1

THE ORIGINS
(700 BC–AD 900)

THE MIDDLE AGES
(1066-1485)

Extra Materials

Anonymous

Beowulf (composed c. 8th century)

BEFORE READING

❶ **Beowulf is introduced as the strongest of heroes: what qualities do you expect from him, which will make him able to win the monster Grendel?**

Beowulf

The coming of Beowulf

When Beowulf hears about Grendel, he decides to leave his home in Geatland, to sail the stormy Baltic and to reach Heorot, the royal palace haunted by the monster, in order to help Hrothgar, King of Danes.
The powerful language and rhythm of the original poem in Old English is well-preserved in this modern version by the poet Seamus Heaney, who has struck a good balance between plain language and alliterative poetry.

When he heard about Grendel, Hygelac's thane[1]
was on home ground, over in Geatland.
There was no one else like him alive.
In his day, he was the mightiest[2] man on earth,
5   high-born and powerful. He ordered a boat
that would ply the waves[3]. He announced his plan:
to sail the swan's road and search out that king,
the famous prince who needed defenders.
Nobody tried to keep him from going,
10   no elder[5] denied him, dear as he was to them.
Instead, they inspected omens[6] and spurred[7]
his ambition to go, whilst he moved about
like the leader he was, enlisting men,
the best he could find; with fourteen others
15   the warrior boarded[8] the boat as captain,
a canny[9] pilot along coast and currents.
Time went by, the boat was on water,
in close[10] under the cliffs[11].
Men climbed eagerly up the gangplank[12],
20   sand churned in surf[13], warriors loaded
a cargo of weapons, shining war-gear[14]
in the vessel's hold[15], then heaved out[16],

1. **Hygelac's thane:** Beowulf, signore di Hygelac. Il termine thane indica un nobile guerriero al servizio di un re e legato a lui nella vita e nella morte.
2. **mightiest:** il più forte.
3. **ply the waves:** solcare i mari.
4. **the swan's road:** il mare.
5. **elder:** anziano. Nelle società primitive gli anziani, considerati le massime autorità, erano ascoltati e venerati.
6. **inspected omens:** esaminarono attentamente i presagi.
7. **spurred:** spronarono.
8. **boarded:** si imbarcò.
9. **canny:** abile e prudente.
10. **in close:** vicino.
11. **cliffs:** scogliere.
12. **gangplank:** passerella.
13. **sand churned in surf:** la sabbia era agitata dai frangenti.
14. **war gear:** arnesi di guerra.
15. **hold:** stiva.
16. **heaved out:** presero il largo.

away with a will in their wood-weathered[17] ship.
Over the waves, with the wind behind her

25 and foam[18] at her neck, she flew like a bird
until her curved prow[19] had covered the distance
and on the following day, at the due hour,
those seafarers[20] sighted land,
sunlit cliffs, sheer crags[21]

30 and looming headlands[22], the landfall[23] they sought.
It was the end of their voyage.

17. **wood weathered:** legno stagionato.
18. **foam:** schiuma.
19. **curved prow:** prua curva.
20. **seafarers:** naviganti.
21. **sheer crags:** rupi a picco.
22. **looming headlands:** promontori che si stagliano in lontananza.
23. **landfall:** approdo.

OVER TO YOU

❶ **Write a short summary of the text answering the following questions.**
   1. (ll. 1-8) Who did Beowulf hear about? What did he do? What was his plan?
   2. (ll. 9-16) Who supported Beowulf? What and how many men did he choose?
   3. (ll. 17-23) What did men carry on board?
   4. (ll. 24-31) How did the boat sail? When did the seafarers land?

❷ **Answer true or false.**
   1. Beowful was the most powerful man on earth. T F
   2. Nobody encouraged him in his decision and plan. T F
   3. The ship carried a cargo of weapons and war gear. T F
   4. The warriors did not want to leave. T F
   5. The voyage was fast because of favourable wind. T F

❸ **Find the expressions used to describe Beowulf.**

❹ **What expressions are used to describe Beowulf's companions?**

❺ **Focus on the sea and the ship and notice:**
   1. the words that describe the sea
   2. the words that describe the ship
   3. the atmosphere on the vessel
   What is conveyed through them?

