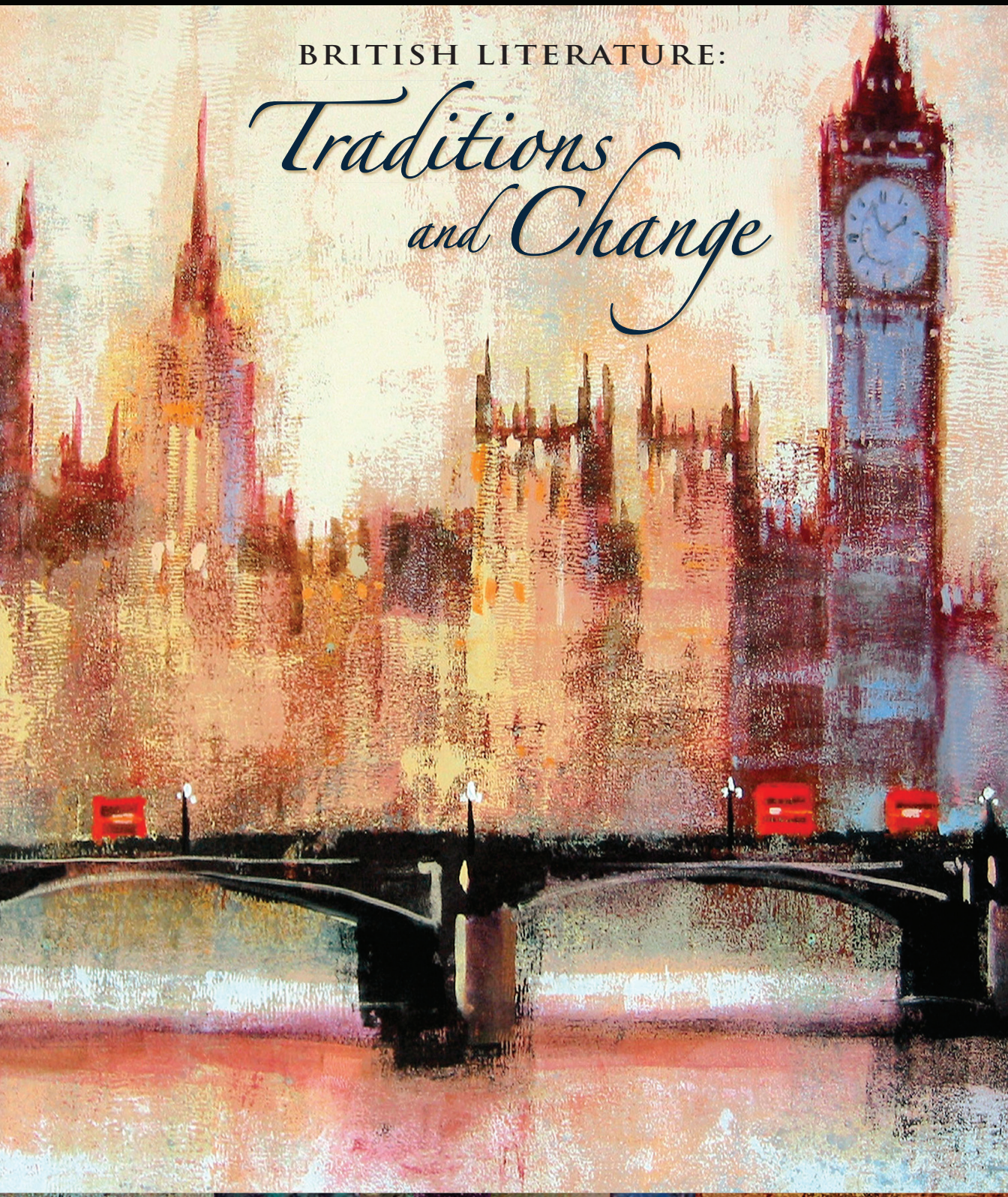
MANY VOICES LITERATURE

BRITISH LITERATURE:
Traditions and Change



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Traditions and Change

Perfection Learning®

Logan, Iowa 51546-0500

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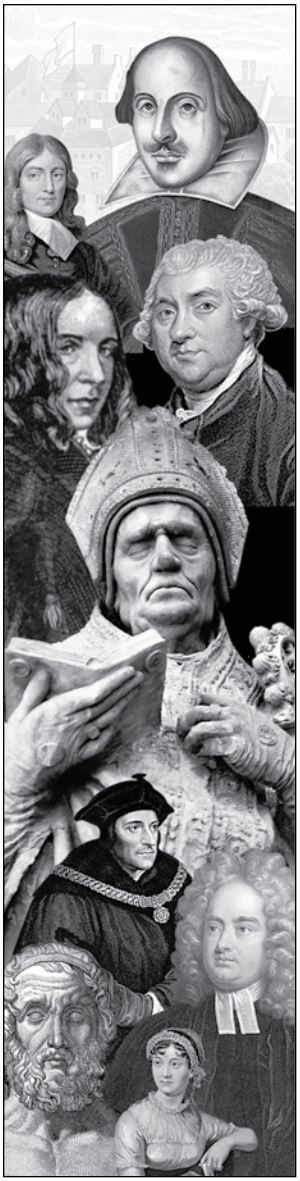

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TO THE STUDENT

Director and comedy writer Woody Allen once advised, "Just don't take any course where they make you read *Beowulf*." Like Allen, you may feel that *Beowulf*, *The Canterbury Tales*, and other British works of literature seem distant and irrelevant, that they bristle with an unfamiliar language and culture. In reality, these works offer an opportunity too valuable to pass up: to learn about those who first spoke the English language and about the world they inhabited. Reading Chaucer, Milton, Keats, Woolf, and the rest of the authors included in this book offers you not only a rich literary history but a bridge between then and now, which reveals that, though times have changed, certain truths about humanity remain constant. As you read about struggles for acceptance, the desire to love and be loved, the thirst for revenge, and the quest for a place in the world, you may find you have more in common with these writers than you thought.

This book will help you think critically, make connections from texts you are familiar with to the new texts you explore, and understand the literary elements of each selection you read. Here's how:

Eye on an Era A timeline appears at the beginning of each unit (see the timeline for Unit 1 on pages 16–21) that gives you important insights into the defining political, social, and cultural events of the time period. Important historical figures, political uprisings, religious happenings, economic changes, and social upheavals are chronicled to set up a context in which to read the literature that follows. At the end of the timeline, take an up-close-and-personal look at what life would be like for a boy or girl during that time period in A Teen of the Time (page 21).

Critical Thinking To encourage you to dive deeper into your reading and understanding of the selections included in the book, each unit focuses on a particular critical thinking skill. An essay, such as the one on page 22, will precede the selections for each unit and help you focus on using the skill, in this case *compare and contrast*, when reading and responding to literature. Each unit's essay also introduces you to a Web site that will aid in your understanding of the literature and allow you to practice your ability to think critically.

Before You Read In order to obtain a more thorough understanding of a literary work, gathering background information on an author, his or her style of writing, and literary techniques he or she used when writing is vital. Each Before You Read page (see page 23) offers this information, along with questions to think about as you prepare to read the selection(s) that follow. Many of the questions will ask you to make a connection to something else you have read or experienced; other questions will tie in to the critical thinking skill for that unit. You'll also find the following icons used:

This icon calls attention to the Literary Lens feature, which reviews important literary elements, such as simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and allusion, found in the selection(s) that follow.

This icon denotes a question that tests the specific critical thinking skill focused on in that unit.

After You Read Turn to page 34. Following each selection or set of selections, you are asked to extend your understanding of the literature by interpreting literary elements, exploring context, doing research, applying what you read to your own creative project, and using critical analysis.

Exploring the Classics Units 4–7 include information about additional authors who created quintessential works of literature for that time period.

Connecting Eras At the end of each unit, you will revisit the critical thinking skill using a contemporary selection that connects to an important theme addressed in that unit. In Unit 5, for example, the new selection is an interview with rapper Eminem conducted by British writer Zadie Smith (see pages 704–711). This interview, like much literature of the Romantic Period, explores an artist's attempt to break free of convention, expectation, and precedent. Each selection is followed by critical thinking questions, a writing assignment related to the theme, and an assignment that encourages you to use what you've learned in a creative way.

Finally, note that parallel text is included with some of the more challenging texts to aid in comprehension. The original text is provided on the left-hand pages, with the modern translation on the right-hand pages *parallel* to the original. Always read the original text first, using the parallel text to check your understanding.

Unit 1:
The Anglo-Saxon Period

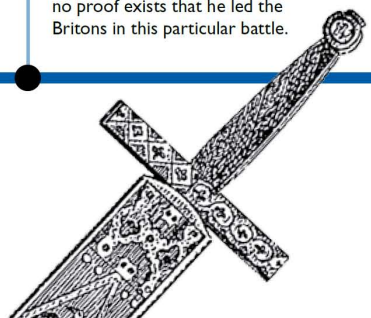
449 to 1066

Eye on an Era

449
The Germanic Angle and Saxon Tribes arrive in southeast Britain.

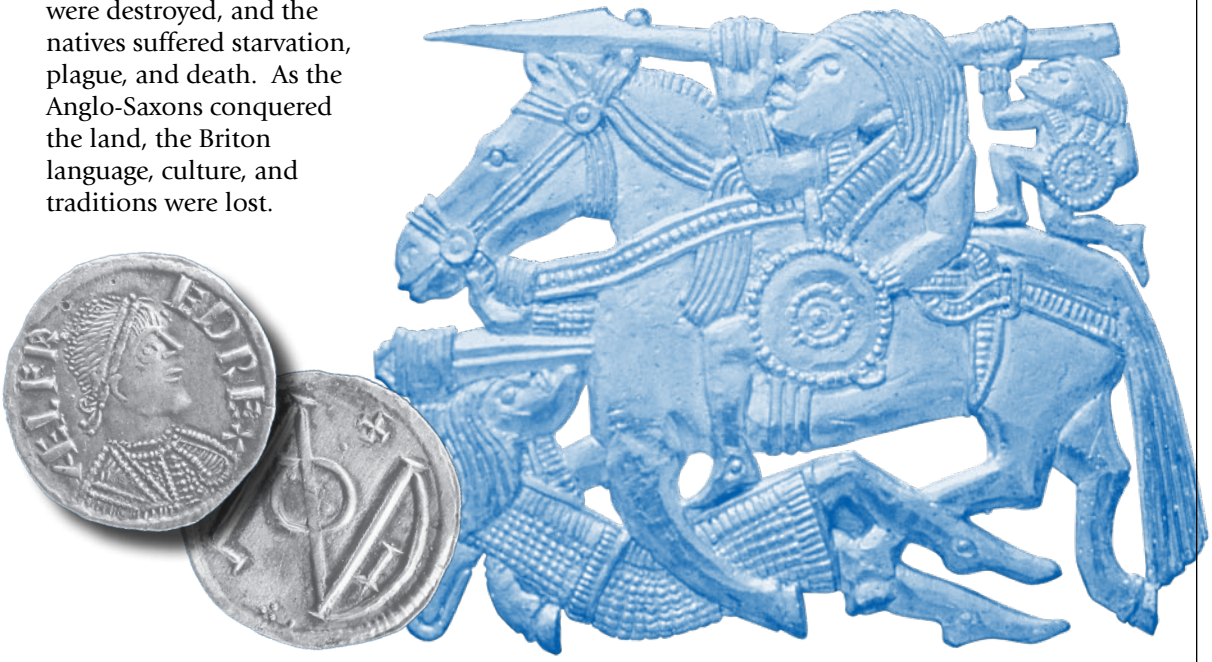
476
German general Odoacer defeats Romulus Augustus and becomes the first non-Roman ruler of Italy.

516
Britons defeat the Anglo-Saxons at Mount Badon. Throughout history, success is attributed to King Arthur's leadership, but no proof exists that he led the Britons in this particular battle.



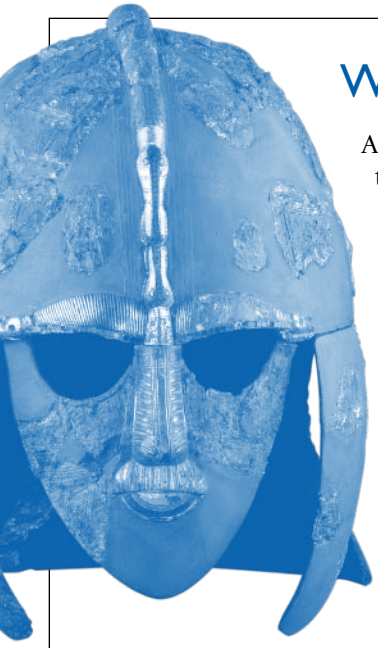
When the Romans withdrew troops from Britain in the early fifth century, Germanic tribes of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes took advantage of Rome's diminishing presence in the country and began invading at the borders.

