

The Canterbury Tales: The General Prologue **Answer Guide**

- 1. Why might the narrator spend the first sixteen lines of *The General Prologue* describing the weather during spring? What could spring represent here?**

Answer Tip: Your answer to this question will really depend on your own person interpretation of the text and the feelings and tone you associate springtime with. As long as you have a plausible answer that is supported with evidence from the text, you will be fine. For ideas on what spring normally represents in *The Canterbury Tales*, [please visit this website](#).

- 2. How does the Squire differ from the Knight in demeanor and appearance?**

Answer Hint: Look back at ll.80-81 and 89-90

- a. What might that say about the Squire's personality?**

Answer Tip: Focus on how chivalrous, unselfish, and courageous the Knight is portrayed in comparison to the Squire.

- 3. The narrator says that the Prioress' "greatest oath is by Saint Loy" (l. 120). Refer to the footnotes of your text and do some additional research on this line. Why is this an appropriate description for a nun?**

Answer Tip: The footnote of our edition of the text says that an oath by Saint Loy was considered extremely mild; however, other websites give a completely different interpretation of this line. Choose whatever reading compels you the most and support it with evidence from the text!

- 4. Look back at the description of the Monk. Why does this man of the Church wear such fancy clothes? What is his reasoning?**

Answer Hint: Look back at ll.175-183

- 5. Compare the description of the Monk with that of the Friar. What image are we receiving of clergymen?**

[Answer Hint](#)

- a. Based on these comparisons, how do you think the narrator felt about the Church as an institution?**

Answer Tip: For more information on the portrayal of the Church in *The Canterbury Tales*, [please visit this website](#).

6. What is ironic about the description of the Merchant?

Sample Answer: The description of the Merchant is ironic because he dressed in nice clothes as if he were wealthy and constantly spoke of protecting his monetary assets, but in reality, he owed a lot of money to his lenders. According to the narrator, none of the other pilgrims know “that [the Merchant] was in debt/so stately was he in his dealings” (ll.279-280).

7. The Wife of Bath is the only woman in this company of pilgrims. Based on her description, how do you think women were viewed during this time?

Answer Tip: For more information about the portrayal of women in *The Canterbury Tales*, [please visit this website](#).

8. Reread the Parson’s description, particularly ll. 500-506 and 11.525-528. How is he different from the other clergymen in the party?

Answer Tip: Focus on what the Parson appears to value and what he finds important in his position versus what pilgrims like the Monk and the Friar appear to value.

9. Based on the description of the Miller (particularly ll. 560-63), what do you think his tale will be like?

Answer Tip: This is another question where you will have to rely on your close reading skills and the evidence you pull from the text to craft your answer. Focus on the tone: do you think the story will be comedic? Serious? Romantic? Will the story be considered “appropriate” by medieval standards?

10. What do you think the narrator means when he says that he thinks the Summoner “was a gelding or a mare”? (l. 691).

Sample Answer: The narrator seems to imply that the Summoner is not considered very manly by medieval standards. A mare is a female horse, and a gelding is castrated horse, so comparing the Summoner to these two animals implies that he is lacking male genitalia, which is often associated with manhood.

11. Describe the bet that the Innkeeper makes with the pilgrims in your own words.

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Answer Hint: Look back at ll.769-820