

The Miller's Tale Answer Guide

Translation Activity: Modern English Version

A dead sleep, the result of his hard work

Fell on this carpenter, I believe, right

About curfew time, or a little later;

From the troubling of his spirit he groans sorely,

And soon he snores, because of his head's awkward position (ll.457-461).

Reading and Discussion Questions

- 1. The Miller spends quite a bit of time giving specific details about Alison's appearance. Why does he do this? (i.e., why might it her appearance be important to the story?)**

Sample Answer: Alison's main function in the story is to tempt the male characters and make them jealous, which causes them to make poor decisions. The Miller spends a long time describing her appearance in great detail to show exactly why these men fight over Alison.

- 2. Reread Absolon's description in ll. 127-152.**
 - a. What is his position, and how does he use this position to his advantage?**

Sample Answer: Absolon is a parish clerk whose duty is to gather a census of the town. He uses this position to thoroughly examine the

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women of the parish and give them “many a loving look,” which is how he meets Alison (l. 156).

b. How might Absolon's character be a critique of the Church?

Answer Tip: Think back to how Chaucer critiques the church in *The General Prologue* (especially in the descriptions of the Monk and the Friar) and in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. How are these characters similar to Absolon?

3. Explain the aphorism described in ll. 205-208 and how it relates to the plot of the tale in your own words.

Answer Tip: Your answer to this question will depend on your interpretation of the text and your understanding of the plot so far. As long as your answer seems logical, you will be fine.

4. What story do Nicholas and Alison devise to trick John?

Answer Hint: Look back at ll. 223-236 and 307-337.

5. Reread ll. 471-495. Why does Absolon believe that this is the opportune moment to try to woo Alison, and why is he mistaken?

Sample Answer: Absolon think that this is a good time to woo Alison because he heard from a townsman that the Carpenter was at “the Grange a day or two,” so he will not have to worry about the Carpenter finding out about his wooing attempts (l. 483). This will ultimately backfire because Absolon doesn't know that Nicholas, who arranged for John's absence, is already sleeping with Alison.

6. What happens when Absolon tries to kiss Alison?

Answer hint: Look back at ll. 535-548 and 612-627.

a. Why is this particularly fitting punishment for Absolon?

Sample Answer: This is a very fitting punishment for Absolon because the Miller tells us earlier in story that Absolon is very squeamish, particularly about farting (ll.152-153).

b. How does Absolon get revenge on Nicholas?

Answer Hint: Pay particular attention to ll. 623-627.

7. In ll. 268-268, John chastises Nicholas for being a student. Why does he think that Nicholas shouldn't study astrology?

Sample Answer: John doesn't think that Nicholas should study astrology because he believes that in doing so, Nicholas is trying to discover "God's secrets" (l. 268). Instead, John believes that it is safer to remain ignorant and know "nothing except his Faith" (l. 273).

a. Why is this ironic?

Answer Hint: Think back to how Nicholas convinces John to stay out of his house for several days.

b. How might this scene be a critique on those who choose to remain ignorant under the guise of religion?

Answer Tip: This answer really depends on your ability to close-read the text and your own interpretation. Make sure to back up your claim with direct evidence!