❻ **Find examples of the technical devices typical of Old English poetry and say what their function is.**
   1. alliteration ....
   2. kenning (metaphorical circumlocution used to describe a person or a thing) ....
   3. simile ....

❼ **An idea of strength and physicality pervades the whole passage. It is shared by Beowful and his men as well as by natural elements. What images convey this sense?**

❽ **How would you call this poem? Choose from the following.**
   ☐ narrative poem (it has a moral and didactic purpose)
   ☐ epic poem (it tells about great deeds)
   ☐ religious poem (it deals with religious questions)
   ☐ war poem (it reports wars and battles)

❾ **The major epic poems in Western tradition are Iliad and Odyssey attributed to the Greek poet Homer, and laterAeneid by Virgil. If you know or have read passages from these poems you could compare them with Beowulf, keeping in mind the following main features:**

• an epic poem as a long narrative poetic composition
• references to historical events together with supernatural and mythological tales
• great actions of heroes
• aristocratic and military society
• narrative made up of type-scenes: the voyage, the fight, the banquet, the funeral
• elevated style; vivid and figurative language

❿ **Can Beowful embody the warlike ideal hero? Why? Why not? Discuss in class. Go back to the initial activity and check your predictions.**

Anonymous

The Seafarer (composed c. 975)

The Seafarer is an example of an elegy and is also probably the most famous Anglo-Saxon lyrical poem. The elegies of the period were less religious and consequently contained more pagan elements and like all elegies the tone was generally one of lament or mourning. It comes from *The Exeter Book*.

Until the spread of Christianity, Anglo-Saxon prose and poetry was an oral tradition, passed on through generations. It was mainly the Christian scribes who began to transform the oral into a written form thus introducing for the first time a certain continuity. However, many writers would eliminate any aspects which either contrasted or did not fit into their Christian belief.

The Seafarer is a good example of a rich and complex poem which embodies both the pagan and Christian elements typical of the works of that time. The Christian aspects of the work make it a more interesting poem, one which can be read on two levels. After describing the hardships of life at sea the narrator then speaks about his rejection of the comforts and ease offered by a life on land. His journey at sea, despite its difficulties, also becomes his journey towards a better life after death. In the complete text the narrator laments the fact that life on land has changed for the worse and feels that man's duty is to make his mark in some way in this life before going on to the next. The Christian influences are clear. The poem, however, distinguishes itself from the majority of the poetry in this period because of its rather personal tone; the reader feels he is sharing this sailor's intimate moment of reflection.

BEFORE READING

❶ The sea has always been a source of inspiration for writers. Make a list of any poems, novels, plays or films you know in which the sea plays an important role. In each one indicate whether the sea was a positive or negative presence. Compare your results with the rest of the class.

Poem	Novel	Play	Film

❷ Read the opening lines of the poem in its original Old English. These are the same lines you will find in the extract we're studying. Can you identify any words from the English we use today, over a thousand years later? Compare them with the extract that follows in modern English.

The Seafarer

Mæg ic be me sylfum
soðgied wrecan,
siþas secgan,
hu ic geswincdagum
earfoðhwile
oft þrowade,
bitre breostceare
gebiden hæbbe,

❸ Now read and listen to the first extract of The Seafarer from a translation by S.A.J. Bradley and describe the tone of the poem. Choose from the following.

☐ lighthearted
☐ ironic
☐ solemn

The Seafarer 🎧

I can tell the true riddle[1] of my own self, and speak of my
experiences – how I have often suffered times of hardship[2]
in days of toil[3], how I have endured[4] cruel anxiety at heart
and experienced many anxious lodging-places[5] afloat[6], and

5   the terrible surging[7] of the waves. There the hazardous[8]
night-watch has often found me at the ship's prow[9] when it
is jostling[10] along the cliffs. My feet were pinched[11] by the
cold, shackled[12] by the frost[13] in cold chains, whilst anxieties
sighed[14] hot about my heart. Hunger tore[15] from within at the

10 mind of one wearied[16] by the ocean. This that man does not
understand, who is most agreeably suited[17] on land – how I,
wretchedly anxious[18], have for years lived on the ice-cold
sea in the ways of the sojourner[19], bereft[20] of kinsfolk[21], hung
about by ice-spikes[22]; hail pelted[23] in showers. There I heard

15 nothing but the waging[24] of the sea, the ice-cold wave.
Sometimes I would take the song of the swan as my
entertainment, the cry of the gannet[25] and the call of the
curlew[26] in place of human laughter, the sea-mew's[27] singing
in place of the mead[28] drinking. There storms would pound[29]

20 the rocky cliffs whilst the tern[30], icy-winged, answered them;
very often the sea-eagle would screech[31], wings dappled[32]
with spray. No protective kinsman[33] could comfort the
inadequate soul.