These tribes arrived primarily from northern Germany and Scandinavia, and their goal was to conquer the native people (Britons, an Anglo-Saxon word meaning "slaves") and colonize their lands. The Britons alone did not have enough troops and were too scattered to fight off the majority of the attacks, and the Anglo-Saxons took control. Whole villages were destroyed, and the natives suffered starvation, plague, and death. As the Anglo-Saxons conquered the land, the Briton language, culture, and traditions were lost.



565
Columba founds a monastery on the island of Iona off the coast of Scotland. It will come to house one of the greatest libraries in Western Europe, contributing greatly to Dark Age learning.

597
St. Augustine arrives in England; he converts King Ethelbert to Christianity.



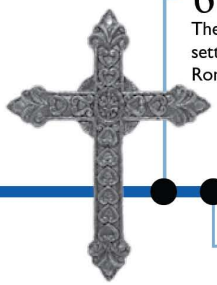
Warrior Society

Anglo-Saxons were loyal, fierce warriors. They lived by a code of honor and took oaths to obey their tribe and kin. Insults against their tribe could lead to bloody feuds, and warriors were expected to fight until victory or death. If a warrior's leader was killed, it was the warrior's duty to avenge the death. When warriors were not defending and protecting their lands, they spent much time celebrating battles and holidays by feasting. Men and women gathered to eat and drink, sometimes celebrating for as long as sixteen hours.

While Anglo-Saxon Britain was certainly a patriarchal, male-dominated society, women had more power than they would in later time periods. Unmarried women could be landowners and had the same rights as men to wield power over workers, arrange finances, and defend their households. A woman could not be forced to marry against her will, and, once married, her personal property remained her own. If a married woman's husband died, she ruled his kingdom.

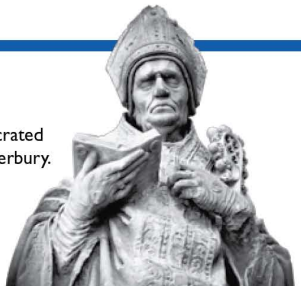
Paganism and Christianity

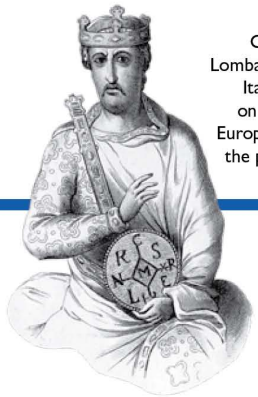
The native Britons had been converted to Christianity when they were controlled by the Roman Empire, but the spread of Christianity drastically diminished when the Anglo-Saxons, who worshiped gods and goddesses of the natural world, took control. Referred to as "pagans," which came to mean heathens, they held rituals and often offered blood sacrifices to please their gods. Missionaries began traveling to Britain to establish monasteries and convert the pagans; with St. Augustine's conversion of the king and other royalty, Christianity began to flourish again. The transition from paganism to Christianity was not smooth, however, and missionaries allowed the adoption of pagan traditions and rituals to ease Anglo-Saxons' concerns. For example, Christians began celebrating Christmas on December 25, when pagans celebrated the Winter Solstice. Unfortunately, the adoption of pagan customs did not mean problems disappeared, and the issue of religion continued to cause disputes between different kingdoms within Britain.



664
The Whitby Synod is held to settle the differences between Roman and Celtic clergy.

668
Theodore is consecrated archbishop of Canterbury.

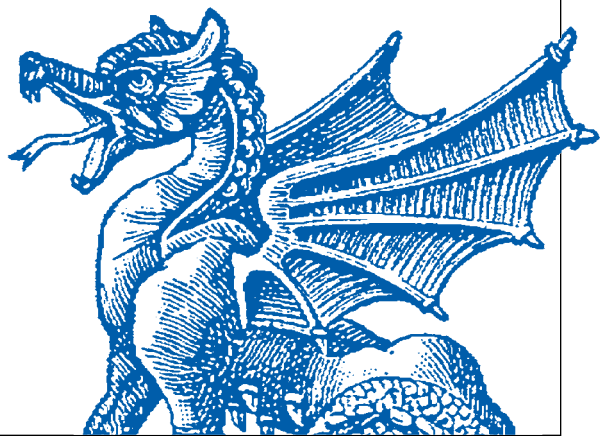




774
Charlemagne conquers the Lombards and comes to control Italy. Charlemagne would go on to unite most of Western Europe under his empire, giving the people a common identity.

Oral Tradition

Very few Anglo-Saxons could read or write, so the only way to pass down their culture's history was through storytelling. Scops, or oral poets, would travel the land entertaining and educating audiences with legends and songs that had been passed down through the ages. Parents would share with their children stories of loyalty and bravery, tragedy and triumph, and these stories would be passed down from generation to generation. These stories gave Anglo-Saxons their identity and purpose. Because of Anglo-Saxons' strong reliance on oral tradition, we have few records of the culture's history or literature. *Beowulf* and "The Wanderer" are two examples of oral traditions that were written down and are now preserved, offering us a glimpse into the Anglo-Saxon culture.



793

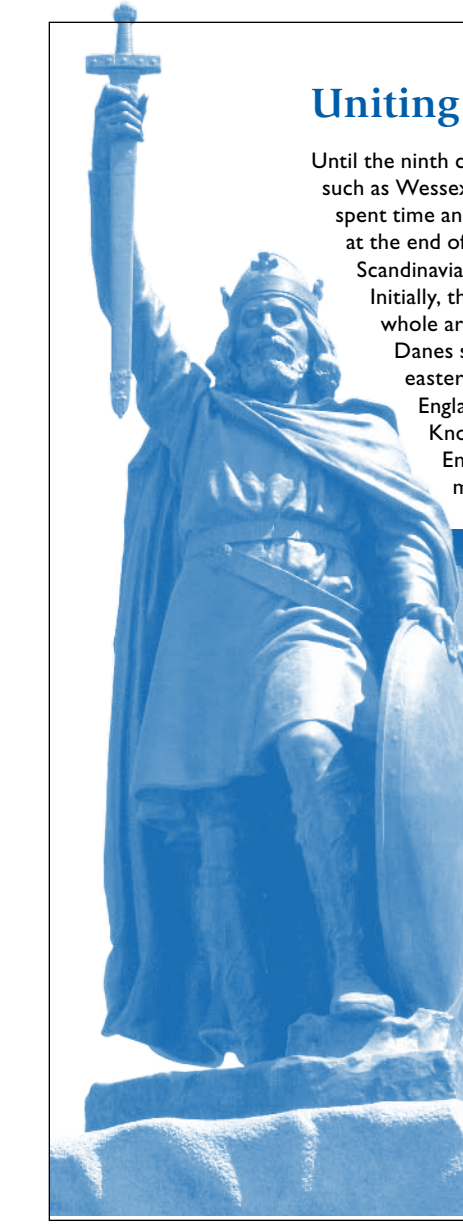
The Vikings (Danes) begin a period of raids on England with their attack of the monastery on the island of Lindisfarne.

843

Kenneth MacAlpine unites the Scots and the Picts in one "kingdom of Scotland."

Uniting Against a Common Enemy

Until the ninth century, Britain remained an island divided into various powerful kingdoms such as Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria. The various tribes controlling these kingdoms spent time and energy defending their land against the other kingdoms of Britain. Then, at the end of the eighth century, attacks began from a foreign enemy: Vikings from Scandinavia. The Danish warriors attacked monasteries and villages all over the islands. Initially, their attacks were swift, and they would leave after pillaging and destroying whole areas. However, as the attacks continued throughout the ninth century, the Danes stayed behind after their attacks, eventually gaining control of northern and eastern parts of Britain. The king of Wessex, Alfred, united all the kingdoms of England, and under his leadership, the English were able to defeat the Danes. Known as Alfred the Great, this king not only defeated the Danes and united England, but he also established the first permanent military and encouraged more scholarly and literary works to be produced.

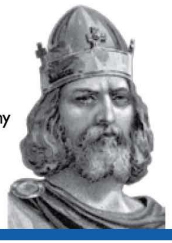


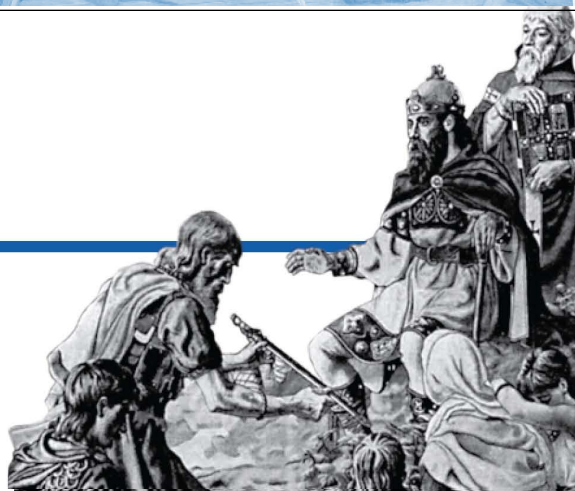
867
The Kingdom of York is established by the Vikings.

878
King Alfred defeats the Danes at Wessex.

886
King Alfred and the Danes sign a treaty that divides England.

890
King Alfred establishes a permanent army and navy.





A Teen of the Time

Aerlene's father looked to her for her answer: Yes or no? This was the biggest decision she had ever had to make. If the question had come up five years earlier, when she was twelve, her parents would have made it for her. But now it became her choice. A young man named Oeric from a neighboring village had asked her to marry him. To show his sincerity—and offer her some financial security—he had offered her a cow and two sheep. According to custom, he would provide her these gifts the morning after they married. These animals would be hers (not her father's or her husband's) to keep—even if the marriage did not work out.

Aerlene knew Oeric, at least well enough to like him. If she said yes, she could predict her life. Like almost everyone she had ever met—only a few hundred people at most—Oeric was a peasant farmer. They would live in a small house—a one-room hut, really—in his village of Wilfridham. He would walk ten or twenty minutes to one of the strips of land around the village that he rented and tend his crops. He might grow wheat in one field, oats in another, and barley in a third. She would keep busy working at home—sewing, weaving, spinning, growing vegetables. And if they hoped to live to see their children grown, they should start their family immediately.

What if she said no? Might she get a better offer? She was a little surprised, and a little hurt, that Tondbert had not asked her. His wife had recently died in childbirth, a sad but common occurrence. He needed a wife to help raise his children. Like his father, Tondbert was a tanner. He made leather shoes, reins, and bags.

Part of her liked the idea of marrying a tanner. He made a little money that they could use to buy luxuries from the trader who visited their village from time to time. But one part of her did not like the idea: her nose. Now Aerlene was accustomed to many smells. People rarely bathed, so the smell of human sweat did not bother her. Their hut had no chimney, so she was used to smoke and the smell of burning wood. And livestock, such as sheep, cattle, pigs, goats, and horses, sometimes shared their hut, so she did not mind all the smells that came with them. But the smell of treating animal hides? That was awful. It was so bad that tanners located their shops far from the village. Tondbert had to walk nearly half an hour to his shop each day.

Besides Oeric and Tondbert, Aerlene had met only a few other eligible men. Only about fifty people lived in her village, and other nearby villages were no larger, so the choices were limited.

"So," her father now asked, "what is your answer? Will you marry Oeric?"

Aerlene drew in a deep breath. "Yes."

973
Edgar is crowned king of England at Bath, fourteen years after taking power.

1000
The epic poem *Beowulf* is believed to have been recorded around this time. The poem is considered the most important literary work of the Anglo-Saxon Period.

1016
Canute of Denmark becomes king of England.

1040
Macbeth defeats Duncan I and crowns himself king of Scotland.

1042
The reign of Edward the Confessor begins.

1050
The Bishop of Exeter is gifted with a book of poetry. *The Exeter Book* is the largest known collection of Anglo-Saxon literature. Included in the book is the famous poem "The Wanderer."

