

The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue Characters

Writer: Geoffrey Chaucer | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

☐ The Knight (A Knyght):

- **Chivalry:** The Knight is a true example of chivalry. He is brave, honorable, and loyal. He fights for truth and justice and shows courtesy to all.
- **Battle Experience:** He fought in 15 important battles in both Christian and non-Christian lands. He fought in 15 important battles in both Christian and non-Christian lands. He fought in **Prussia and Lithuania** (referred to as Pruce and Lettow), **Russia** (called Ruce), **Spain** during the **siege of Algeciras** (referred to as Gernade), **North Africa** (referred to as Belmarye or Morocco), **Turkey** (fought alongside the Lord of Palatye), **Egypt** during the **siege of Alexandria**. His reputation is very high.
- **Humble Appearance:** Despite his great achievements, he wears a simple, stained tunic. This shows that he is not proud or flashy.
- **Gentle Nature:** He is wise, kind, and respectful to everyone. He never speaks rudely or harshly.
- **Religious Devotion:** He fights for his faith and serves God through his battles and actions.
- **Wisdom and Prudence:** His experiences have made him not only a great warrior but also a thoughtful and humble person.

☐ Young Squier (A Yong Squier):

- **Family:** He is the son of the Knight, a noble and chivalrous figure.
- **Age and Appearance:** He is about 20 years old, has curly hair, and is of medium height. His clothing is short and elaborately embroidered with white and red flowers.
- **Talents:** He excels in many arts, such as singing, playing the flute, writing poems, drawing, and dancing.
- **Military Experience:** He has fought valiantly in regions like Flanders, Artois, and Picardy.
- **Love and Romance:** The Squire is deeply passionate and often restless due to love, so much that he barely sleeps at night, much like a nightingale.

- **Personality:** He is Humble, courteous, and eager to serve. He is respectful. He carves meat for his father during meals.
- **Aspirations:** His service in battle and artistic skills are motivated by a desire to impress his lady and earn her favor.

☐ **A Yeoman (A Yeman):**

- **Role:** He is the only servant of the Knight who accompanies him on the pilgrimage.
- **Clothing:** He wears a green coat and hood, which is typical of his status as a forester.
- **Weapons:** He carries a sheaf of bright, sharp peacock-feathered arrows and a mighty bow, along with a sword, shield, and dagger.
- **Appearance:** His head is closely cropped, and his face is brown. It refers to his experience outdoors.
- **Skills:** He is skilled in woodcraft and knows all the practices of forestry and archery.
- **Accessories:** He wears a wrist guard for archery and a silver medal of St. Christopher on his chest.

☐ **A Prioress (A Prioress):**

- **Name:** Her name is Madam Eglantine (**Madame Eglentyne**).
- **Modesty:** She smiles gently, showing her simple and modest nature.
- **Speech:** She takes oaths using Saint Loy's name.
- **Singing:** She sings divine services well, though with a nasal tone.
- **French Language:** She speaks French but learned it from an English school (Stratford-at-Bow), not from Paris.
- **Table Manners:** She is highly refined at meals. She never drops food and ensures her fingers stay clean. She wipes her lip so that no grease remains in her cup.
- **Deportment:** She values good manners and takes care to imitate courtly behavior. She aims to be seen as dignified.
- **Tender-heartedness:** She is extremely compassionate and would weep if she saw an animal, like a mouse, in pain.
- **Pets:** She owns small dogs and feeds them well, even crying if any are hurt or killed.

- **Appearance:** She is well-dressed, with a neatly pleated wimple, a well-shaped nose, gray eyes, a small mouth, and a broad forehead.
- **Jewelry:** She wears a coral rosary and a gold brooch inscribed with "Amor Vincit Omnia" (Love Conquers All).

☐ **Nun (NONNE):**

- She is called the Second Nun (not mentioned this way in "The General Prologue").
- She accompanies the Prioress. She acts as the Prioress' secretary (**Chapeleyne**). She is not described in much detail in the General Prologue.

☐ **Three Priests (Preestes Thre):**

- Three priests, along with the Second Nun, also accompany the Prioress.
- One of the priests tells "The Nun's Priest's Tale." The priests are not described in much detail in "The General Prologue." The Priest who tells the story is called John. It is mentioned in line 44 of the prologue of The Nun's Priest's Tale. The Host addresses him as Sir John.

