


Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: Background to *The Canterbury Tales*

Introduction

Background to The Canterbury Tales

Introduction



Click the vertical tabs to view background information on Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.

- Canterbury Cathedral
- The Black Death
- A Cross Section of Medieval Society
- A Literary Survey

Click the vertical tabs to view background information on Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*.


Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: Background to *The Canterbury Tales*

Canterbury Cathedral

Background to The Canterbury Tales

Canterbury Cathedral



Canterbury Cathedral

Thomas Becket, often known today as Saint Thomas à Becket, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. After refusing to relinquish ecclesiastical power to King Henry II, he was murdered in 1170 by knights of the king. Declared a martyr and venerated as a symbol of resistance to the monarchy, he was buried at Canterbury Cathedral, which already had a long religious history. Although people had been making religious pilgrimages to Canterbury Cathedral long before Becket's death, his shrine attracted a dramatic influx of pilgrims to this sacred place. Geoffrey Chaucer had a front-seat view of the pilgrims who journeyed to Canterbury: A window from his home in London overlooked the pilgrims' road to the cathedral.

The Black Death

A Cross Section of Medieval Society

A Literary Survey

Thomas Becket, often known today as Saint Thomas à Becket, became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1162. After refusing to relinquish ecclesiastical power to King Henry II, he was murdered in 1170 by knights of the king. Declared a martyr and venerated as a symbol of resistance to the monarchy, he was buried at Canterbury Cathedral, which already had a long religious history. Although people had been making religious pilgrimages to Canterbury Cathedral long before Becket's death, his shrine attracted a dramatic influx of pilgrims to this sacred place. Geoffrey Chaucer had a front-seat view of the pilgrims who journeyed to Canterbury: A window from his home in London overlooked the pilgrims' road to the cathedral.

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice


Topic 3 Content: Background to *The Canterbury Tales*

The Black Death

Background to The Canterbury Tales

Canterbury Cathedral

The Black Death



The Black Death

Between 1348 and 1352, the people of Britain faced the Black Death, a plague that swept through Europe and killed at least a third of the population. In medieval times, living conditions were marked by poor sanitation. The streets of cities were dirty, and animals that harbored diseases roamed around freely. This lack of sanitation was a major contributor to the spreading of the plague. During this dark time, people looked to the Church to save them, but the Church was unable to provide relief from the terrible suffering. While the cruelty of the disease increased, the power of the Church decreased as people lost faith in the Church's protection.

A Cross Section of Medieval Society

A Literary Survey

Between 1348 and 1352, the people of Britain faced the Black Death, a plague that swept through Europe and killed at least a third of the population. In medieval times, living conditions were marked by poor sanitation. The streets of cities were dirty, and animals that harbored diseases roamed around freely. This lack of sanitation was a major contributor to the spreading of the plague. During this dark time, people looked to the Church to save them, but the Church was unable to provide relief from the terrible suffering. While the cruelty of the disease increased, the power of the Church decreased as people lost faith in the Church's protection.

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice

Topic 3 Content: Background to *The Canterbury Tales*

A Cross Section of Medieval Society


Background to The Canterbury Tales

Canterbury Cathedral

The Black Death

A Cross Section of Medieval Society

A Cross Section of Medieval Society



To pass the time during the long journey, the twenty-nine pilgrims in Chaucer's tale decide to participate in a storytelling contest. *The Canterbury Tales* is a story about stories, each one offering the reader a snapshot of medieval society from all walks of life, including elite aristocrats, clergy members, and common laborers. Each pilgrim represents a specific rank or position in medieval society and tells his or her tale in a style reflective of each character. In fact, sometimes a word used by several characters may have completely different meanings according to who the speaker is. Nonetheless, Chaucer adds realism to his characters in a way that defies stereotypes, revealing their secrets, faults, merits, and virtues.

A Literary Survey

To pass the time during the long journey, the twenty-nine pilgrims in Chaucer's tale decide to participate in a storytelling contest. *The Canterbury Tales* is a story about stories, each one offering the reader a snapshot of medieval society from all walks of life, including elite aristocrats, clergy members, and common laborers. Each pilgrim represents a specific rank or position in medieval society and tells his or her tale in a style reflective of each character. In fact, sometimes a word used by several characters may have completely different meanings according to who the speaker is. Nonetheless, Chaucer adds realism to his characters in a way that defies stereotypes, revealing their secrets, faults, merits, and virtues.

Module 3: Exploring Good, Evil, and Noble Sacrifice


Topic 3 Content: Background to *The Canterbury Tales*

A Literary Survey

Background to The Canterbury Tales

- Canterbury Cathedral
- The Black Death
- A Cross Section of Medieval Society
- A Literary Survey**

A Literary Survey



An impressive characteristic of Chaucer's masterpiece is the diversity of literary form and genres that he utilizes. Within *The Canterbury Tales*, you will find both prose and poetry along with the following medieval genres:

- Allegories (stories in which the characters and other story elements represent abstract ideas)
- *Fabliaux* (humorous and bawdy tales originating from France)
- Romances (medieval tales of chivalry and courtly love)
- Stories of saints (depictions of their lives and sermons)

Chaucer wrote much of his lyrical verse in a form that he pioneered called a heroic couplet, consisting of two rhymed lines of iambic pentameter, or five units of unstressed and stressed syllables.

An impressive characteristic of Chaucer's masterpiece is the diversity of literary form and genres that he utilizes. Within *The Canterbury Tales*, you will find both prose and poetry along with the following medieval genres:

- Allegories (stories in which the characters and other story elements represent abstract ideas)
- *Fabliaux* (humorous and bawdy tales originating from France)
- Romances (medieval tales of chivalry and courtly love)
- Stories of saints (depictions of their lives and sermons)

Chaucer wrote much of his lyrical verse in a form that he pioneered called a heroic couplet, consisting of two rhymed lines of iambic pentameter, or five units of unstressed and stressed syllables.