1066
William the Conqueror (of Normandy) becomes king of England.

Understanding the Anglo-Saxon Period: Compare and Contrast

The Anglo-Saxon period may seem so distant to you in both time and place that you may not believe the literature of the time could speak to you in any meaningful way. How could an Old English poem relate to a twenty-first century teenager in the United States? The answer to that question lies in readers' natural inclinations to find similarities and differences between their own lives and what they are reading. Comparing—looking for similarities—and contrasting—looking for differences—are ways readers find personal relevance, no matter what time or in what place the literature was created.

Comparisons and contrasts can become all the more meaningful as you learn about the historical context of the work of literature. To help set the scene, each unit in this book opens with a timeline and an overview of the social, political, and economic issues of the era. You can supplement that information with your own research. The Web provides a wealth of information on the Anglo-Saxon period. One of the most extensive sites, Regia Anglorum (www.regia.org/village.htm) offers the visitor the virtual village of Wichamstow. Here you can learn about the work and pastimes of an English village during the 800s to the 1000s. These specific details of life in Anglo-Saxon England make comparison and contrast to your own life vivid and meaningful.

Comparing and contrasting are skills you will use throughout this unit—and beyond. The following pairs of topics are just a few of the many you could illuminate through comparison and contrast:

- Life in Anglo-Saxon England and life in Christian Rome
- Lives of nobles and lives of peasants
- Roles of men and roles of women
- Roles of Anglo-Saxon women and roles of contemporary women
- Oral literary traditions and written traditions

Comparing and contrasting can also highlight the "big ideas." What qualities made someone a hero to the Anglo-Saxon people, and what qualities do today's heroes have? How did Anglo-Saxons experience and work through grief, and how do people mourn today? If you ask these questions and try to answer them as you read, you may feel the barriers of distant centuries and different cultures come tumbling down.

Before You Read *Beowulf: "Grendel," "The Coming of Beowulf," and "The Battle with Grendel"*

Beowulf was originally an untitled oral poem authored between 700 and 750 A.D. Although the epic poem was composed in England, the story itself takes place in Scandinavia during the fifth century. It tells the tale of the two Germanic tribes—the Danes and the Geats—and the brave Geatan warrior Beowulf who saves the Danes by slaying the monster Grendel. Although no one knows exactly who composed *Beowulf*, the poem's content offers some clues. The many biblical references—for example, Grendel is described as a descendant of Cain, and God is identified as humankind's creator—show that the poet was likely a Christian. In fact, scholars often view the poem as a religious work in which good conquers evil. And yet, the poet also draws on historical facts and Germanic legends, creating characters with pagan traditions and values (see page 18). The blending of the two traditions seems to reveal the tension felt by Anglo-Saxon pagans when Christianity first arrived in England.

Literary Lens

Epic *Beowulf* is an epic, or long narrative poem. Epics have been written throughout the ages and are still written today. Epics share many characteristics:

- They are based on both historical fact and legend.
- The hero is a male of noble birth who values courage and honor.
- The hero is courageous and almost superhuman.
- The hero must complete a long and dangerous journey and fight supernatural creatures.
- The hero's actions determine the fate of his people or nation.
- The themes, such as good versus evil, are universal.

The Poet's Language

Beowulf was composed in Old English, the language of the Anglo-Saxons. The earliest form of the English language, it derived from Germanic languages and included about fifty thousand words and dialects—one spoken in each of the four largest kingdoms. This language was spoken until 1066, when the French Normans conquered England and a new language, Middle English, emerged. Old English looks and sounds nothing like Modern English, and very few people today can read or speak it.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Study the characteristics of an epic. What epic stories or movies are you already familiar with?
2. Little is known about Anglo-Saxon pagan beliefs, but they are related to the better-recorded beliefs of the Norse. What do you know about Norse mythology and such gods as Thor and Wotan?
3. Working with a partner and your current knowledge, make a chart comparing and contrasting Christianity and Anglo-Saxon paganism. As you read, look for evidence of both belief systems.

from BEOWULF

translated by Burton Raffel

Beowulf *begins as the monster Grendel approaches the mead*[1] *hall of Hrothgar, the Danish king. After an evening of drinking and celebration, Hrothgar's warriors fall into a heavy sleep, unaware of the danger that lurks outside.*

Grendel

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing
5 Call and the poet's clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
The Almighty making the earth, shaping
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon
10 To glow across the land and light it;
The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:
15 So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,
Grendel, who haunted the moor,[2] the wild
Marshes, and made his home in a hell
Not hell but earth. He was **spawned** in that slime,

spawned: *produced; created*

1 **mead:** fermented, alcoholic drink made from honey
2 **moor:** stretch of desolate land

20 Conceived by a pair of those monsters born
Of Cain, murderous creatures banished
By God, punished forever for the crime
Of Abel's death.[3] The Almighty drove
Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,

3 **Cain and Abel:** sons of Adam and Eve; in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, Cain murders Abel.

Shut away from men; they split
Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits
And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,
A brood forever opposing the Lord's
Will, and again and again defeated.

Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's
Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:
He slipped through the door and there in the silence
Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
The blood dripping behind him, back
To his **lair**, delighted with his night's slaughter.

lair: *hideout*

At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
Broke their long feast with tears and laments
For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
In Herot, a mighty prince mourning
The fate of his lost friends and companions,
Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
His followers apart. He wept, fearing
The beginning might not be the end. And that night
Grendel came again, so set
On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
No savage assault quench his lust
For evil. Then each warrior tried
To escape him, searched for rest in different
Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,
Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
Distance was safety; the only survivors
Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.
So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
One against many, and won; so Herot
Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,

Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped
65 The seas, was told and sung in all
Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,
How the monster relished his savage war
On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud
Alive, seeking no peace, offering
70 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
In gold or land, and paying the living
For one crime only with another. No one
Waited for **reparation** from his plundering claws:
That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
75 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old
And young, lying in waiting, hidden
In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
Of the marsh, always there, unseen.

reparation: *making amends for a wrong*

So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,
80 Killing as often as he could, coming
Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived
In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
Dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious
Throne, protected by God—God,
85 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's
Heart was bent. The best and most noble
Of his council debated remedies, sat
In secret sessions, talking of terror
And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
90 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,
Made heathen[4] vows, hoping for Hell's
Support, the Devil's guidance in driving
Their affliction off. That was their way,
And the heathen's only hope, Hell
95 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God
Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord
Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear

4 **heathen:** pagan, not Christian

His praise nor know His glory. Let them
Beware, those who are thrust into danger,
Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace
In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail
To those who will rise to God, drop off
Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace!

The Coming of Beowulf

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son[5]
Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom
Or strength could break it: that agony hung
On king and people alike, harsh
And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.
In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's[6]
Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,
Now when help was needed. None
Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
As he was loved by the Geats: the **omens** were good,
And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
Chose the mightiest men he could find,
The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen
In all, and led them down to their boat;
He knew the sea, would point the **prow**
Straight to that distant Danish shore. . . .

omens: *events that signify evil or good by their occurrence*

prow: *pointed, front part of a boat that rises out of the water*

The Battle with Grendel

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,
Grendel came, hoping to kill
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.

5 **Healfdane's son:** Hrothgar was Healfdane's second son and took the throne upon his death.
6 **Higlac:** king of Geatland

He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
130 Up from his swampland, sliding silently
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's
Home before, knew the way—
But never, before nor after that night,
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
135 So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch
And rushed angrily over the threshold.
He strode quickly across the inlaid
140 Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
With rows of young soldiers resting together.
145 And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,
Intended to tear the life from those bodies
By morning; the monster's mind was hot
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
150 Grendel to gnaw the broken bones
Of his last human supper. Human
Eyes were watching his evil steps,
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.
Grendel snatched at the first Geat
155 He came to, ripped him apart, cut
His body to bits with powerful jaws,
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted
Him down, hands and feet; death
And Grendel's great teeth came together,
160 Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
—And was instantly seized himself, claws
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.
165 That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
Knew at once that nowhere on earth

Had he met a man whose hands were harder;
His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing
Could take his talons and himself from that tight
170 Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run
From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
But Higlac's follower remembered his final
Boast and, standing erect, stopped
175 The monster's flight, fastened those claws
In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
Closer. The infamous killer fought
For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
180 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!
The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
And Danes shook with terror. Down
The aisles the battle swept, angry
185 And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
Built to withstand the blows, the struggling
Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
And out, artfully worked, the building
190 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.
Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot
To stand forever; only fire,
195 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
The sounds changed, the Danes started
In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
200 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang
In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's
Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms
Of him who of all the men on earth
205 Was the strongest.

That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's
210 Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
Swords raised and ready, determined
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel
From every side, trying to open
215 A path for his evil soul, but their points
Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells
That blunted every mortal man's blade.
220 And yet his time had come, his days
Were over, his death near; down
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.
Now he discovered—once the afflictor
225 Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant
To feud with Almighty God: Grendel
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws
Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,
230 But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
And the bleeding **sinews** deep in his shoulder
Snapped, muscle and bone split
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
235 But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end
Of all his days. And after that bloody
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
240 He who had come to them from across the sea,
Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,

sinews: *tendons or ligaments*

245 A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
The victory, for the proof, hanging high
250 From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's
Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
Herot, warriors coming to that hall

From faraway lands, princes and leaders
255 Of men hurrying to behold the monster's
Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense
Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,
Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
260 Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed
And already weary of his vanishing life.
The water was bloody, steaming and boiling
In horrible pounding waves, heat
Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
265 Surf had covered his death, hidden
Deep in murky darkness his miserable
End, as hell opened to receive him.
Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
From that happy **pilgrimage**, mounted their hard-hooved
270 Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
Slowly toward Herot again, retelling
Beowulf's bravery as they jogged along.
And over and over they swore that nowhere
On earth or under the spreading sky
275 Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.
(But no one meant Beowulf's praise to belittle
Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)
And sometimes, when the path ran straight and clear,
280 They would let their horses race, red
And brown and pale yellow backs streaming
Down the road. And sometimes a proud old soldier
Who had heard songs of the ancient heroes
And could sing them all through, story after story,
285 Would weave a net of words for Beowulf's
Victory, tying the knot of his verses
Smoothly, swiftly, into place with a poet's
Quick skill, singing his new song aloud
While he shaped it, and the old songs as well. . . .

pilgrimage: *long journey made to visit a sacred place or pay homage*

After You Read *Beowulf*: "Grendel," "The Coming of Beowulf," and "The Battle with Grendel"

Literary Lens: Epic

What characteristics of an epic did you find in *Beowulf*? Make a chart like the one below. Write the characteristics of an epic in the left column and examples from the text in the right column. Circle the elements you felt were the most powerful.

Characteristics of an Epic	Examples from *Beowulf*

Explore Context: Pagan and Christian Beliefs and Traditions

How are Christianity and paganism portrayed in *Beowulf*? Write a paragraph about the conflict between Christian beliefs and pagan beliefs. Use evidence from the poem to support your answer.

Apply and Create: Epic Movie

Working with a partner, choose one of the excerpts from *Beowulf* and rewrite it as a scene for a present-day movie version of the poem. To get started, think about elements in an epic movie you have seen. You will need to create dialogue, provide stage directions for your characters, and describe the sets and action. Then act out your scene for the class or another group.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from *Beowulf*. Answer the questions and support your answers with details from the passage.

At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
Broke their long feast with tears and laments
For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
45 In Herot, a mighty prince mourning
The fate of his lost friends and companions,
Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
His followers apart. He wept, fearing
The beginning might not be the end. And that night
50 Grendel came again, so set
On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
No savage assault quench his lust

For evil. Then each warrior tried
To escape him, searched for rest in different
55 Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,
Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
Distance was safety; the only survivors
Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.
So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
60 One against many, and won; so Herot
Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped
65 The seas, was told and sung in all
Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,
How the monster relished his savage war
On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud
Alive, seeking no peace, offering
70 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
In gold or land, and paying the living
For one crime only with another. . . .

1. Based on Grendel's actions and Hrothgar's response, what conclusions can you draw about Grendel and Hrothgar?
2. Why does Hrothgar fear that "The beginning might not be the end"? Is he right? Cite examples to support your answer.
3. Reread the last nine lines. How do they foreshadow, or hint at, what happens next? What other lines are examples of foreshadowing?