☐ **A Monk:**

- **Manly and Virile:** The Monk is described as a strong, vigorous man capable of leadership and physical pursuits.
- **Outrider and Huntsman:** He enjoys hunting and has fine horses, which sets him apart from the traditional life of monks.
- **Disregards Monastic Rules:** The Monk ignores the strict rules of Saint Benedict and prefers modern customs.
- **Luxurious Lifestyle:** His fine clothing, including fur-lined sleeves and a gold pin, reflects his love for luxury.
- **Physically Well-Fed:** He is described as fat and healthy, with a bald, shiny head and face.
- **Preference for Fine Food:** The Monk enjoys lavish meals, particularly roasted swan.
- **Excellent Horse:** His horse, which is as brown as a berry, symbolizes his wealth and status.

☐ **A Friar (A Frere):**

- **Named Hubert:** His name is Hubert, and he is referred to as a "worthy friar" within his order.
- **Sociable and Merry:** The Friar is a sociable and cheerful person. He enjoys interactions with the wealthy.
- **Matchmaker:** He has arranged many marriages for young women at his own expense.
- **Popular Among the Wealthy:** He is very well known and loved by landowners and women in town, often preferring their company.
- **Licensed Confessor:** He has the license from a higher position to forgive sin. He hears confessions sweetly and gives easy penance, especially if it comes with a gift.
- **Favors Rich Donors:** He believes donations to his order are a sign of true repentance and gives easy absolution in return for gifts.
- **Expert Beggar:** He is skilled at begging and often earns more than his actual income.
- **Avoids the Sick and Poor:** He prefers to associate with the wealthy, avoiding sick people and beggars.
- **Gift-Giver:** His hood is stuffed with knives and pins, which he gives to women to win their favor.
- **Musically Talented:** The Friar has a pleasant singing voice and plays the rote, a stringed instrument.
- **Well-Dressed:** He is elegantly dressed, wearing a cloak of fine fabric, which is expensive and fashionable.
- **Lisping Affectation:** The Friar lisps slightly, which he does intentionally to make his speech sound sweeter.
- **Twinkling Eyes:** When he sings or plays, his eyes twinkle brightly, like stars in the night.

☐ **A Merchant (A Marchant):**

- **Appearance:** The Merchant has a forked beard, wears a colorful outfit, and sits high on his horse. He also wears a Flemish beaver hat and stylishly buckled boots.
- **Personality:** He speaks very solemnly, mostly about increasing his profits. He strongly supports maintaining trade routes across the sea.
- **Business Skills:** The Merchant is skilled in dealing with foreign currencies and business exchanges. He supports protecting trade routes, especially between Middelburgh (Holland) and Orwell (England).

- **Financial Status:** Despite being in debt, no one knows due to his dignified and careful management of his affairs.
- **Unknown Name:** While he is considered a worthy man, the narrator admits not knowing his name.

☐ **A Clerk:**

- **Occupation:** The Clerk is an Oxford scholar who has dedicated himself to the study of logic. He is known as the Oxford Clerk.
- **Physical Appearance:** He and his horse are both thin, almost skeletal. His clothes are tattered.
- **Values and Priorities:** He prefers books over material luxuries such as rich robes or musical instruments. He spends all his money on learning rather than on worldly goods.
- **Academic Devotion:** The Clerk is devoted to philosophy, particularly the works of Aristotle. He has not sought a church position (benefice) nor taken any worldly job. It indicates his focus is purely academic.
- **Lifestyle and Behavior:** He speaks only when necessary, and when he does, his words are meaningful and respectful. His speech focuses on moral virtue.
- **Piety:** He prays diligently for the souls of those who help fund his education.
- **Love for Learning:** He is deeply passionate about learning and teaching. He takes joy in both acquiring knowledge and sharing it with others.

☐ **A Sergeant of the Law (A Sergeant of the Lawe):**

- **Occupation and Reputation:** He is a high-ranking attorney known for being prudent, wise, and highly regarded in his profession. He often served as a judge in the court of assizes, appointed by the royal commission.
- **Wealth and Status:** The Sergeant is very wealthy, having acquired numerous fees and grants. He is an expert land buyer, and his purchases cannot be contested.
- **Knowledge and Skill:** He is highly knowledgeable in the law and can recite statutes by heart. He has recorded all legal cases since King William's time.
- **Work Ethic:** He appears very busy, although Chaucer hints that he may seem busier than he truly is.

