The History of the English Language

[English Language Timeframes]
- England before the English (55BC-600AD)
- Old English (600-1100)- Anglo-Saxon English (like Beowulf)
- Middle English (1100-1500)- French Meets English (like The Canterbury Tales)
- Early Modern English (1500-1700)- Scientific & Biblical Influence (like Hamlet)
- Present-Day English (1700-Today)- Global English & Internet English (like Feed)

➔ Remember: Syntactically/structurally, English follows a Germanic framework (S-V-O). However, semantically (at the word level of meaning), the English language reflects the influence of romance languages.

Prose= paragraph or standard sentence form (exp. Textbooks, traditional novels, articles, short stories, etc.)
Poetry= stanzas and verse (exp. Poems, lyrics, etc.)

The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

Spotlight: Poet Geoffrey Chaucer (Father of English Literature)
Bio: Born in London to an affluent family (his father worked in the wine business); some scandal when his aunt kidnapped him as a child in hopes of having him marry her daughter to keep Ipswich property in the family; ended up being ‘rescued’ and later married a wealthy lady in London; He became a public servant at a young age (working as a nobleman’s page in the house of a countess); The countess’s husband was the second son of Edward III; Therefore, Chaucer became acquainted with the royal court; He held several positions as a public servant and fought during the Hundred Years War with the English army; When he married, he had at least four children with his wife; However, they separated before his death in 1400; He is believed to have begun The Canterbury Tales in 1380 (living in Kent at the time); Though he attained a fairly high salary during his lifetime, he was robbed in 1390; His wife left around this time; His patron was overthrown; Some say he died of unknown causes, while others believe he was murdered.
Timeframe: 1340-1400 (ish); Medieval/Middle Ages (Richard II’s Reign of Great Britain)
Location: London & Canterbury, England
Race & Ethnicity & Gender: White, British Male

Major Literary Work: The Canterbury Tales (remains unfinished)- long narrative poem- 24 tales
[Estates Satire- criticizes the distinction and flaws inherent in the medieval social class system]

Stylistic Components (language; structure; syntax)
- Standardized the use of London Dialect of Middle English (the vernacular) as a literary language
- Introduced the rhyme royal (seven lines of iambic pentameter- rhyme scheme ABABBCC- that’s a tercet and two couplets OR a quatrains and a tercet)- not in the tales that we covered; but just so you know it exists
- Iambic Pentameter- the number of “iamb” sets within a line of poetry
- Lamb- an unstressed (U) and stressed syllable (/) in poetry (a pair of U/)
- Couplet- two successive lines that rhyme
- Tercet- three successive lines, two of which must rhyme
- Quatrain- four successive lines related through a rhyme scheme (typically alternating)

Text at a Glance
Frame story that discusses the tales of 30 people on pilgrimage toward Canterbury Cathedral from London (to pay respects to the late St. Thomas a Beckett- who was murdered there due to tensions between the Church and State). Though originally the story (narrative poem) was intended to recount a total of 120 tales, Chaucer died before he could finish. In the frame narration, Harry Bailey, the owner of the Tabard Inn in London decides to accompany the pilgrims and host a storytelling competition. The descriptions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue preface each individual tale or framed narration. The winner of the storytelling contest is promised a feast upon their return to London. In the competition, each pilgrim was intended to tell two tales on the way there and two tales on the way back (for a total of four tales per person- 120 tales per the group). The Knight tells the first tale. Through each of these tales, Chaucer critiques some aspect or flaw within contemporary English society. He does this through the character descriptions as well as the genre in which each tale unfolds.
- Frame Story/Narrative- story within a story
“The Knight’s Tale”

Speaker: The Knight (Second Estate)

General Prologue Description: Humble, knightly, dignified; honorable; fought in the Crusades

Tale Genre: Romance

Spotlight Speech: Prime Mover’s Speech

Mimetic Background: Teseida (epic poem by Giovanni Boccaccio)

Characters in the Tale:
- Duke Theseus of Athens (Greece)
- Ypolita (Queen of Athens; Captured Queen of Amazons)
- Emelye (Princess of Athens; Captured Princess of Amazons)
- Creon (Ruler of Thebes- also in Greece* correction from lecture)
- Palamon- Captured Thebian knight
- Arcite- Captured Thebian Knight
- Mars- Roman mythological god of war
- Diana- Roman mythological goddess of hunt & chastity
- Venus- Roman mythological goddess of love