Before You Read *Beowulf: "Grendel's Mother" and "The Battle with Grendel's Mother"*

Like other Old English poems, *Beowulf* was passed orally from generation to generation and chanted for audiences by scops, or oral poets (see page 19). Scops did not simply memorize stories and songs, they often improvised on them—creating new verses to combine with the old. Experimenting with the repetition and alliteration of words and phrases, as well as the poem's rhythm, allowed scops to create new verses while maintaining the original story line. Although manuscripts of *Beowulf* were eventually created, the only surviving Anglo-Saxon manuscript was written around 1000 A.D. This copy was nearly destroyed in a fire in 1731, and several lines of the poem were lost. While *Beowulf* is now the most famous Anglo-Saxon heroic epic, it was not published until 1815. Most of England's greatest authors, including Chaucer and Shakespeare, never read it.

Literary Lens

Elegy or Epic Narrative There is some debate, but many scholars classify *Beowulf* as a heroic elegy, a poem celebrating the life and death of a heroic figure. Others feel it is an epic narrative, a long poem in the oral tradition telling of a hero's deeds. *Beowulf* certainly has characteristics of both.

Alliteration *Beowulf's* poet uses alliteration, or the repetition of sounds at the beginning of words, to create a musical effect and emphasize ideas. In his translation, Burton Raffel uses alliteration to preserve the poem's sound and style.

Rhythm and Repetition In the original poem, rhythm was created by a pause in each line called a *caesura*. This pause is shown as a space that divides the line. Translator Raffel uses punctuation to create pauses and rhythm. Repetition, or the recurrence of sounds, is used to emphasize ideas and to give a sense of unity to a poem.

The Poet's Language

Beowulf, composed orally in Old English, was later written down—possibly recited by a poet to a scribe—in that same language. Beginning in the Middle Ages, monks began translating the poem into Latin, which was the language of scholars and the Church. Modern versions of the poem are often translated from the Latin versions. Not surprisingly, many of the original poetic qualities of the poem—the repetition, alliteration, rhythm, and improvisation—have been lost in translation.

Think Critically

Before you read the excerpts that follow, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. How do you think listening to the poem would be different from reading it?
2. Relate what you read about the Anglo-Saxons on pages 16–21 with what you've read of the poem so far. What values and traditions do the characters share with the Anglo-Saxons?
3. Based on what you have read so far, do you think *Beowulf* is an epic narrative or a heroic elegy?

Grendel's Mother

So she reached Herot,
Where the Danes slept as though already dead;
Her visit ended their good fortune, reversed
The bright vane[1] of their luck. No female, no matter
5 How fierce, could have come with a man's strength,
Fought with the power and courage men fight with,
Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,
Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,[2]
Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of points.
10 The soldiers raised their shields and drew
Those gleaming swords, swung them above
The piled-up benches, leaving their mail[3] shirts
And their helmets where they'd lain when the terror took hold of them.
To save her life she moved still faster,
15 Took a single victim and fled from the hall,
Running to the moors, discovered, but her supper
Assured, sheltered in her dripping claws.
She'd taken Hrothgar's closest friend,
The man he most loved of all men on earth;
20 She'd killed a glorious soldier, cut
A noble life short. No Geat could have stopped her:
Beowulf and his band had been given better
Beds; sleep had come to them in a different
Hall. Then all Herot burst into shouts:
25 She had carried off Grendel's claw. Sorrow
Had returned to Denmark. They'd traded deaths,
Danes and monsters, and no one had won,
Both had lost!

---

1 **vane:** banner originally used to show archers the direction of the wind

2 **boar-headed helmets:** Helmets often depicted various symbolic animals; this one depicted the image of a boar.

3 **mail:** type of armor made from tiny steel rings, woven together into a fabric

The Battle with Grendel's Mother

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's
Answer; the heaving water covered him
Over. For hours he sank through the waves;
At last he saw the mud of the bottom.
And all at once the greedy she-wolf
Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred
Years discovered him, saw that a creature
From above had come to explore the bottom
Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,
Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,
Tried to work her fingers through the tight
Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore
And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor
And sword and all, to her home; he struggled
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight
Brought other monsters swimming to see
Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth
As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,

And there the water's heat could not hurt him,
Nor anything in the lake attack him through
The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant
Light burned all around him, the lake
Itself like a fiery flame.
Then he saw
The mighty water witch, and swung his sword,
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;
The iron sang its fierce song,
Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,
And that too failed him; for the first time in years

Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf
Longed only for fame, leaped back
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,
Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where
He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame
Comes to the men who mean to win it
And care about nothing else! He raised
His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.
She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,
Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew
A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared
To **avenge** her only son. But he was stretched
On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted

By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.
The hammered links held; the point
Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the bottom
of the earth,
Edgetho's son, and died there, if that shining
Woven metal had not helped—and Holy
God, who sent him victory, gave judgment
For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.
Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy
Sword, hammered by giants, strong
And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons
But so massive that no ordinary man could lift
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it
From its **scabbard**, broke the chain on its **hilt**,
And then, savage, now, angry

avenge: *to inflict harm in return for an injury or wrongdoing*

scabbard: *sheath for a sword*

hilt: *handle of a sword*

And desperate, lifted it high over his head
And struck with all the strength he had left,
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,
Broke bones and all. Her body fell
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.
The brilliant light shone, suddenly,
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven's
Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked
At her home, then following along the wall
Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,
His heart still angry. He was hunting another
Dead monster, and took his weapon with him
For final revenge against Grendel's vicious
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over
And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's
Men slept, killing them in their beds,
Eating some on the spot, fifteen
Or more, and running to his loathsome moor
With another such sickening meal waiting
In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,

Found him lying dead in his corner,
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
His head with a single swift blow. The body
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.
The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,
Like him staring into the monsters' lake,
Saw the waves surging and blood
Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,
All the graybeards, whispered together
And said that hope was gone, that the hero
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never
Return to the living, come back as triumphant
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.
The sun slid over past noon, went further

Down. The Danes gave up, left
The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
140 Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
They would ever see him again.
—Then the sword
Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's
145 Eternal Lord loosens invisible
Fetters[4] and unwinds icicles and frost
As only He can, He who rules
Time and seasons, He who is truly
God. The monsters' hall was full of
150 Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took
Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'
Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked
Blade had dissolved in Grendel's steaming
Blood, boiling even after his death.
155 And then the battle's only survivor
Swam up and away from those silent corpses;
The water was calm and clean, the whole
Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived in it
were dead.
Then that noble protector of all seamen
160 Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy
Burdens he was bringing with him. He
And all his glorious band of Geats
Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;
They left the lake together. The Geats
165 Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.
Behind them the water slowly thickened
As the monsters' blood came seeping up.
They walked quickly, happily, across
Roads all of them remembered, left
170 The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men
Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,
Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—

4 **fetters:** chains or shackles placed on the ankles

Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—
Yet proud of their ugly load and determined
175 That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.
Soon, fourteen Geats arrived
At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,
Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall
Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered
180 Herot, covered with glory for the daring
Battles he had fought . . .

After You Read *Beowulf: "Grendel's Mother" and "The Battle with Grendel's Mother"*

Literary Lens: Alliteration, Rhythm, and Repetition

The alliteration, rhythm, and repetition in *Beowulf* allowed scops to create original verse and still remember the story line. Raffel maintains these literary elements in his translation. Create a graphic organizer like the one below on a separate sheet of paper. Then complete the organizer with examples of each type of element from *Beowulf*.

Alliteration:

Rhythm:

Repetition:

Explore Context: Warrior Society

The Anglo-Saxons were warriors and lived by a code of honor. Review what you learned about their culture and society (page 18), and write a paragraph demonstrating how this code is reflected in the poem. Provide examples of the characters' actions or beliefs that express the Anglo-Saxon culture and code of honor.

Apply and Create: Become a Scop

Beowulf was originally chanted. Today, we generally read the poem. However, Benjamin Bagby has become a modern scop and enthralls his audiences with his performance of the epic—in the original Anglo-Saxon language. See a clip of his performance at www.bagbybeowulf.com/. Choose a short excerpt from the poem, and prepare to become a scop. Read the excerpt several times to get a feel for the rhythm and story. Underline words you will emphasize, and mark places where you will pause for effect. Practice chanting the excerpt to a partner. Then perform it for a small group or your class.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpt from *Beowulf*. Answer the questions and support your answers with details from the passage.

For final revenge against Grendel's vicious
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over
115 And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's
Men slept, killing them in their beds,
Eating some on the spot, fifteen
Or more, and running to his loathsome moor
With another such sickening meal waiting

In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
Found him lying dead in his corner,
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
His head with a single swift blow. The body
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.
The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,
Like him staring into the monsters' lake,
Saw the waves surging and blood
Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,
All the graybeards, whispered together
And said that hope was gone, that the hero
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never
Return to the living, come back as triumphant
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.
The sun slid over past noon, went further
Down. The Danes gave up, left
The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
They would ever see him again.
—Then the sword
Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's
Eternal Lord loosens invisible
Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost
As only He can, He who rules
Time and seasons, He who is truly
God. The monsters' hall was full of
Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took
Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'
Jeweled sword; . . .

1. Why does Beowulf search for Grendel and cut off his head?
2. The Geats never leave the lake. Compare their actions with those of the Danes. What conclusions can you draw about them from their actions?
3. Based on Beowulf's actions, do you think he is a true hero? Explain using examples from the passage.

Before You Read *Beowulf: "The Battle with the Dragon" and "The Death of Beowulf"*

Though the original manuscript was created around 1000 A.D., *Beowulf* wasn't read or understood until 1705, when a librarian cataloged it. This sole copy, badly damaged by fire, was virtually unknown until a Danish historian commissioned a copy to be made in 1786. He then made a copy for himself, and in 1815 he published the first copy of *Beowulf* in Old English and Latin. By the time it was first published in English in 1833, the epic was considered a historical record.

By the twentieth century, the original manuscript had greatly deteriorated, and thousands of words and letters were lost as the burned edges of the manuscript crumbled. In 1993, Anglo-Saxon experts Kevin Kiernen and Paul Szarmach began using electronic photography and digital reproduction to study the original manuscript. Their work, known as *The Electronic Beowulf*, allows scholars to study the original manuscript without touching and further damaging it. The digital reproduction has also recovered some of the words that had been invisible to previous scholars. See examples of scanned images by visiting www.uky.edu/~kiernan/eBeowulf/main.htm.

Literary Lens

Foreshadowing Writers use foreshadowing, hints about what will happen next or how the narrative will end, to add suspense to the plot and to draw the reader into the story.

Theme A work's theme is its main message. Many works contain universal themes—themes that apply to all times, cultures, or places. *Beowulf*'s theme can be determined by noting what the characters say and do and how they change.

Protagonist and Antagonist The main character of a literary work is often a hero, such as Beowulf. This character is called the *protagonist*, and is usually the person the reader identifies with most strongly. Opposing the protagonist is the *antagonist*, the character (or force) that stands in the hero's way. Grendel and his mother were the antagonists in your previous reading of *Beowulf*. In the upcoming excerpt, Beowulf is about to meet the antagonist who will be his ruin. Be aware of the ways in which this next antagonist is portrayed.

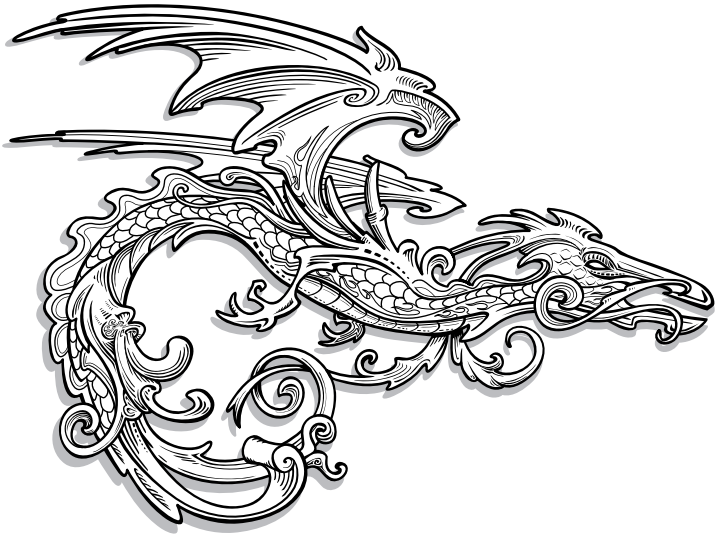
The Poet's Language

Old English did not consist of many words, and the same word could have a different meaning depending on how long the vowel was held. To create new words or denote shades of meaning, nouns and verbs were joined with other words or word parts. These imaginative compound nouns, called *kennings*, can be found in *Beowulf*. The poet also used words not found in any other Old English manuscripts. Though the poet may have heard these words, some scholars believe they are his own creation. Others theorize that because it contains conventions and spellings from two different dialects, *Beowulf* may have been created by two different people.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Based on other heroic episodes you've read or seen, how do you think Beowulf will react to his next challenge?
2. How might the poet create suspense in Beowulf's last battle?
3. Compare *Beowulf* to accounts you have read about real historical figures. Can you understand why scholars consider *Beowulf* a historical record? Why or why not?