- **Dress and Appearance:** He wears a simple, multi-colored coat and a silk belt with small bars. Despite his wealth and influence, he is modestly dressed.

☐ **A Franklin (A Frankeleyn)**

- **Appearance:** His beard is white as a daisy. His complexion is sanguine (cheerful and optimistic).
- **Lifestyle and Preferences:** He enjoys a piece of bread dipped in wine every morning. Epicurus influences his philosophy. He believes in living for pleasure.
- **Hospitality:** His house always has plenty of food and drink. Meals are prepared to reflect seasonal changes. His table is always set and ready for guests, and the kitchen is full of spices and sharp sauces.
- **Wealth and Social Status:** He presides over court sessions as a lord and is often elected to Parliament. He also serves as a sheriff and tax auditor. He carries an elegant and neat silk purse and dagger.

☐ **The Guildsmen**

- **Group of Five:** A Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver (Webbe), a Dyer, and a Tapestry-Maker (Tapicer) travel together.
- **Appearance:** They wear matching livery, signifying their membership in a prestigious guild. Their equipment and knives are freshly adorned with silver, not brass. These indicate their wealth and status.
- **Social Status:** They seem respectable enough to sit as aldermen (council members) in their city. Their wives encourage them to attain high positions for the title "Madame."
- **Wealth:** They have enough wealth and income to be considered for higher positions in society.

☐ **The Cook**

- **Profession:** The cook serves the group by preparing meals such as chickens with marrow bones and spices like poudre-marchant and galingale.
- **Skills:** He is skilled in roasting, boiling, frying, broiling, making stews, and baking pies.

- **Expert in Drinks:** The Cook can expertly distinguish the quality of London ale.
- **Physical Condition:** Unfortunately, he suffers from an open sore on his shin.
- **Reputation:** Despite his wound, he is renowned for making the best blancmange (a type of white pudding).

☐ **The Shipman**

- **Origin:** The Shipman hails from Dartmouth.
- **Appearance:** He rides a cart horse, wears a woolen gown reaching his knees, and carries a dagger hanging on a cord around his neck.
- **Complexion:** His skin is brown, tanned by the sun due to his long voyages at sea.
- **Personality:** He is a rough but good-natured fellow and a skilled seaman.
- **Morality:** He steals wine from merchants while they sleep.
- **Competence:** He is an expert navigator who is knowledgeable about tides, currents, and harbors from Hull to Cartagena.
- **Experience:** The Shipman has survived many tempests, and he knows every port in Brittany and Spain.
- **Ship:** His ship is called the *Maudelayne*.

☐ **A Doctor of Medicine (Doctor of Physik):**

- **Profession:** The Doctor is an expert in both medicine and surgery.
- **Knowledge in Astronomy:** He uses astrology and planetary positions to treat his patients.
- **Skillful Practitioner:** He understands the cause of illnesses and provides remedies swiftly.
- **Collaborates with Apothecaries:** He works closely with pharmacists, benefiting from their mutual business.
- **Familiar with Medical Authorities:** He knows classical medical figures like Aesculapius, Hippocrates, Galen, and others.
- **Diet:** He is careful with his diet, focusing on nourishing, digestible food.
- **Material Wealth:** He is dressed in luxurious fabrics and values gold highly, particularly as a medical remedy.

- **Moderation:** Despite his success, he spends moderately but keeps his earnings from treating plague victims.
- **Focus on Medicine Over Religion:** His studies are more focused on medicine than the Bible, and he studies little of the Bible.

□ **The Wife of Bath:**

- **Occupation:** The Wife is a highly skilled cloth-maker. Her skill surpasses even those from renowned cities like Ypres and Ghent.
- **Appearance:** The Wife of Bath is described with striking and bold features. Her face is fair, bold, and red-hued, and she has widely spaced teeth, a symbol of sensuality. She wears fine kerchiefs weighing ten pounds and bright scarlet stockings that are tightly fastened. Her shoes are new and soft. She also wears a wide-brimmed hat as large as a shield and a large overskirt with sharp spurs on her feet. Her appearance is that of a confident, fashion-forward woman, ready to display her wealth and status.
- **Marriages:** The Wife has been married five times at the church door and hints at other relationships in her youth. Despite these experiences, she proudly considers herself a "worthy woman."
- **Pilgrimage Experience:** She has been on several pilgrimages, visiting holy places such as Jerusalem three times, Rome, Boulogne, and Saint-James of Compostela in Galicia.
- **Personality:** She is bold and talkative and enjoys being in company, often laughing and chatting with others. She is knowledgeable about love and relationships. She has mastered the "old dance" of love. It refers to her extensive experience with the art of love and marriage.