1. **riddle:** mistero.
2. **hardship:** privazione.
3. **toil:** fatica.
4. **endured:** tollerato.
5. **lodging-places:** alloggi (in questo caso, navi).
6. **afloat:** a galla.
7. **surging:** l'agitarsi.
8. **hazardous:** rischioso.
9. **prow:** prua.
10. **jostling:** urtando.
11. **pinched:** stretti in una morsa.
12. **shackled:** imprigionati.
13. **frost:** gelo.
8. **anxieties** sighed: sospiravo per l'ansia.
15. hunger tore: la fame dilaniava.
16. wearied: stancato.
17. suited: adatta.
18. wretchedly anxious: infelicemente ansioso.
19. sojourner: ospite di passaggio.
20. bereft: private.
21. kinsfolk: parenti.
22. ice-spikes: punte di ghiaccio.
23. hail pelted: la grandine cadeva a grande velocità.
24. waging: muovendosi.
25. gannet: uccello di mare (surla).
26. curlew: uccello di mare (chiurlo).
27. sea-mew: uccello di mare.
28. mead: un antico tipo di vino.
29. pound: battere.
30. tern: uccello di mare.
31. screech: strillare.
32. dappled: bagnato.
33. kinsman: parente.

OVER TO YOU

❶ **Answer the following questions.**

   1. Who is the 'I' in the extract?
   2. Does his experience as a sailor seem a positive or negative one?
   3. What climatic conditions does he describe?
   4. What does he say people, who work and live on land, would find difficult to understand (ll. l0-15)?
   5. What were his only forms of entertainment at sea (ll. 16-20)?

❷ **The overall impression of the seafarer's life is one of great hardship. Complete the box below with the words used to describe the different atmospheric conditions.**

The hostility of the sea	The hostility of the climate

❸ **Underline the words in the text which describe the seafarer's own suffering.**

❹ **What feeling of the seafarer's is emphasised by the final line of the extract: 'No protective kinsman could comfort the inadequate soul.'?**

❺ **After this introduction and the description of the seafarer's hard life what question do we, the readers, ask ourselves about the seafarer and in what way is this connected to the first line of the poem? 'I can tell the true riddle of my ownself'. Do we ask ourselves...**

   1. where he will travel next?
   2. how old he must be?
   3. why he chooses this life?

❻ **Find an example of a kenning in the text.**

❼ **There are many different translations of the poem *The Seafarer*. We have chosen S.A.J. Bradley's because it seemed more accessible. However, what comment could we make on Bradley's chosen format? Compare it to two other translations of the opening passage:**

   1 I can make a true song
      about me myself,
      tell my travels,
      how I often endured
      days of struggle,

   2 'May my words spell the truth
      of the ways I've toiled
      distraught, for days on end
      enduring cares and bitter bale
      within my breast, my keel cleaving
      endless halls of heaving waves

❽ **The Seafarer was written at the same time as *Beowulf*. What similarities and differences can you find between the two poems?**

❾ **'The sea as a life giver, the sea as a life taker'. Discuss in pairs the circumstances in which the sea can be both a giver and a taker and then compare your ideas with the rest of the class.**

REVIEW

❶ **Complete the following sentences.**

1. *The Seafarer* is an example of Anglo-Saxon .... poetry.

2. It belongs to the .... which is one of the four surviving manuscripts of the 11th century containing Anglo-Saxon poetry.

3. It is typical of Anglo-Saxon works in that it embodies both .... and .... elements.

4. The tone of the poem, however, is less typical of the period because it is more ....

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1387-1400)

TEXT 3

'April's Sweet Showers'

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,
5 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
10 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,
15 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.