Tale in a Nutshell Summary:
Duke Theseus of Athens conquers the Amazon tribe (of women warriors) and returns to Greece with his war bride (Ypolita) and her sister (Emelye). As the marriage celebration is occurring, three widows stop Theseus and complain that Creon of Thebes has dishonored their husbands by refusing burial in a recent battle. Theseus decides to attack Creon and retrieve the corpuses of their husbands for proper burial. After the battle against Creon, Theseus (of course wins) and takes pity on two Thebian knights (cousins) on the edge of life and death. He takes these knights (Arcite and Palamon) as captives. They are imprisoned in a tower that overlooks a garden (Biblical allusion: Garden of Eden symbolism). Both Arcite and Palamon fall in love with Emelye (who wonders in the garden unaware that she is being watched). Arcite is released but banished. Palamon remains locked in the tower. Both believe they have a bad break. OF COURSE, Arcite illegally returns and Palamon illegally breaks out of the tower... both in search of Emyle. OF COURSE, both run into each other in the woods and get all “she’s mine” and try to solve their “problem” through violence. OF COURSE, Theseus happens to come upon this fight. He claims it is uncivilized. Instead, he calls for a tournament between the two men in the amphitheater. Whoever wins gets to marry Emelye. Emelye, wishing to remain a virgin and never marry, prays to Diana (goddess of chastity). Arcite prays to Mars (god of war) to help him win the tournament. Palamon prays to Venus (goddess of love). It is against the gods wishes for Emyle to remain a virgin. Therefore, she must marry one of them. Arcite wins the tournament; but is quickly trampled by a horse. Palamon marries Emeyle. Prime Mover’s Speech reinforces the idea of divine destiny and fate. The End.

Great Chain of Being: the idea of a hierarchal universe ordained by God; each link in the chain had more authority in the hierarchy; it included: God, Angelic Beings (divine abilities of love, imagination, and reason; transcended limitations of the flesh; immortal); Humans (solidity and strength; ability to grow and reproduce; emotional capacity; ability to feel primal feelings; ability to think and reason); Animals (solidity and strength; ability to grow and reproduce; emotional capacity; ability to feel primal feelings); Plants (solidity and strength; ability to grow and reproduce); and Minerals (solidity and strength). This notion was twisted to reinforce social class distinctions (estates) during the Middle Ages.

A Lesson on Symbolism & Embedded Meaning
- Conventional Symbols: Mainstream symbols; status quo symbols
- Contextual/Literary Symbols: Alternative; context-necessary symbols
- Allusions- references to well-known ideas, places, events, or people
  (Common allusions: Greek/Roman Mythology & Biblical Allusions)
- Simile: a comparison using “like” or “as”
- Metaphor: comparison without using “like” or “as”
- Literary Conceit: an extended metaphor
- Allegory: story in which every character or object is a symbol on a 1:1 basis
  (Most Popular: Plato’s “The Allegory of the Cave” in The Republic 381 BC)
“The Wife of Bath’s Tale”

Speaker: The Wife of Bath - Alisoun (Third Estate)

General Prologue Description: gapped teeth; outspoken; gossipy; educated (but not necessarily in a good way); encompasses her own sense of feminism; multiple marriages; sexual empowerment is her motto

Prologue Genre: Literary Confession; Mock Sermon

Tale Genre: Arthurian Romance

Spotlight Style: Testimony of Authorities

Mimetic Background: Irish Myths

Characters in the Tale:
-King Arthur & Queen Gwenhwyfar (Static Characters)
-Knight (Dynamic Character)
-Young Maiden (Static Character)
-Loathly Lady (Dynamic Character)

Quick Review:

Dynamic Character: change or develop in a story; major characters

Static Characters: remain the same; very little development/growth in the story; minor characters

Tale in a Nutshell Summary:
A knight sees a maiden in the woods. Overcome by lust, he rapes her. He goes before King Arthur. The Queen begs the King to let her do what she wishes with the knight (vaguely parallels the Biblical story of Herod & Herodias). The Queen gives the knight a year to find the answer to one question: “What do women want most?” The knight travels around and speaks with many women; however, all give him different answers. Finally, just as his time is running out, he happens to see a bunch of women dancing in the woods (parallels with Hindu mythology). As he approaches, the group of dancing women manifests into one loathly lady. The loathly lady tells him that she has the answer which he seeks. She agrees to give him the answer if he promises to grant her a wish after she helps him. OF COURSE, he does not ask what her wish is in advance. Before the court, he takes the woman with him. She tells him that women want sovereignty over their husbands. The Queen and her court approve his answer. Then, the loathly lady requests that he marry her. He is utterly disappointed by this turn of events and begrudgingly marries her. On their wedding night, he does not want to consummate the marriage. She asked him if he would rather she be beautiful and disloyal/unfaithful or ugly and loyal/faithful. He tells her that the choice is hers. Since he “learned” and applied what women want most, the loathly lady transforms into a beautiful and loyal/faithful wife. The End.

