*The Canterbury Tales*: Written in 1386 by Geoffrey Chaucer

* Chaucer was born in London, around 1345, into a well-connected family of wine-merchants.
* *The Canterbury Tales* is the most famous and critically acclaimed work of Geoffrey Chaucer, a late-fourteenth-century English poet. As the printing press had yet to be invented when Chaucer wrote his works, *The Canterbury Tales* has been passed down in several handwritten manuscripts.
* He wrote in the native language or vernacular of the Medieval period in Britain called Middle English. Chaucer is credited with having set the style for Middle English literature. Earlier Anglo-Saxon poetry, such as 'Beowulf', had been succeeded by a taste for French literature, in large part the result of England being ruled by Norman French kings after the Conquest of 1066.
* Twenty nine people that represent all aspects of Medieval society go on a pilgrimage to the cathedral at Canterbury in southeast England.
* Chaucer's works give great insight into the fourteenth century’s reflections of social change, religious controversies, and gender expectations.
* The cathedral at Canterbury is the main cathedral of the Church of England. The shrine to the martyr Saint Thomas a Becket is located at this cathedral.
* Chaucer’s characters are going to pay respects to this shrine as a part of a religious pilgrimage. They all meet at a tavern to begin their journey.
* Saint Thomas a Becket was the archbishop of Canterbury, and in 1170 he was martyred by some knights of the king of England, Henry II, who was overheard complaining about Becket’s loyalty to the church at Rome over his loyalty to his king.
* The host of the tavern or innkeeper is the man who suggests that the pilgrims each tell a story on the way to entertain the group. Chaucer intended for each to tell 2 stories, but he only got to write one apiece.
* *The Canterbury Tales* are called a **frame story**, meaning that there are many stories “framed” in the larger story of the pilgrimage to Canterbury. They are stories within a story. Many think that he was inspired to write this after reading another frame story called *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio.
* Chaucer had twenty-nine characters to introduce, so he couldn’t develop any one character at great length. Instead, he provided a few well-chosen details that would make each character stand out vividly.
* Chaucer uses **indirect characterization** when he tells how each character:

Looks and Dresses / Speaks and Acts / Thinks and Feels

* Chaucer also uses **direct characterization,** when he comes right out and tells us what a character’s nature is—virtuous, vain, clever, and so on.
* SATIRE

When an author ridicules and exposes the faults of his or her subject

Used in order to provoke change

*The Canterbury Tales* is a very important satire, pointing out the need for change in Medieval beliefs and practices

* Chaucer’s original plan for *The Canterbury Tales* was for each character to tell four tales, two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. But, instead of 120 tales, the text ends after twenty-four tales, and the party is still on its way to Canterbury. Chaucer either planned to revise the structure to cap the work at twenty-four tales, or else left it incomplete when he died on October 25, 1400.