The Battle with the Dragon

Beowulf and his men are honored by the Danes and then return home to Geatland. Beowulf becomes king and rules for many years. When a dragon threatens his kingdom, Beowulf, though old, prepares to kill the beast.

Vomiting fire and smoke, the dragon
Burned down their homes. They watched in horror
As the flames rose up: the angry monster
Meant to leave nothing alive. And the signs
5 Of its anger flickered and glowed in the darkness,
Visible for miles, tokens of its hate
And its cruelty, spread like a warning to the Geats
Who had broken its rest. Then it hurried back
To its tower, to its hidden treasure, before dawn

Could come. It had wrapped its flames around
The Geats; now it trusted in stone
Walls, and its strength, to protect it. But they would not.
Then they came to Beowulf, their king, and announced
That his hall, his throne, the best of buildings,
Had melted away in the dragon's burning
Breath. Their words brought misery, Beowulf's
Sorrow beat at his heart: he accused
Himself of breaking God's law, of bringing
The Almighty's anger down on his people.
Reproach pounded in his breast, gloomy
And dark, and the world seemed a different place.
But the hall was gone, the dragon's molten
Breath had licked across it, burned it
To ashes, near the shore it had guarded. The Geats
Deserved revenge; Beowulf, their leader
And lord, began to plan it, ordered
A battle-shield shaped of iron, knowing that
Wood would be useless, that no linden shield[5]
Could help him, protect him, in the flaming heat
Of the beast's breath. That noble prince
Would end his days on earth, soon,
Would leave this brief life, but would take the dragon
With him, tear it from the heaped-up treasure
It had guarded so long. And he'd go to it alone,
Scorning to lead soldiers against such
An enemy: he saw nothing to fear, thought nothing
Of the beast's claws, or wings, or flaming
Jaws—he had fought, before, against worse
Odds, had survived, been victorious, in harsher
Battles, beginning in Herot, Hrothgar's
Unlucky hall. He'd killed Grendel
And his mother, swept that murdering tribe
Away. And he'd fought in Higlac's war
With the Frisians,[6] fought at his lord's side
Till a sword reached out and drank Higlac's

reproach: *blame; disgrace*

scorning: *refusing with contempt*

1 **linden shield:** shield made out of a pale, soft wood often used in carving and furniture
2 **Frisians:** inhabitants of Frisia, an ancient region in northwestern Europe

Blood, till a blade swung in the rush
Of battle killed the Geats' great king.
Then Beowulf escaped, broke through Frisian
Shields and swam to freedom, saving
50 Thirty sets of armor from the scavenging
Franks, river people who robbed
The dead as they floated by. Beowulf
Offered them only his sword, ended
So many **jackal** lives that the few
55 Who were able skulked silently home, glad
To leave him. So Beowulf swam sadly back
To Geatland, almost the only survivor
Of a foolish war. Higlac's widow
Brought him the crown, offered him the kingdom,
60 Not trusting Herdred, her son and Higlac's,
To beat off foreign invaders. But Beowulf
Refused to rule when his lord's own son
Was alive, and the leaderless Geats could choose
A rightful king. He gave Herdred
65 All his support, offering an open
Heart where Higlac's young son could see
Wisdom he still lacked himself: warmth
And good will were what Beowulf brought his new king.
But Swedish **exiles** came, seeking
70 Protection; they were rebels against Onela,
Healfdane's son-in-law and the best ring-giver[7]
His people had ever known. And Onela
Came too, a mighty king, marched
On Geatland with a huge army; Herdred
75 Had given his word and now he gave
His life, shielding the Swedish strangers.
Onela wanted nothing more:
When Herdred had fallen that famous warrior
Went back to Sweden, let Beowulf rule!
80 "The gifts that Higlac gave me,
And the land, I earned with my sword, as fate

jackal: *wild dog*

exiles: *people banished from their native land*

3 **ring-giver:** A king was often called a ring-giver because he was expected to be generous and dish out spoils of war to his thanes.

Allowed: he never needed Danes
Or Goths or Swedes, soldiers and allies
Bought with gold, bribed to his side.
85 My word was better, and always his.
In every battle my place was in front,
Alone, and so it shall be forever,
As long as this sword lasts, serves me
In the future as it has served me before. So
90 I killed Dagref, the Frank, who brought death
To Higlac, and who looted his corpse: Higd's
Necklace, Welthow's treasure, never
Came to Dagref's king. The thief
Fell in battle, but not on my blade.
95 He was brave and strong, but I swept him in my arms,
Ground him against me till his bones broke,
Till his blood burst out. And now I shall fight
For this treasure, fight with both hand and sword."
And Beowulf uttered his final boast:
100 "I've never known fear; as a youth I fought
In endless battles. I am old, now,
But I will fight again, seek fame still,
If the dragon hiding in his tower dares
To face me."
105 Then he said farewell to his followers,
Each in his turn, for the last time:
"I'd use no sword, no weapon, if this beast
Could be killed without it, crushed to death
Like Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn
110 Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning
Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.
I feel no shame, with shield and sword
And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me
I mean to stand, not run from his shooting
115 Flames, stand till fate decides
Which of us wins. My heart is firm,
My hands calm: I need no hot
Words. Wait for me close by, my friends.
We shall see, soon, who will survive

This bloody battle, stand when the fighting
Is done. No one else could do
What I mean to, here, no man but me
Could hope to defeat this monster. No one
Could try. And this dragon's treasure, his gold
And everything hidden in that tower, will be mine
Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!"
Then Beowulf rose, still brave, still strong,
And with his shield at his side, and a mail shirt on his breast,
Strode calmly, confidently, toward the tower, under
The rocky cliffs: no coward could have walked there!
And then he who'd endured dozens of desperate
Battles, who'd stood boldly while swords and shields
Clashed, the best of kings, saw
Huge stone arches and felt the heat
Of the dragon's breath, flooding down
Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone
To stand, a streaming current of fire
And smoke that blocked all passage. And the Geats'
Lord and leader, angry, lowered
His sword and roared out a battle cry,
A call so loud and clear that it reached through
The hoary[8] rock, hung in the dragon's
Ear. The beast rose, angry,
Knowing a man had come—and then nothing
But war could have followed. Its breath came first,
A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,
Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf
Swung his shield into place, held it
In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon
Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it
Into battle. Beowulf's ancient sword
Was waiting, unsheathed, his sharp and gleaming
Blade. The beast came closer; both of them
Were ready, each set on slaughter. The Geats'
Great prince stood firm, unmoving, prepared

4 **hoary:** ancient; commanding respect

Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining
Armor. The monster came quickly toward him,
Pouring out fire and smoke, hurrying
To its fate. Flames beat at the iron
160 Shield, and for a time it held, protected
Beowulf as he'd planned; then it began to melt,
And for the first time in his life that famous prince
Fought with fate against him, with glory
Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword
165 And struck at the dragon's scaly hide.
The ancient blade broke, bit into
The monster's skin, drew blood, but cracked
And failed him before it went deep enough, helped him
Less than he needed. The dragon leaped
170 With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting
Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.
And the Geats' ring-giver did not boast of glorious
Victories in other wars: his weapon
Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it
175 Most, that excellent sword. Edgetho's
Famous son stared at death,
Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it
For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey
Into darkness that all men must make, as death
180 Ends their few brief hours on earth.
Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,
And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling
Flames—a king, before, but now
185 A beaten warrior. None of his comrades
Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
Followers; they ran for their lives, fled
Deep in a wood. And only one of them
Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering,
190 As a good man must, what kinship should mean.
His name was Wiglaf, he was Wexstan's son
And a good soldier; his family had been Swedish,
Once. Watching Beowulf, he could see

How his king was suffering, burning. Remembering
195 Everything his lord and cousin had given him,
Armor and gold and the great estates
Wexstan's family enjoyed, Wiglaf's
Mind was made up; he raised his yellow
Shield and drew his sword—an ancient
200 Weapon that had once belonged to Onela's
Nephew, and that Wexstan had won, killing
The prince when he fled from Sweden, sought safety
With Herdred, and found death. And Wiglaf's father
Had carried the dead man's armor, and his sword. . . .
205 —He'd never worn
That armor, fought with that sword, until Beowulf
Called him to his side, led him into war.
But his soul did not melt, his sword was strong;
The dragon discovered his courage, and his weapon,
210 When the rush of battle brought them together.
And Wiglaf, his heart heavy, uttered
The kind of words his comrades deserved:
"I remember how we sat in the mead-hall, drinking
And boasting of how brave we'd be when Beowulf
215 Needed us, he who gave us these swords
And armor: All of us swore to repay him,
When the time came, kindness for kindness
—With our lives, if he needed them. He allowed us
to join him,
Chose us from all his great army, thinking
220 Our boasting words had some weight, believing
Our promises, trusting our swords. He took us
For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill
This monster himself, our mighty king,
Fight this battle alone and unaided,
225 As in the days when his strength and daring dazzled
Men's eyes. But those days are over and gone
And now our lord must lean on younger
Arms. And we must go to him, while angry
Flames burn at his flesh, help
230 Our glorious king! By almighty God,

I'd rather burn myself than see
Flames swirling around my lord.
And who are we to carry home
Our shields before we've slain his enemy
235 And ours, to run back to our homes with Beowulf
So hard-pressed here? I swear that nothing
He ever did deserved an end
Like this, dying miserably and alone,
Butchered by this savage beast: We swore
240 That these swords and armor were each for us all!"
Then he ran to his king, crying encouragement
As he dove through the dragon's deadly fumes:
"Belovéd Beowulf, remember how you boasted,
Once, that nothing in the world would ever
245 Destroy your fame: fight to keep it,
Now, be strong and brave, my noble
King, protecting life and fame
Together. My sword will fight at your side!"
The dragon heard him, the man-hating monster,
250 And was angry; shining with surging flames
It came for him, anxious to return his visit— .
Then the monster charged again, vomiting
Fire, wild with pain, rushed out
Fierce and dreadful, its fear forgotten.
255 Watching for its chance it drove its tusks
Into Beowulf's neck; he staggered, the blood
Came flooding forth, fell like rain.

And then when Beowulf needed him most
Wiglaf showed his courage, his strength
260 And skill, and the boldness he was born with. Ignoring
The dragon's head, he helped his lord
By striking lower down. The sword
Sank in; his hand was burned, but the shining
Blade had done its work, the dragon's
265 Belching flames began to flicker
And die away. And Beowulf drew
His battle-sharp dagger: the bloodstained old king

Still knew what he was doing. Quickly, he cut
The beast in half, slit it apart.
270 It fell, their courage had killed it, two noble
Cousins had joined in the dragon's death.
Yet what they did all men must do
When the time comes! But the triumph was the last
Beowulf would ever earn, the end
275 Of greatness and life together. The wound
In his neck began to swell and grow;
He could feel something stirring, burning
In his veins, a stinging venom, and knew
The beast's fangs had left it. He fumbled
280 Along the wall, found a slab
Of stone, and dropped down; above him he saw
Huge stone arches and heavy posts,
Holding up the roof of that giant hall.
Then Wiglaf's gentle hands bathed
285 The bloodstained prince, his glorious lord,
Weary of war, and loosened his helmet.
Beowulf spoke, in spite of the swollen,
Livid wound, knowing he'd unwound
His string of days on earth, seen
290 As much as God would grant him; all worldly
Pleasure was gone, as life would go,
Soon:
"I'd leave my armor to my son,
Now, if God had given me an heir,
295 A child born of my body, his life
Created from mine. I've worn this crown
For fifty winters: no neighboring people
Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers
Against us or talked of terror. My days
300 Have gone by as fate willed, waiting
For its word to be spoken, ruling as well
As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,
Seeking no lying wars. I can leave
This life happy; I can die, here,

305 Knowing the Lord of all life has never
Watched me wash my sword in blood
Born of my own family. Beloved
Wiglaf, go, quickly, find
The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life,
310 But its gold is ours, too. Hurry,
Bring me ancient silver, precious
Jewels, shining armor and gems,
Before I die. Death will be softer,
Leaving life and this people I've ruled
315 So long, if I look at this last of all prizes."