Archetype: a character or symbol that is repeated throughout a culture so much that it becomes part of a collective cultural consciousness (like a literary stereotype); example: the loathly lady motif

“The Pardoner’s Tale”

Speaker: The Pardoner (First Estate)

General Prologue Description: sinner without shame; con-artist; does NOT practice what he preaches; in it for the money; sells pardons (something that can absolve sins and lessen purgatory time)

Prologue Genre: Literary Confession

Tale Genre: Exemplum

Spotlight Style: Danse Macabre

Tale’s Motto: Radix malorum est cupiditas (Greed is the root of all evil.)

Characters in the Tale:
-Old Man; Death; Rioter One; Rioter Two; Rioter Three

Tale in a Nutshell Summary:
Three rioters in Flanders set out to find Death (Black Death plague personified) because he is killing all their friends. An old man tells the three where they can find this “Death.” He sends them to a tree. Under the tree, there is monetary treasure. While two stay behind, they send the other in town to get celebratory wine. When he is gone, two of the rioters conspire to kill him upon return to split the money among themselves (somewhat harkens the Biblical story of Joseph and the lion’s den- same concept). The third rioter (the one in town) has the same thought. So, he stops by a “pharmacy” of sorts and places the poison in the wine. Upon his return, the other two rioters kill him. However, in their murder success, they decide to drink the wine. They also die. Beneath the tree and money, they found death.
Other Contextual Knowledge:
- **Feudalism**: social system tied to a bureaucratic distribution of land from royal powers to nobles and indentured servitude (called peasants or serfs); they were provided a place to live and a small stipend of food in place for manual labor and maintenance of the land; a self-perpetuating system in Medieval England; little to no social class mobility
- **Capitalism**: a socio-economic system that shifted the power of the state (a.k.a. royalty) to private ownership and a monetarily maintained system of payment and livelihood; more class mobility (though still encompasses limitations)
- **Catholicism**: originally the national religion (before the separation between Church & State)
- **Purgatory**: a holding place of purification or temporary punishment to refine souls of worthy humans before entrance into Heaven.

**Medieval Literary Genres**
- **Metrical Tale**: narrative poem told as simply and realistically as possible.
- **Fabliau**: a comic tale written in verse and borrowed from the French tradition
- **Tragedy**: a tale that fixes on a fall from prosperity
- **Miracle Stories**: Virgin or Holy Mary stories (Immaculate Conception)
- **Folk tale**: a tale that encompasses a hero/heroine’s trudge through obstacles and typically ends with a lesson learned
- **Breton Lai**: a form of medieval romance literature that integrates the supernatural and magical components
- **Exemplum**: an anecdote or a cautionary tale sometimes used in sermons
- **Estates Satire**: a critical survey of three social class: those that pray, those that fight; and those who labor
- **Hagiography**: recounts the life of a saint
- **Beast Fable**: an allegorical moral story told with animals
- **Treatise**: a methodological discussion of facts and principles
- **Romance**: a story told about high-class people from long ago dealing with drama and encountering adventures before a wedding

**Composition Focus: Close Reading Literary Analysis**

**Types of Literary Analysis**
- **Comparative Analysis**: paper that compares and contrasts at least two works of literature to make an argument
- **Close Reading**: paper that dissects three parts: (1) the purpose/meaning; (2) the writing strategies; (3) the language
- **Theoretical Literary Analysis**: paper that uses theoretical research to analyze a work of literature
- **Applied Literary Analysis**: paper that uses personal experience to better explain the events/characters within a text

**Thesis Platforms**
- **Socio-Economic Status**: analyze the ways in which social class and capital influence a given text
- **Power Hierarchies**: analyze the ways in which power is distributed between characters within the text
- **Race/Ethnicity**: analyze the ways in which constructions of racial or ethnic heritage impact the text
- **Language**: analyze the ways in which meaning is conveyed through a given language or construction of language
- **Gender**: analyze constructions and representations of gender in a text
- **Perspective**: analyze the POV and potential biases or influences
- **Location**: analyze the role of location in a story- where it was written and where it takes place
- **Body Language/Insinuations**: analyze the ways in which implicit sculpting influences the text

**Introductory Sentence**: Introduces text, author/poet, and a general plot statement
**Thesis Statement**: Re-introduces text, author/poet, and a critical argument in regard to the text (X or X/Y)
**Topic Sentence**: Supports the main argument in the thesis statement through elaboration (the A B C)

**Refresher: Advanced Expository Paragraphing**
- **Claim** (Thesis Statement or Topic Sentence)- includes title and author
- **Elaboration**: builds on the claim
- **Textual Support**: never leave a quotation hanging- always introduce it & use in-text citation
- **Explanation**: explain how the quotation supports the claim
- **Textual Support**: add a new element of the claim or build on the existing element of the claim
- **Explanation**: always, always explain how the quotation backs the claim
- **Tie Back to the Claim**: all about that 360-degree vibe