic pentameters (*sote / rote*). f An exemplum is a short story used in a sermon to teach a moral (the Pardoner's three rioters).

7. Traccia. a The model had only three groups (clergy, nobles, workers), but new rich groups — merchants, lawyers, doctors, craftsmen, independent women like the Wife of Bath — were neither noble nor peasants and were often richer than knights; money, not birth, decided their place. b A pilgrimage brought together people of every estate who would never normally meet; it was a real, familiar experience; it gave a reason to tell stories on a long journey; and its religious goal made the worldly behaviour of many pilgrims ironic.

8. A (*folk*: "Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages").

9. a *sote* (also *swete*) · b *rote* · c *flour* · d *fowles* · e *slepen* · f *yë* · g *strondes* · h *holpen* · i *seke*.

10. a Rain (the April showers), the drought of March, the west wind (Zephirus), the sun in the sign of the Ram, the growth of plants, the singing of birds. b In l. 12 (*Than longen folk*); the long "when" clauses imitate the slow arrival of spring and create suspense before the human subject appears. c The natural restlessness of spring, which makes people want to travel, and the religious wish to thank the saint for help in illness. d The two words are spelt the same but are different words: "seek" (l. 17) and "sick" (l. 18); people seek the martyr because he helped them when they were sick.

11. *whan ZE · phi RUS · eek WITH · his SWE · te BREETH*: whan(x) ZE(/) phi(x) RUS(/) eek(x) WITH(/) his(x) SWE(/) te(x) BREETH(/) — ten syllables. The final *-e* of *swete* is sounded (it stands before a consonant). Other readings are possible (e.g. a stress on *eek*), but the line has five stresses.

12. a She is a cloth-maker, so skilled that she is better than the weavers of Ypres and Ghent. b Her Sunday headscarves are fine and heavy ("ten pound"), her stockings bright red, her shoes soft and new: she is rich, proud and likes to be noticed. c Three times; she has also been to Rome, Boulogne, Santiago de Compostela (Galicia) and Cologne. d He pretends to be discreet about her "other companye in youthe"; in fact, by refusing to talk about it, he makes the reader imagine it — a form of irony.

13. Model answer. (1) "She was a worthy womman al hir lyve" (l. 459) is followed at once by "Housbondes at chirche-dore she hadde fyve" (l. 460): the word *worthy* becomes doubtful. (2) She must be first at the offering, and if someone goes before her "she was out of alle charitee" (l. 452): at a moment of reli-

gious humility she shows pride and anger. (Also acceptable: "wandring by the weye", l. 467, with its double meaning; the "ten pound" of headscarves, l. 454.)

14. Model paragraph. Point: the tale shows that greed leads to death. Evidence: the motto "*Radix malorum est Cupiditas*" (l. 334) and the ending, in which the three rioters kill each other for the gold. Explanation: they go looking for Death but find gold, and their greed — each wants a larger share — makes them murder and poison one another, so they find Death exactly where the old man said; gold is literally the "root" of their evil. Link: the irony is double, because the teller himself preaches against the vice he practises (ll. 427–428).

15. a telling · b to make · c preaching (or having preached) · d to bring · e speaking · f to look · g eating (or having eaten) · h reading.

16. A (of).

17. D (that we read; also correct: *suggested reading*; ✗ *suggested us to read*).

18. a Callum apologised for being late. b The Host accused the Miller of breaking the rules of the game. c The youngest rioter denied taking / having taken the gold (or denied that he had taken the gold). d Mrs Hill reminded the class to write the line numbers. e Sam advised Giulia to read the Clerk's Tale. f The Pardoner claimed that the pillowcase was the Virgin's veil. g Callum complained that the road was (or is) too long and too muddy. h The Pardoner urged the pilgrims to buy his pardons.

19. a She admitted having been married five times. b He denied having sold false relics. c They apologised for having arrived late at the inn. d The Host thanked the Knight for having told a noble tale. e The Reeve accused the Miller of having insulted all carpenters.

20. a The Pardoner suggested that the Host (should) kiss his relics. (Also: *urged / invited the Host to kiss*.) b Mrs Hill explained the rhyme scheme to us. c They blamed the Pardoner for their bad luck. d He insisted on telling his story first. e She advised me to start with the Prologue. f I apologise for having interrupted (or for interrupting) you.

21. a The narrator apologises for not putting the pilgrims in order of rank. b Giulia congratulated Sam on winning the podcast vote. c People blamed the friars for taking money from the poor. d Callum thanked his dad for driving them to Kent. e The Miller insisted on telling his tale next. f The Host accused the Pardoner of trying to cheat him.

22. a Mrs Hill explained that the *Tales* are unfinished / were unfinished (both possible: still true). b Sam complained that he was tired (backshift: the situation is over). c Giulia says that Chaucer was born in London (present reporting verb: no change). d Callum boasted that he would win the vote (backshift; *will* is possible only if the vote has not happened yet).

23. a Our teacher suggested reading the Prologue aloud. / Our teacher suggested that we (should) read the Prologue aloud. b The Pardoner admitted selling / having sold false relics, but he denied lying / having lied to the poor. c Callum persuaded Sam to walk to Canterbury and then apologised for making him get up at six.

24. a worldly · b generous · c greedy · d cheerful · e vain · f hypocritical · g shrewd · h pious.

25. a famous · b attractive · c heroic · d satirical · e ambitious · f talkative · g ironic · h historical · i offensive · j courageous.

26. a economic · b historic · c comic · d classical · e economical · f classic.

27. Assessment: Point that answers the question; at least two short, exact quotations with line numbers (e.g. "My theme is alwey oon, and ever was" l. 333; "Thus can I preche agayn that same vyce / Which that I use" ll. 427–428; "pigges bones" GP l. 700); explanation of the irony (he condemns greed, the vice he practises, and openly admits it, so his own words reveal his hypocrisy); present tense; link back to the question; 180–220 words.

28. Model answer. "The woman I'm looking at is in her forties, I'd say, and she's riding a horse very comfortably, so she must be used to travelling.

What strikes me first is her enormous hat — it's as wide as a shield — and her bright red stockings: judging by her clothes, she must be quite rich, and she looks as if she wants everybody to notice her. She's got a bold, red face and a gap between her front teeth. She comes across as confident and talkative; she's laughing and chatting with the people around her. I get the impression that she's been married more than once, and she seems to be the kind of person who always says what she thinks. On the surface she's a pious pilgrim, but deep down I suspect she's enjoying the holiday more than the prayers."

29. 1 A came · 2 A cured · 3 B answered · 4 B take · 5 C agree · 6 C criticises.

30. 1 each · 2 telling · 3 who (or *that*) · 4 to · 5 on · 6 though · 7 on · 8 of.

31. 1 memorable · 2 ambitious · 3 hypocritical · 4 enthusiasm · 5 persuasive · 6 comic (or *comical*).

32. a denied having stolen · b suggested stopping · c accused the Pardoner of telling · d reminded us to bring · e apologised for interrupting.