The Death of Beowulf

Then Wexstan's son went in, as quickly
As he could, did as the dying Beowulf
Asked, entered the inner darkness
Of the tower, went with his mail shirt and his sword.
320 **Flushed** with victory he groped his way,
A brave young warrior, and suddenly saw
Piles of gleaming gold, precious
Gems, scattered on the floor, cups
And bracelets, rusty old helmets, beautifully
325 Made but rotting with no hands to rub
And polish them. They lay where the dragon left them;
It had flown in the darkness, once, before fighting
Its final battle. (So gold can easily
Triumph, defeat the strongest of men,
330 No matter how deep it is hidden!) And he saw,
Hanging high above, a golden
Banner, woven by the best of weavers
And beautiful. And over everything he saw
A strange light, shining everywhere,
335 On walls and floor and treasure. Nothing
Moved, no other monsters appeared;
He took what he wanted, all the treasures
That pleased his eye, heavy plates
And golden cups and the glorious banner,

flushed: *reddened from emotion or exertion*

340 Loaded his arms with all they could hold.
Beowulf's dagger, his iron blade,
Had finished the fire-spitting terror
That once protected tower and treasures
Alike; the gray-bearded lord of the Geats
345 Had ended those flying, burning raids
Forever.
Then Wiglaf went back, anxious
To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him
Treasure they'd won together. He ran,
350 Hoping his wounded king, weak
And dying, had not left the world too soon.
Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found
His famous king bloody, gasping
For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water
355 Over his lord, until the words
Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.
Beholding the treasure he spoke, **haltingly**:
"For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank
Our Father in Heaven. Ruler of the Earth—
360 For all of this, that His grace has given me,
Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
Still came to my lips. I sold my life
For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take
What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people,
365 Help them; my time is gone. Have
The brave Geats build me a tomb,
When the funeral flames have burned[9] me, and build it
Here, at the water's edge, high
On this spit of land, so sailors can see
370 This tower, and remember my name, and call it
Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness
And mist, crossing the sea, will know it."
Then that brave king gave the golden
Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf,

haltingly: *in a way that's hesitant or wavering*

5 **funeral flames have burned:** Anglo-Saxons were often cremated, especially after Christianity was brought to the region. Elaborate tombs were built to house the remains, and possessions were often buried with the deceased.

375 Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,
And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
"You're the last of all our far-flung family.
Fate has swept our race away,
Taken warriors in their strength and led them
380 To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them."
The old man's mouth was silent, spoke
No more, had said as much as it could;
He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul
Left his flesh, flew to glory. . . .
385 And when the battle was over Beowulf's followers
Came out of the wood, cowards and traitors,
Knowing the dragon was dead. Afraid,
While it spit its fires, to fight in their lord's
Defense, to throw their javelins and spears,
390 They came like shamefaced jackals, their shields
In their hands, to the place where the prince lay dead,
And waited for Wiglaf to speak. He was sitting
Near Beowulf's body, wearily sprinkling
Water in the dead man's face, trying
395 To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept
Life in their lord's body, or turned
Aside the Lord's will: world
And men and all move as He orders,
And always have, and always will.
400 Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them
What men without courage must hear.
Wexstan's brave son stared at the traitors,
His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to:
"I say what anyone who speaks the truth
405 Must say. . . .
Too few of his warriors remembered
To come, when our lord faced death, alone.
And now the giving of swords, of golden
Rings and rich estates, is over,
410 Ended for you and everyone who shares
Your blood: when the brave Geats hear
How you bolted and ran none of your race

Will have anything left but their lives. And death
Would be better for them all, and for you, than the kind
415 Of life you can lead, branded with disgrace!". . .

Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf
Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors
Could find it from far and wide; working
For ten long days they made his monument,
420 Sealed his ashes in walls as straight
And high as wise and willing hands
Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf
Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,
Ancient, hammered armor—all
425 The treasures they'd taken were left there, too,
Silver and jewels buried in the sandy
Ground, back in the earth, again
And forever hidden and useless to men.
And then twelve of the bravest Geats
430 Rode their horses around the tower,
Telling their sorrow, telling stories
Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,
Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life
As noble as his name. So should all men
435 Raise up words for their lords, warm
With love, when their shield and protector leaves
His body behind, sends his soul
On high. And so Beowulf's followers
Rode, mourning their beloved leader,
440 Crying that no better king had ever
Lived, no prince so mild, no man
So open to his people, so deserving of praise.

After You Read *Beowulf: "The Battle with the Dragon" and "The Death of Beowulf"*

Literary Lens: Foreshadowing

The poet uses foreshadowing to create suspense and draw the reader into the action. Record examples of foreshadowing in "The Battle with the Dragon" and "The Death of Beowulf," and explain the effect that each example has on the poem. Read the sample response below.

Foreshadowing	Effect
That noble prince/ Would end his days on earth, soon, . . . but would take the dragon/ With him. . . .	This signals that Beowulf will die—don't know how or if he will kill the dragon.

Explore Context: Traditions

When Christianity was adopted by the pagan Anglo-Saxons, some of their traditions and beliefs were retained. Based on what you know and have read, write a paragraph explaining which pagan traditions became part of the Christian religion. Then do more research to find out other pagan or ancient traditions that have become part of our culture.

Apply and Create: Graphic Novel

Work with a partner to identify a universal theme in *Beowulf*. How does that theme still apply today? What kind of story can you tell that shares that message? Create four or five pages of a graphic novel or comic book using a modern setting and heroic characters to illustrate your story and theme. Share your novel or comic with another group or with the class. See how many people can identify your theme.

Read Critically

Reread the following passages from "The Battle with the Dragon" and answer the questions that follow.

Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,
And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling
Flames—a king, before, but now
185 A beaten warrior. None of his comrades
Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
Followers; they ran for their lives, fled
Deep in a wood. And only one of them
Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering,
190 As a good man must, what kinship should mean. . . .

Then the monster charged again, vomiting
Fire, wild with pain, rushed out
Fierce and dreadful, its fear forgotten.
255 Watching for its chance it drove its tusks
Into Beowulf's neck; he staggered, the blood
Came flooding forth, fell like rain.

And then when Beowulf needed him most
Wiglaf showed his courage, his strength
260 And skill, and the boldness he was born with. Ignoring
The dragon's head, he helped his lord
By striking lower down. The sword
Sank in; his hand was burned, but the shining
Blade had done its work, the dragon's
265 Belching flames began to flicker
And die away. And Beowulf drew
His battle-sharp dagger: the bloodstained old king
Still knew what he was doing. Quickly, he cut
The beast in half, slit it apart.
270 It fell, their courage had killed it, two noble
Cousins had joined in the dragon's death.
Yet what they did all men must do
When the time comes! But the triumph was the last
Beowulf would ever earn, the end
275 Of greatness and life together. The wound
In his neck began to swell and grow;
He could feel something stirring, burning
In his veins, a stinging venom, and knew
The beast's fangs had left it. . . .

1. Why do Beowulf's men desert him? What conclusions can you draw about them based on their actions?
2. Create a Venn diagram to compare and contrast the young Beowulf with the old Beowulf. How has he changed?
3. Why does Wiglaf help Beowulf? What do his actions foreshadow?

Before You Read *"The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," and "The Wife's Lament"*

The authors of these three poems are unknown. The poems survive in a manuscript called *The Exeter Book*, which was created by Christian scribes around 975 A.D. Like *Beowulf,* the poems were most likely written by Christians and reflect both Christian and pagan beliefs.

Literary Lens

Elegiac Verse These three poems are examples of elegiac verse. Unlike heroic verse that celebrated heroes and codes of honor, elegiac verse questioned the beliefs in these codes and focused on the hardships and uncertainties of Anglo-Saxon life—the disease, death, and loneliness faced by warriors or seamen. The speakers in both "The Seafarer" and "The Wanderer" are men who lament losing their leaders, fellow warriors, and families. The speakers are forced to live in exile and now search for salvation in God. The speaker in "The Wife's Lament" is a woman who grieves over the loss of her family, husband, and former life. She too is in exile because she was forced to leave her community when she married. Although the speaker is female, scholars disagree about the author's gender, as women were forbidden or harshly criticized for writing.

Descriptive Details Poets use descriptive details to set a mood; emphasize ideas and emotions; and help the reader visualize people, objects, and actions. Descriptive details also help readers understand the poem's meaning and the writer's attitude toward the subject. For example, in "The Seafarer," the phrases "ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow" and "freezing waves" suggest isolation and despair.

The Poet's Language

"The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," and "The Wife's Lament" were written in Old English. The only copies survive in *The Exeter Book*—the largest collection of Old English poems. Sometime between 1050 and 1070, the book was donated to the Exeter Cathedral library. It was during this time that Old English was being replaced by Middle English. Soon, few people read or spoke Old English, and thus the book was neglected and remained so for centuries. The binding broke, and several pages were lost or badly damaged. Many poems vanished forever. Today, the book remains housed in Exeter Cathedral.

Think Critically

Before you read the poems, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. These poems are about loss and loneliness. When have you felt lost or lonely? Use your experience to connect to the poems while reading.
2. Use what you've read and your prior knowledge to make a chart comparing and contrasting heroic epics with elegiac verse.
3. You've probably read laments by other poets. How do you think the speaker in "The Wife's Lament" will approach her misfortunes?

The Seafarer

Author Unknown
Translated by Burton Raffel

This tale is true, and mine. It tells
How the sea took me, swept me back
And forth in sorrow and fear and pain,
Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,
In a thousand ports, and in me. It tells
Of smashing surf when I sweated in the cold
Of an anxious watch, perched in the bow
As it dashed under the cliffs. My feet were cast
In icy bands, bound with frost,
With frozen chains, and hardship groaned
Around my heart. Hunger tore
At my sea-weary soul. No man sheltered
On the quiet fairness of earth can feel
How wretched I was, drifting through winter

On an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow,
Alone in a world blown clear of love,
Hung with icicles. The hailstorms flew.
The only sound was the roaring sea,
The freezing waves. The song of the swan
Might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl,
The death-noise of birds instead of laughter,
The mewing of gulls instead of mead.[1]
Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed
By icy-feathered **terns** and the eagle's screams;
No kinsman could offer comfort there,
To a soul left drowning in **desolation**.
And who could believe, knowing but
The passion of cities, swelled proud with wine
And no taste of misfortune, how often, how wearily,
I put myself back on the paths of the sea.
Night would blacken; it would snow from the north;
Frost bound the earth and hail would fall,
The coldest seeds. And how my heart
Would begin to beat, knowing once more
The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!
The time for journeys would come and my soul
Called me eagerly out, sent me over
The horizon, seeking foreigners' homes.
But there isn't a man on earth so proud,
So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,
Grown so brave, or so graced by God,
That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl,
Wondering what Fate has willed and will do.
No harps ring in his heart, no rewards,
No passion for women, no worldly pleasures,
Nothing, only the ocean's heave;
But longing wraps itself around him.
Orchards blossom, the towns bloom,
Fields grow lovely as the world springs fresh,
And all these admonish that willing mind
Leaping to journeys, always set

terns: *seabirds related to and resembling gulls but smaller and with a forked tail*

desolation: *loneliness and sorrow*

1 **mead:** fermented, alcoholic drink made from honey

In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide.
So summer's **sentinel**, the cuckoo, sings
In his murmuring voice, and our hearts mourn
As he urges. Who could understand,
In ignorant ease, what we others suffer
As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on?
And yet my heart wanders away,
My soul roams with the sea, the whales'
Home, wandering to the widest corners
Of the world, returning ravenous with desire,
Flying solitary, screaming, exciting me
To the open ocean, breaking oaths
On the curve of a wave.
Thus the joys of God
Are fervent with life, where life itself
Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth
Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains.
No man has ever faced the dawn
Certain which of Fate's three threats
Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy's
Sword, snatching the life from his soul.
The praise the living pour on the dead
Flowers from reputation: plant
An earthly life of profit reaped
Even from hatred and **rancor**, of bravery
Flung in the devil's face, and death
Can only bring you earthly praise
And a song to celebrate a place
With the angels, life eternally blessed
In the hosts of Heaven.
The days are gone
When the kingdoms of earth flourished in glory;
Now there are no rulers, no emperors,
No givers of gold, as once there were,
When wonderful things were worked among them
And they lived in lordly magnificence.
Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead.
The weakest survives and the world continues,

sentinel: *one that stands guard*

rancor: *bitter, long-lasting resentment*

Kept spinning by **toil**. All glory is tarnished.
The world's honor ages and shrinks,
Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces
Blanch as time advances, their beards
Wither and they mourn the memory of friends.
The sons of princes, sown in the dust.
The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing
Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,
Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother
Opens his palms and pours down gold
On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin
With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing
Golden shakes the wrath of God
For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing
Hidden on earth rises to Heaven.
We all fear God. He turns the earth,
He set it swinging firmly in space,
Gave life to the world and light to the sky.
Death leaps at the fools who forget their God.
He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven
To carry him courage and strength and belief.
A man must conquer pride, not kill it,
Be firm with his fellows, **chaste** for himself,
Treat all the world as the world deserves,
With love or with hate but never with harm,
Though an enemy seek to scorch him in hell,
Or set the flames of a funeral pyre [2]
Under his lord. Fate is stronger
And God mightier than any man's mind.
Our thoughts should turn to where our home is,
Consider the ways of coming there,
Then strive for sure permission for us
To rise to that eternal joy,
That life born in the love of God
And the hope of Heaven. Praise the Holy
Grace of Him who honored us,
Eternal, unchanging creator of earth. Amen.