□ **The Parson (Person of a Toun)**

- **Occupation and Character:** The Parson is a poor but virtuous religious figure who serves as the priest of a large parish. He is rich in holy thought and action. He follows Christ's gospel with sincerity.
- **Education and Diligence:** He is learned and preaches the gospel truthfully to his parishioners, always teaching them with diligence and patience.
- **Generosity:** Despite being poor, the Parson is generous and gives away his own offerings and income to the needy instead of collecting tithes strictly.

- **Commitment:** He visits his parishioners, even those living far away, in times of sickness or need, always traveling on foot with a staff.
- **Exemplary Leadership:** He leads by example and ensures that he acts before preaching. His moral stance is clear: if the priest (gold) becomes corrupt, how can the common people (iron) remain pure?
- **Integrity and Dedication:** The Parson stays dedicated to his parish instead of seeking wealth or higher positions in cities like London. He does not seek material wealth but instead focuses on spiritual duties.
- **Moral Teacher:** He teaches by kindness and good example, though he does criticize the obstinate firmly. His goal is to guide everyone towards righteousness regardless of their status.
- **Modesty:** He does not seek outward displays of piety. Instead, he focuses on living and teaching according to Christ's and the Apostles' principles.

☐ **The Plowman:**

- **Relation:** He is the Parson's brother.
- **Occupation:** He is a hard-working laborer who hauls dung, threshes, and digs.
- **Religious Devotion:** He loves God deeply and treats his neighbors as himself.
- **Charity:** He works for the poor without expecting payment when possible.
- **Tithing:** He pays his tithes fully from his work and possessions.
- **Appearance:** He wears a simple tabard and rides a mare.

☐ **The Miller:**

- **Physical Description:** The Miller is a large, muscular man with considerable physical power. His brawn and bones are impressive. He is a formidable figure in both size and strength.
- **Skills:** He is skilled at wrestling and wins the prize (a ram) in every match. He is known for his ability to break doors by running into them with his head.
- **Appearance:** The Miller has a broad red beard that resembles a spade. On his nose, he has a wart with a tuft of hair as red as the bristles on a pig's ears. His nostrils are wide and black.

- **Character Traits:** The Miller is loud and often speaks of sinful matters and jokes about harlotry. He is also a cheat, known for stealing grain from his customers and charging them three times its worth. Despite this, he prides himself on his cunning.
- **Clothing and Accessories:** He wears a white coat with a blue hood and carries a sword and buckler by his side.
- **Bagpipes:** The Miller is skilled in playing the bagpipes, and he leads the group out of town with his music.

☐ The Manciple:

- **Occupation:** A Manciple is a servant in charge of buying food and provisions. This Manciple is responsible for purchasing supplies for a law school (temple).
- **Wisdom:** Despite being uneducated ("lewed"), the Manciple is exceptionally skilled at making profitable deals. He outsmarts his learned masters in matters of finance.
- **Wealth:** Through his shrewd purchasing strategies, the Manciple has amassed wealth and security, often surpassing the wisdom of more educated men.
- **Professionally Respected:** His ability to manage finances and make wise purchases is an example for others in similar professions. He works for learned men and manages to outwit them in business dealings.

☐ The Reeve:

- **Physical Appearance:** The Reeve is a slender, choleric (bad-tempered) man with closely shaved hair and beard. His long, lean legs make him look like a stick, with no visible calves.
- **Occupation:** He works as an estate manager, overseeing his lord's land and property. His financial skills and strict oversight of the estate's operations allow him to ensure that no one deceives him, not even the auditors. He knows how to control every aspect of his lord's property, from sheep to livestock, and he gives detailed accounts of his lord's wealth.
- **Deceptive Abilities:** Though efficient and secretive, the Reeve manages to enrich himself from his lord's estate. He hoards wealth privately while keeping his master pleased.
- **Background:** Once a carpenter in his youth, he still retains his craftsmanship skills.
- **Horse:** He rides a sturdy dapple-gray horse named Scot, and he dresses in a long blue coat with a rusty sword hanging by his side. He always rides at the back of the group.