Quando Aprile con le sue dolci piogge ha penetrato fino alla radice la siccità di Marzo, impregnando ogni vena di quell'umore che ha la virtù di dar vita ai fiori, quando anche Zeffiro col suo dolce fiato ha rianimato per ogni brughiera i teneri germogli, e il nuovo sole ha percorso metà del suo cammino in Ariete, e cantano melodiosi gli uccelletti che dormono tutta la notte a occhi aperti (tanto li punge in cuore la natura), la gente allora è presa dal desiderio di mettersi in pellegrinaggio e d'andare per contrade forestiere alla ricerca di lontani santuari variamente noti, e fin dalle più remote parti d'ogni contea d'Inghilterra molti si recano specialmente a Canterbury, a visitare quel santo martire benedetto che li ha soccorsi quand'erano malati.

Traduzione di E. Barisone

OVER TO YOU

❶ **Answer the following questions.**

  1. What time of year is it?
  2. What happens to nature in this season?
  3. Chaucer mentions every aspect of nature at this time of year. What does he say concerning: a) rain b) wind c) plants d) animals.
  4. Why does the narrator say that in this season 'people long to go on pilgrimages'?
  5. What do the flowers and birds do at this time of year?
  6. In what way has the 'martyr' helped these people?
  7. Where do the pilgrims come from?

❷ Underline in the passage the words which reflect the narrators enthusiasm for spring, e.g. 'sweet' showers.

❸ What 'scientific' and 'astronomical' references can you find in the passage?

❹ Look at the style of the piece and identify the rhyme scheme and metre.

❺ Is the style formal or colloquial? (Listen again to the reading.)

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales *(c. 1387-1400)*

TEXT 4

BEFORE READING

❶ The final character we are going to look at, the Wife of Bath, is from the third estate, the laity. This is the lowest in the social order. From what we have already seen of Chaucer's technique how do you think he will describe her?

❷ Now read and listen to Chaucer's description of her from the General Prologue and see if you were right.

'The Wife of Bath's Tale'

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.
5 In all the parish not a dame dare 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;
10 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.
15 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,
20 Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St James of Compostela and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
25 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.
30 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.

E c'era una brava Comare dei dintorni di Bath, ma, peccato, era un po' sorda. A tessere il panno era così pratica, da battere quelli di Ypres e di Gand. In tutta la parocchia non c'era donna che avesse il coraggio di passarle avanti a far l'offerta: se mai qualcuna s'arrischiava, a lei veniva una tal bile, che usciva fuori da ogni grazia. I suoi fazzoletti erano di tessuto finissimo: giurerei che pesavano dieci libbre quelli che si metteva in capo la domenica. Le sue calze erano d'un bel rosso scarlatto, ben attillate; le scarpe morbidissime e nuove. Aveva un volto impertinente, bello, di colorito acceso. Era una donna ricca di meriti, che in vita sua aveva condotto ben cinque mariti sulla porta di chiesa, senza contare altre amicizie di gioventù...ma non è il caso di parlarne proprio ora. Tre volte era andata a Gerusalemme, e di fiumi stranieri ne aveva attraversati molti: era stata a Roma, a Boulogne, a San Giacomo in Malizia e a Colonia. Aveva insomma parecchi pratica di viaggi: i suoi denti infatti erano radi. Sul cavallo sedeva comodamente, ben avvolta da un soggiólo, con un cappello in testa largo come un brocchiere o uno scudo; una gualdrappa intorno ai larghi fianchi, e ai piedi un paio di speroni aguzzi. In compagnia sapeva ridere e chiacchierare; e doveva intendersene di rimedi d'amore, poiché di quell'arte conosceva certo l'antica danza.

Traduzione di E. Barisone

✎ **OVER TO YOU**

❶ **Complete the chart below on the Wife of Bath with information from the text.**

Physical aspect · Occupation · Character · Dress · Past life

....
....
....
....

❷ **With the information you have put in the chart what conclusions can you come to about her?**

1. Physical aspect, she is

☐ beautiful   ☐ ugly   ☐ refined

2. Character, she is

☐ shy   ☐ lively   ☐ domineering

3. Dress, she is

☐ reserved   ☐ messy   ☐ fashion-conscious

4. Past life, it was

☐ adventurous   ☐ boring   ☐ dangerous

❸ **Now, in your own words, justify each choice in question 2 using evidence from the text.**

e.g. 'I think the Wife of Bath is... because in his presentation Chaucer says...'