toil: *hard and continuous work*

blanch: *to become pale*

chaste: *pure or right in action*

2 **funeral pyre:** structure made of wood that is used to burn a body as part of a funeral rite

THE *Wanderer*

Author Unknown
Translated by Burton Raffel

This lonely traveler longs for grace,
For the mercy of God; grief hangs on
His heart and follows the frost-cold foam
He cuts in the sea, sailing endlessly,
5 Aimlessly, in exile. Fate has opened
A single port: memory. He sees
His kinsmen slaughtered again, and cries:
"I've drunk too many lonely dawns,
Grey with mourning. Once there were men
10 To whom my heart could hurry, hot
With open longing. They're long since dead.
My heart has closed on itself, quietly
Learning that silence is noble and sorrow
Nothing that speech can cure. Sadness
15 Has never driven sadness off;
Fate blows hardest on a bleeding heart.
So those who thirst for glory smother
Secret weakness and longing, neither
Weep nor sigh nor listen to the sickness
20 In their souls. So I, lost and homeless,
Forced to flee the darkness that fell
On the earth and my lord.
Leaving everything,
Weary with winter I wandered out
25 On the frozen waves, hoping to find
A place, a people, a lord to replace
My lost ones. No one knew me, now,
No one offered comfort, allowed

Me feasting or joy. How cruel a journey
30 I've traveled, sharing my bread with sorrow
Alone, an exile in every land,
Could only be told by telling my footsteps.
For who can hear: "friendless and poor,"
And know what I've known since the long cheerful nights
35 When, young, and yearning, with my lord I yet feasted
Most welcome of all. That warmth is dead.
He only knows who needs his lord
As I do, eager for long-missing aid;
He only knows who never sleeps
40 Without the deepest dreams of longing.
Sometimes it seems I see my lord,
Kiss and embrace him, bend my hands
And head to his knee, kneeling as though
He still sat enthroned, ruling his thanes.[1]
45 And I open my eyes, embracing the air,
And see the brown sea-billows heave,
See the sea-birds bathe, spreading
Their white-feathered wings, watch the frost
And the hail and the snow. And heavy in heart
50 I long for my lord, alone and unloved.
Sometimes it seems I see my kin
And greet them gladly, give them welcome,
The best of friends. They fade away,
Swimming soundlessly out of sight,
55 Leaving nothing.
How loathsome become
The frozen waves to a weary heart.
In this brief world I cannot wonder
That my mind is set on **melancholy**,
60 Because I never forget the fate
Of men, robbed of their riches, suddenly
Looted by death—the doom of earth,
Sent to us all by every rising
Sun. Wisdom is slow, and comes

melancholy: *gloom; sadness; depression*

1 **thanes:** freemen granted land by the king in return for military service

But late. He who has it is patient;
He cannot be hasty to hate or speak,
He must be bold and yet not blind,
Nor ever too **craven**, **complacent**, or **covetous**,
Nor ready to gloat before he wins glory.
The man's a fool who flings his boasts
Hotly to the heavens heeding his spleen
And not the better boldness of knowledge.
What knowing man knows not the ghostly,
Waste-like end of worldly wealth:
See, already the wreckage is there,
The wind-swept walls stand far and wide,
The storm-beaten blocks besmeared with frost,
The mead-halls crumbled, the monarchs thrown down
And stripped of their pleasures. The proudest of warriors
Now lie by the wall: some of them war
Destroyed; some the monstrous sea-bird
Bore over the ocean; to some the old wolf
Dealt out death; and for some dejected
Followers fashioned an earth-cave coffin.
Thus the Maker of men lays waste
This earth, crushing our callow mirth.[2]
And the work of old giants stands withered and still."

He who these ruins rightly sees,
And deeply considers this dark twisted life,
Who sagely remembers the endless slaughters
Of a bloody past, is bound to proclaim:
"Where is the war-steed? Where is the warrior?
Where is his war-lord?
Where now the feasting-places? Where now the mead-hall pleasures?
Alas, bright cup! Alas, brave knight!
Alas, you glorious princes! All gone,
Lost in the night, as you never had lived.
And all that survives you a **serpentine** wall,
Wondrously high, worked in strange ways.

craven: *easily defeated; cowardly*

complacent: *eager to please*

covetous: *excessively eager to obtain and possess*

serpentine: *resembling a serpent; snakelike*

2 **callow mirth:** immature amusement or gaiety

Mighty spears have slain these men,
Greedy weapons have framed their fate.
These rocky slopes are beaten by storms,
This earth pinned down by driving snow,
By the horror of winter, smothering warmth
In the shadows of night. And the north angrily
Hurls its hailstorms at our helpless heads.
Everything earthly is evilly born,
Firmly clutched by a **fickle** Fate.
Fortune vanishes, friendship vanishes,
Man is fleeting, woman is fleeting,
And all this earth rolls into emptiness."

fickle: *not constant or loyal in affections*

So says the sage in his heart, sitting alone with His thought.
It's good to guard your faith, nor let your grief come forth
Until it cannot call for help, nor help but heed
The path you've placed before it. It's good to find your grace
In God, the heavenly rock where rests our every hope.

The Wife's Lament

Author Unknown
Translated by Ann Stanford

I make this song about me full sadly
my own wayfaring.[2] I a woman tell
what griefs I had since I grew up
new or old never more than now.
5 Ever I know the dark of my exile.

First my lord[3] went out away from his people
over the wave-**tumult**. I grieved each dawn
wondered where my lord my first on earth might be.
Then I went forth a friendless exile
10 to seek service in my sorrow's need.
My man's kinsmen began to plot
by darkened thought to divide us two
so we most widely in the world's kingdom

lived wretchedly and I suffered longing.
15 My lord commanded me to move my dwelling here.
I had few loved ones in this land
or faithful friends. For this my heart grieves:
that I should find the man well matched to me
hard of fortune mournful of mind

tumult: *disorder and confusion*

1 **wayfaring:** traveling, especially on foot
2 **my lord:** The speaker of the poem calls her husband "my lord."

20 hiding his mood thinking of murder.

Blithe was our bearing often we vowed
that but death alone would part us two
naught else. But this is turned round
now . . . as if it never were
25 our friendship. I must far and near
bear the anger of my beloved.
The man sent me out to live in the woods
under an oak tree in this den in the earth.
Ancient this earth hall. I am all longing.
30 The valleys are dark the hills high
the yard overgrown bitter with briars
a joyless dwelling. Full oft the lack of my lord
seizes me cruelly here. Friends there are on earth
living beloved lying in bed
35 while I at dawn am walking alone
under the oak tree through these earth halls.
There I may sit the summerlong day
there I can weep over my exile
my many hardships. Hence I may not rest
40 from this care of heart which belongs to me ever
nor all this longing that has caught me in this life.

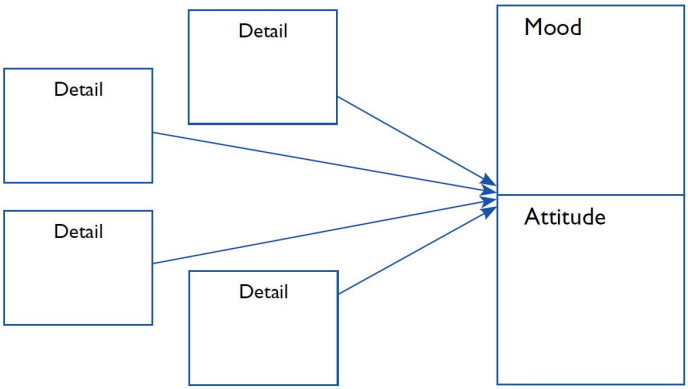
May that young man be sad-minded always
hard his heart's thought while he must wear
a blithe bearing with care in the breast
45 a crowd of sorrows. May on himself depend
all his world's joy. Be he outlawed far
in a strange folk-land— that my beloved sits
under a rocky cliff rimed with frost
a lord dreary in spirit drenched with water
50 in a ruined hall. My lord endures
much care of mind. He remembers too often
a happier dwelling. Woe be to them
that for a loved one must wait in longing.

blithe: *happy*

After You Read *"The Seafarer," "The Wanderer," and "The Wife's Lament"*

Literary Lens: Descriptive Details

How did the descriptive details in the poems set the mood and help you understand them? Create an organizer like the one below. Fill in descriptive details from "The Wanderer." Based on these details, what mood do the details create? What do you think the poet's attitude is?



Explore Context: Women's Roles

How were women viewed in Anglo-Saxon society? Write a paragraph explaining the roles of women and how they were perceived by men. Then write a paragraph comparing the roles of Anglo-Saxon women with the roles of modern women.

Apply and Create: Elegiac Poem

Like Anglo-Saxons long ago, people today sometimes feel isolation and loss. Think of a time you felt lonely or isolated. Write a poem about your situation. Use descriptive details to set a mood and to help the reader visualize the scene and understand your feelings and attitudes. Then exchange poems with someone of the opposite gender. Compare your approaches to the topic.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpt from "The Seafarer" and answer the questions that follow.

65 Thus the joys of God
Are fervent with life, where life itself
Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth

Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains.
No man has ever faced the dawn
70 Certain which of Fate's three threats
Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy's
Sword, snatching the life from his soul.
The praise the living pour on the dead
Flowers from reputation: plant
75 An earthly life of profit reaped
Even from hatred and rancor, of bravery
Flung in the devil's face, and death
Can only bring you earthly praise
And a song to celebrate a place
80 With the angels, life eternally blessed
In the hosts of Heaven.
The days are gone
When the kingdoms of earth flourished in glory;
Now there are no rulers, no emperors,
85 No givers of gold, as once there were,
When wonderful things were worked among them
And they lived in lordly magnificence.
Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead.
The weakest survives and the world continues,
90 Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished.
The world's honor ages and shrinks,
Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces
Blanch as time advances, their beards
Wither and they mourn the memory of friends.
95 The sons of princes, sown in the dust.
The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing
Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,
Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother
Opens his palms and pours down gold
100 On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin
With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing
Golden shakes the wrath of God
For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing
Hidden on earth rises to Heaven.

1. Compare what you read in lines 69–72 to what you have read about Anglo-Saxons. How do the lines in this poem reflect the hardships of Anglo-Saxon life?
2. Analyze the poet's feelings about earthly goods. What do these feelings tell you about the poet?
3. What are the poet's attitudes toward humankind and toward God?

Connecting Eras: Compare and Contrast

In this unit, you've read about the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain, their establishment of new cultures and traditions, and the spread of Christianity. You know that the poetry and art of the Anglo-Saxons celebrated their beliefs and their warrior society, bringing to light the hardships they faced and the changes to their culture. One of the biggest changes was the conversion of Anglo-Saxon pagans to Christianity.

Having read excerpts from the most famous poem of the era, *Beowulf,* you should have a good understanding of the heroic ideals of that time. This epic poem barely survived, and for centuries it was studied mainly by scholars who focused on the language, history, and poetic conventions, rather than the story and beauty of the poem. Although it was finally translated into English, the poem didn't reach a wide audience until 1936 when J. R. R. Tolkien, author of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, gave a lecture—later written as an essay—on the power of the poetry. Since then, *Beowulf* has become not only a poem about a hero of ancient times but a part of our culture, making its way into books, movies, and even video games.