☐ **The Summoner:**

- **Physical Appearance:** The Summoner has a fiery-red, cherub-like face disfigured by sores, pimples, and swollen eyelids. His face is so grotesque that children are afraid of him. He suffers from scaly black eyebrows and a patchy beard.
- **Diet and Drinking Habits:** He enjoys garlic, onions, and leeks, which contribute to his foul breath. He drinks excessively, and when drunk, he speaks only in Latin, reciting legal terms he has memorized. He frequently speaks nonsense, but he knows enough Latin to intimidate others.
- **Occupation and Corruption:** As a Summoner, his job is to summon sinners to the church courts, but he is deeply corrupt. He allows people to escape punishment for their sins in exchange for bribes, including wine or favors. He is known to let people keep concubines for a fee and accept bribes to overlook their immoral behavior.
- **Personality:** Despite his lecherous and dishonest ways, the Summoner is a good companion, well-liked for his easy-going nature. However, he uses his power to blackmail the young people of the diocese by knowing their secrets.

☐ **The Pardoner:**

- **Appearance:** The Pardoner has long, yellow hair that hangs in thin, waxy strands. He has no beard and a smooth, feminine face. It leads others to believe he may be either a eunuch or womanlike. His eyes are glaring and resemble those of a hare.
- **Relics and Deceit:** He carries a bag full of fake relics like a pillowcase he claims to be the Virgin Mary's veil and pigs' bones as saints' relics. He uses these fake relics to deceive and make money from naive believers.
- **Profession:** As a Pardoner, his job is to sell pardons (indulgences) for the forgiveness of sins, but he takes advantage of this role to trick people into giving him large sums of money.
- **Singing and Preaching:** The Pardoner is skilled at singing and reading stories in church, particularly during the Offertory. Here, he uses his melodious voice to charm listeners and increase donations. He is fully aware of his manipulative abilities and uses them to his financial advantage.

☐ **The Host (Hooste):**

- **Appearance:** The Host is a large, imposing man with prominent eyes and a commanding presence. He has the qualities of a leader.
- **Personality:** He is bold in speech, wise, and very merry. He has excellent manners and knows how to entertain people.
- **Role as Leader:** He acts as the master of ceremonies. He welcomes everyone warmly and provides the group with excellent food and strong wine during supper.
- **Social Standing:** The Host is a respected businessman from Cheapside, and no one is seen as a better merchant than him.
- **Proposition for Entertainment:** After the meal, he proposes a storytelling game to amuse the group during the journey. He promises it will cost nothing and aims to provide enjoyment for everyone.
- **Confidence and Authority:** He easily takes charge and speaks with conviction. He ensures everyone feels comfortable in his presence.

The Last part of the Poem: The speaker clears some issues.

- **Gathering of Pilgrims:** The pilgrims are assembled in the Tabard Inn in Southwark, ready to begin their pilgrimage to Canterbury. The Host is described as a jolly and wise man. He welcomes them warmly and offers a proposition to make the journey more enjoyable.
- **Host's Proposal:** The Host suggests a storytelling competition to entertain the travelers along the way. Each pilgrim is to tell two tales on the journey to Canterbury and two more on the return trip. That means $30 \times 4 = 120$ stories.
- **Judging and Prize:** The Host will judge the best stories. Upon returning to the Tabard Inn, the winner will receive a free supper, paid for by the other pilgrims.
- **The Group's Agreement:** The group readily agrees to the Host's proposal and swears oaths to abide by his decision. They then draw lots to determine the order of storytellers.
- **The Knight's Role:** The Knight draws the shortest straw. So, he becomes the first person to tell his tale. He humbly accepts and begins his story as they depart on their pilgrimage.

☐ **Existing Class:** We can split them into four classes. The poet satirizes some characters and admires the worthy characters.

- **Military Class:** Knight (admired), Squire (satirized), Yeoman (admired)

- **Clergy/Religious Class:** Prioress (satirized), Monk (satirized), Friar (satirized), Nun (not described), Three Priests (not described), Parson (admired), Summoner (satirized), Pardoner (satirized), Clerk (admired)
- **Merchant/Middle Class:** Merchant (satirized), Sergeant at Law (admired), Franklin (satirized), Haberdasher (admired), Carpenter (admired), Weaver (admired), Dyer (admired), Tapestry-Maker (admired), Manciple (admired), Reeve (satirized), Host (admired)

Peasant/Working Class

: Cook (satirized), Shipman (satirized), Doctor (satirized), Wife of Bath (satirized), Plowman (admired), Miller (satirized)

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