❹ **There are certain similarities in Chaucer's 'tone' in his presentation of the Prioress and the Wife of Bath. Can you identify these similarities?**

☐ tragic   ☐ informative   ☐ stereo-typical
☐ ironic   ☐ surprising   ☐ lively
☐ serious   ☐ humorous   ☐ critical

❺ **What similarities can you find in these two women?**

❻ **Now looking at Chaucer's description of all three pilgrims. Who do you think is:**

1. the most stereo-typical
2. the funniest
3. the most boring
4. the ugliest
5. the most attractive
6. the most cunning
7. the most adventurous

When you have finished compare your results with the rest of the class.

❼ **Chaucer's irony often rests on the inconsistencies he gives his characters (which also makes them more entertaining and realistic). Complete the sentences below with the pilgrims' inconsistencies.**

1. The Knight is distinguished and heroic, but ....
2. The Prioress seems religious and holy but ....
3. The Wife of Bath is going on a holy pilgrimage, but ....

❽ **If you had to choose one of these three characters as a travelling companion who would you choose and why? Compare your choice with the rest of the class.**

❾ **William Blake said: 'Of Chaucer's characters... some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves remain forever unaltered.'**

❿ **Can you find any examples of men and women similar to the Knight, the Prioress and the Wife of Bath from people you know?**

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1387-1400)

TEXT 5

BEFORE READING

❶ Just like all the other pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales, the Wife of Bath is a storyteller, and her story is related to her life and experiences. After reading Chaucer's description of her in the General Prologue, what would you expect the story she tells to be about?

❷ Now read her tale and see if you were right.

'The Wife of Bath's Tale'

The story is set at the time of King Arthur. A knight, condemned to death for raping a girl, is given the opportunity to save his life if he can find an answer to this question: 'What is that women most desire?'
After a long search, an old ugly woman tells him the right answer and saves his life; but in exchange she asks the knight to marry her. Very reluctantly, he complies. During their wedding night, the knight is unhappy and blames his wife for being 'basely born', 'hideous, old and plain'. She proposes two alternatives to her husband: he can choose either to have her old and ugly but faithful or to have her young and beautiful and run the risk of her being unfaithful to him.

He turns it over in his mind, and sighs,
And in this way the knight at last replies:
'My lady and my love, my dear wife too,
I place myself in your wise governance;
5   Choose for yourself whichever's the most pleasant,
Most honourable to you, and me also.
All's one to me; choose either of the two;
What pleases you is good enough for me.'
10   'Then I've the mastery of you,' said she,
'Since I may choose and decide as I wish?'
'Yes, certainly,' said he, 'I think it best.'
'Kiss me, and we won't quarrel any more,
For I'll be both to you, upon my honour!
15   That's to say, beautiful as well as good,
May death and madness be my lot,' she said,
'If I am not a wife as good and true
As ever wife was since the world was new,
And if I'm not as pretty as a queen,
20   As any empress that was ever seen
From east to west, before tomorrow's dawn,
Then you can deal just as you like with me.

Pensa e sospira, il cavaliere alla fine disse: 'Mìa signora, amor mio e mìa cara moglie, mi affido al vostro saggio consiglio. Scegliete voi stessa quel che a voi e a me sia di maggior piacere e onore. L'uno o l'altro non ha importanza: a me basta ciò che a voi piace.'
'È dunque mio il comando' chiese lei 'se posso scegliere di far come mi piace?'
'Ma certo, moglie' disse lui 'credo che sia meglio.'
'Baciatemi' disse lei 'non siamo più adirati, perché in fede mìa voglio essere per voi l'una e l'altra cosa, cioè sia bella che buona. Dio mi faccia morir pazza, se non sarò per voi buona e fedele come nessuna moglie al mondo. E se domani non sembrerò anch'io una signora, una imperatrice o una regina d'oriente o d'occidente, disporrete della mìa vita e della mia sorte come vorrete.

And now, lift up the curtain: look and see.'
And when the knight saw it was really so,

25   And that she was as lovely as she was young,
He caught her up in both his arms for joy,
With his whole heart bathed in a bath of bliss;
They kiss; a thousand thousand times they kiss.
And she obeyed him in all things that might

30   Afford him satisfaction or delight.
To their lives' end they lived in perfect joy;
And may Christ Jesus send us husbands who
Are meek and young, and spirited in bed;
And send us grace to outlive those we wed;

35   And I pray Jesus to cut short the lives
Of those who won't be governed by their wives;
And as for all old and ill-tempered skinflints,
May heaven rain upon them pestilence!

Alzate il lenzuolo e guardate.'
E quando il cavaliere vide tutto questo,
che in realtà lei era bella e giovane, se
la strinse con gioia fra le braccia, col
cuore inondato di beatitudine. Mille
volte di seguito si mise a baciarla, e
lei gli obbedì in ogni cosa che potesse
dargli piacere e godimento.
E così vissero fino alla fine, in perfetta
gioia. Cristo Gesù ci mandi dunque
mariti mansueti, giovani e freschi
a letto, e la grazia di sopravvivere a
quelli che sposiamo; e inoltre prego
Gesù d'accorciare la vita a quelli che
non vogliono lasciarsi governare dalle
mogli; e ai vecchi rabbiosi, tirchi nello
spendere, Dio mandi subito una gran
peste!

Traduzione di Ermanno Barisone

OVER TO YOU

❶ **Complete the following short summary of the text with the expressions below.**

the mastery of him · in perfect joy · most pleasant and honourable · young and beautiful · proposal · beautiful and good

The knight thinks about his wife's _____ **(1)** and tells her to choose what is _____ **(2)** to both of them. His wife is satisfied that she has got _____ **(3)** and decides she will be _____ **(4)**. When the knight looks at her and discovers that his wife is _____ **(5)**, he is very happy and from that moment they live _____ **(6)**.

❷ **What does the knight do at first when hearing her proposal? What does he call his wife? What do his words show?**

❸ **What is the sentence the wife says which breaks the spell?**

❹ **The crucial question 'what is it that women most desire?' which was asked at the beginning of the story finds an answer here. Quote from the text.**

❺ **The text can be divided into two parts: the first part goes from l. 1 to 30; the second from l. 31 to 37. How do they differ in contents and purpose?**

❻ **In the last paragraph the wife of Bath clearly says what the qualities of an ideal husband are. Paraphrase from the text.**

❼ **Do you find the Wife of Bath's tale consistent with her personality?**

❽ **Which of the following themes does the tale deal with? Tick as appropriate.**

- [ ] love
- [ ] relationships
- [ ] marriage
- [ ] courtly love
- [ ] justice
- [ ] women
- [ ] courage

❾ **Which of the following styles of writing are used in the text? What effect do they have on the reader?**

☐ descriptive   ☐ narrative   ☐ dialogue   ☐ monologue

❿ **Do you think Chaucer agrees with the point of view of his storyteller? Support your opinion.**

⓫ **Do you think the answer to the question 'what women most desire?', - i.e. female dominance in marriage - is still valid today? If not, what do you think 'women most desire?' Do the boys' ideas differ from those of the girls in class? Discuss in class.**

⓬ **Through the character of the Wife of Bath Chaucer conveys ideas and attitudes about women and marriage: is this attitude in any way different from the general attitude that prevailed in medieval society?**

WRITER'S CORNER

⓭ **'The Wife of Bath's Tale' is drawn from an Arthurian romance based on a plot device familiar in fairy tales like 'The Frog-Prince' - which sees the transformation of an ugly mate. In 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' it is an old hag who is transformed into a beautiful, young woman for the pleasure and happiness of the knight.**

Use these contents to develop a fairy tale with all the characteristics of the genre.

Once upon a time ....

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales (c. 1387-1400)

TEXT 6

BEFORE READING

❶ The description of the Doctor, like all the other presentations of the pilgrims, shows once again how Chaucer presents each character both as an individual and a prototype of the social class he/she belongs to. If you think of a doctor and this profession today, what image comes to your mind? What, in your opinion, are the characteristics of a good doctor?

❷ Now read Chaucer's description of this pilgrim and see if there are any similarities/differences with your idea of a doctor.

'The Doctor'

A Doctor[1] 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[2],
He watched his patient closely for the hours
When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers
Of favourable planets, then ascendent,
Worked on the images for his dependant.
The cause of every malady you'd got
He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;
He knew their seat, their humour[3] and condition.
He was a perfect practising 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[4] too
And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
Galen and Rhazes, Halt, Serapion
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine[4].
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.

1. Dottor fisico: è la traduzione di 'doctor of physic', per indicare il dottore anche come 'physician'.

2. astronomy: si pensava che gli astri avessero un'influenza decisiva sulla salute fisica e psichica dell'uomo.

3. humour: si credeva che il corpo umano contenesse quattro fluidi o umori (sangue, flemma, bile gialla e bile nera), per cui la prevalenza di uno sull'altro determinava il particolare carattere di una persona.

4. Aesculapius …Gilbertine: Esculapio, figlio di Apollo, era il dio della medicina. Gli altri nomi si riferiscono a medici famosi di varie nazioni.

Era con noi anche un Dottor Fisico1: nessuno al mondo s'intendeva di medicina e chirurgia al par di lui, perché egli conosceva a fondo anche l'astrologia2. Curava il suo paziente seguendo attentamente le ore celesti, secondo la magia naturale, e dai segni astrologici sapeva determinare con esattezza la costellazione favorevole all'ammalato. Conosceva la causa d'ogni malattia, fosse il caldo o il freddo, l'umido o il secco, e dove si fosse prodotta, e da quale umore generata. Era davvero un ottimo medico. Stabilita la causa e la radice del male, ne indicava subito il rimedio. E prontamente si faceva mandare medicamenti e farmaci dai suoi speziali, giacché l'uno faceva far soldi agli altri, essendo tutti amici di vecchia data. Ben conosceva l'antico Esculapio, Dioscoride e Rufo; il vecchio Ippocrate, Alì e Galeno; Serapione, Razis e Avicenna; Averroè, Damasceno e Costantino; Bernardo, Gatisdeno e Gilbertino. Era misurato nella sua dieta, che non era affatto esorbitante, ma nutriente e di facile digestione. La Bibbia non la studiava molto. Aveva un vestito rosso sangue e azzurro, con fodere di taffetà; eppure era tutt'altro che prodigo nelle sue spese: metteva tutto da parte quel che guadagnava in tempo di pestilenza. E siccome l'oro in medicina è un cordiale, ecco ch'egli amava l'oro sopra ogni cosa.

Traduzione di Ermanno Barisone

❶ **Who does 'we' (l. 1) refer to?**

❷ **Answer true or false.**

		T	F
1. The doctor has a good knowledge of astronomy.		T	F
2. He is not able to identify the cause of an illness.		T	F
3. He does not know the apothecaries he works with.		T	F
4. He has studied the teachings of famous doctors of antiquity.		T	F
5. He is on a diet.		T	F
6. He likes spending money.		T	F
7. He is a lover of gold.		T	F

❸ **Now fill in the chart with more details about the doctor's attitude, behaviour and physical aspect.**

What he knows	....
What he does	....
How he behaves	....
How he is dressed	....
What he loves	....

❹ **Are there any details of the doctor's physical features?**

❺ **Go back to the initial question in 'Let's get started' of your personal and modern image of the doctor. Can you compare it with Chaucer's description? Are there any similarities or differences?**

❻ **The description of the doctor is mainly positive, but there are a few details which mar his portrait. Which ones?**

❼ **Can you say which aspects of the doctor's attitude and behaviour are modern and which are more linked to the traditions of Chaucer's time?**

❽ **What social class does the doctor belong to?**

❾ **With the words 'Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told' (l. 33) Chaucer is referring to... (Choose.)**

☐ the use of gold as a drug

☐ the doctor's greed

☐ the doctor's dedication

❿ **What are the main features of the poetic language (metre and rhyme)?**

⓫ **In the text there are references to the influence of the stars on the physical and psychological health of man, such as 'the time of day', 'the horoscopes', 'the power of the planets', 'ascendants' and 'humours'. What do they suggest about medicine in medieval times?**

⓬ **Now that you have been presented with four characters from Chaucer's General Prologue - the Knight, the Prioress, the Wife of Bath and the Doctor - in small groups prepare a chart comparing them, paying particular attention to their social status, physical features and general attitude to life. Can you find any famous people today who could match each of them? Compare your results with the rest of the class.**