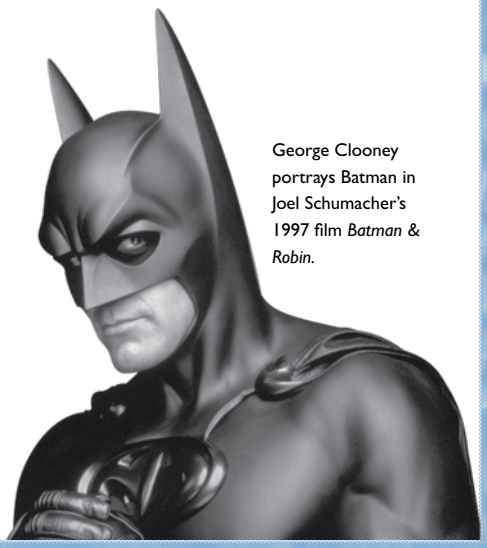
It may seem hard to believe that a story set thousands of years ago in foreign lands is still mainstream. Yet, if you think about *Beowulf*'s characters and the themes, such as the struggle between good and evil, it becomes clear just how universal the story is. Throughout the ages, literary heroes—even unlikely ones—have risen to the occasion: Think Aragorn in *The Lord of the Rings* or Batman in any of the *Batman* comics. These tales, and the films that are based on them, continue to enthrall us.

In 2007, a film adaptation of *Beowulf* was directed by Robert Zemeckis, starring Angelina Jolie, Anthony Hopkins, and John Malkovich. Screenwriters Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary created a telling based in the past but with a modern sensibility. Read the following review by Paul Vallely, and think about how he compares and contrasts the literary epic to the movie and to other contemporary adaptations.

Ray Winstone plays Beowulf in Robert Zemeckis's 2007 movie adaptation of *Beowulf*.

Viggo Mortensen portrays Aragorn Strider in Peter Jackson's adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Christian Bale plays the caped crusader in Christopher Nolan's films *Batman Begins* and *The Dark Knight*.

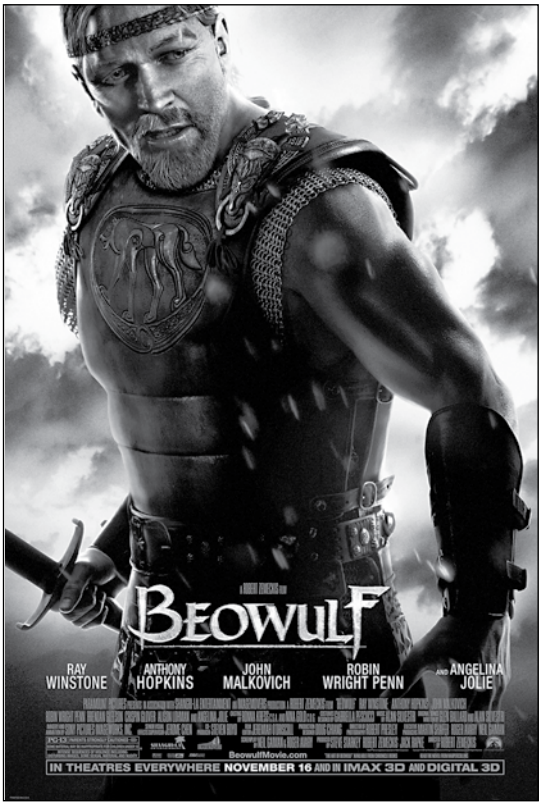


George Clooney portrays Batman in Joel Schumacher's 1997 film *Batman & Robin*.

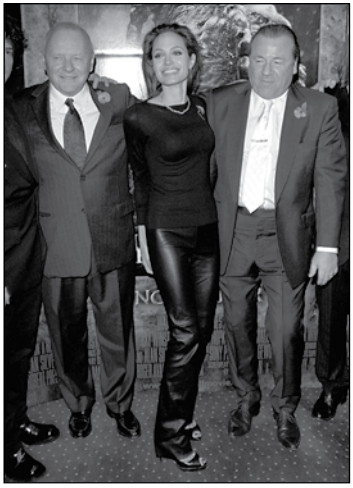
THE INDEPENDENT

Saturday, 10 November 2007
Beowulf: A hero for our times
Paul Vallely

BEOWULF IS BIG BOX-OFFICE



Discover the truth behind the legend.



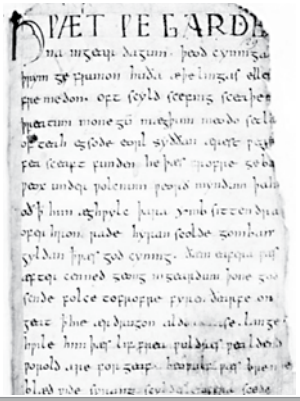
Anthony Hopkins, Angelina Jolie, and Ray Winstone, stars of the 2007 film adaptation of *Beowulf*, pose for a photograph at the movie's premiere.

Being Anglo-Saxon we revere the past, but only so far as it fits with our present. Take *Beowulf*, the oldest surviving piece of literature in the English language, which is about to re-emerge into the national consciousness with the release of Robert Zemeckis's film version starring Ray Winstone, Anthony Hopkins, John Malkovich and the preternaturally proportioned Angelina Jolie who plays—scholars take a deep breath—the monstrous mother of that incarnation of evil, the half-demon Grendel.

Beowulf is burdened with superlatives. It is the oldest narrative poem in English. It is the major surviving work of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry. It is routinely described as "England's national epic," despite the fact that it is about the adventures of a Swede in Denmark.

Epic in more senses than one, it survives only in a single charred manuscript of some 3,000 lines which can be read aloud in three or four hours, depending upon how dramatic is the actor's declaration. But though it was set to parchment around AD 1010—and may well have had an existence in oral form up to 300 years earlier—our acquaintance with the work is comparatively recent. It was transcribed and published in a modern language, Danish, only as late as 1815. The first English manuscript dates from 1837. [or 1833, according to some sources. –ed]

In those early days it was the province only of scholars who preoccupied themselves with questions such as whether the manuscript was the product of two different scribes transcribing an earlier original. Why, they wondered with incisive precision, did the spellings mix the West Saxon and Anglian dialects of Old English? They engaged in close study of its measure and meter, its heavy use of poetic "kennings"—evocative euphemisms describing the sea as the "whale-road" and so forth—and its preoccupation with Anglo-Saxon alliteration. They were denizens of dusty diphthongs.



Hwæt! We Gardena in geardagumþeodcyninga þrym gefrunonhu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon.

Or as they construed the opening lines:

Lo! Of the Spear-Danes, in days of yore, we have heard; of the glory of the people's kings, how the noble ones did deeds of valor.

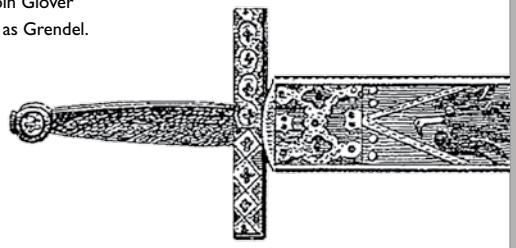
It was the romance of obscurity with its Scyldings, Scylfings and Wulfings, giving fodder for 19th-century archaeologists to argue that a mound in Uppsala—in which a powerful leader was buried around AD575—might be the grave of Beowulf himself.

But it was not until the translation by J. R. R. Tolkien, who was later to go on to create his own elvish epic in *The Lord of the Rings*, that the sheer power of the story began to reach a wider audience. His seminal 1936 essay "*Beowulf:* The Monsters and the Critics" is widely credited as the turning point in modern times when the poetry overpowered the pedantry in a work primarily regarded until then as of purely linguistic interest.

The poem tells the story of Beowulf, nephew of the king of the Geats, a tribe in the south of Sweden, who journeys over the sea to Heorot, the land of the Danes, to repay a debt of honor incurred by his uncle to the Danish king, Hrothgar. He has come to

Beowulf is played by Ray Winstone, and Brendan Gleeson stars as Wiglaf in the *Beowulf* film adaptation.

Crispin Glover stars as Grendel.



release the people from the 12-year tyranny of a creature named Grendel who, night by night, has been attacking Hrothgar's noblemen and courtiers, killing and eating them.

In a great battle Beowulf slays Grendel, whose charmed skin cannot be pierced by any blade, by wrenching his arm and shoulder from his body. Grendel flees to his home in the marshes to die. The next night Grendel's mother appears to avenge her son and devours Hrothgar's favorite courtier. Beowulf then tracks her back to her underwater lair and, despite his armor, swims down to kill her in a ferocious battle. He then cuts off Grendel's head and takes it back to the king.

Angelina Jolie plays Grendel's mother.

Laden with wealth of honors he returns home to his uncle's court where he becomes king and rules, graciously and fairly, for 50 years. But then a dragon, whose hoard has been robbed of ancient treasure, devastates the countryside. Beowulf attacks the fearsome beast and kills it, cutting the wyrm in two. But in doing so he sustains a fatal wound from the dragon's poisonous horn. His people burn his body on a great clifftop pyre and bury him, along with the dragon's treasure. So ends the story of the man who, of all the kings of the Earth, was most eager for fame.

The story continues to grip. Michael Crichton's 1976 novel, *Eaters of the Dead,* was based on *Beowulf*. So was an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager*. Then there were cheap action movies like the one starring Christopher Lambert, of *Mortal Kombat* fame, which featured less than lapidary lines like: "The only thing that keeps me from becoming evil is fighting evil." In 1999 there was a new translation, brooding and blood-black, by the poet Seamus Heaney. And a couple of years back Beowulf was featured in *Spartan: Total Warrior,* a PS2 game.

What has been revealing is the subtext each new incarnation has assumed. Beowulf has long been characterized by such enculturation. The original written work did more than record the values of a pre-literate society. It critiqued them. The poet took the early pagan elements and tempered them in the crucible of his own imagination. He was a Christian who cast Grendel and his mother in a biblical context as the cursed kin of the archetypal first murderer Cain. And though he appeared to take at face value the codes of honor and kinship, which sought revenge or *weregild*, a blood-money reparation, he depicted war as a business which was steeped in the gory as much as in the glory that Beowulf seeks.

One of the most interesting interpretations has come from John Grigsby's *Beowulf & Grendel: The Truth Behind England's Oldest Legend.* Grigsby sees the work as a poetic account of forceful suppression of an older fertility cult, with human sacrifice central to its religion, in 5th-century England, and its replacement by an incoming warrior cult. Grendel stands for a vibrant English pagan religion as rich and complex as that of the early Celts. Grendel's mother represents the outgoing fertility goddess in whose sacred Danish lakes, Tacitus recorded, human victims were drowned.

It is their bodies, Grigsby suggests, that have been found by modern archaeologists preserved in peat bogs in Denmark—naked, strangled or stabbed and whose stomach contents show had eaten a meal of barley contaminated by a hallucinogenic fungus just before they died. It was this fertility goddess—now played, not perhaps so bizarrely, by Jolie—that Beowulf swam down to in his full armor to slay.

The two scriptwriters in the latest version Neil Gaiman and Roger Avary have their roots in science fiction and comedy. "Our theory," said Gaiman, "was that at any point where the poem tells you what happened, it's telling the truth. But at any point when somebody in the poem goes offstage, and then comes back on and says, 'While I was in the other room, this is what happened. . . . ' they could be lying."

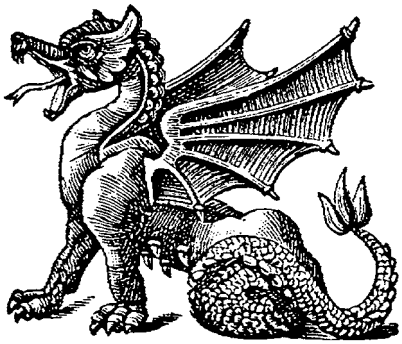
"So that when Beowulf disappears for eight days on the trail of Grendel's mother and returns looking rather exhausted with Grendel's head," said Avary, "since he had already killed Grendel, why did he not return with the mother's head?"

"We just started going, 'This is very unreliable,' " said Gaiman. "It's the concept of the unreliable narrator."

"You have to ask yourself a lot of questions," his partner continued. "For example, Grendel is described as half-man, half-demon. The mother is described as a water demon. So who's Grendel's father? Grendel's always dragging men off alive to the cave? Why is he never attacking Hrothgar [the Danish king]? Perhaps Hrothgar is Grendel's father."

Ray Winstone stars as Beowulf and Anthony Hopkins as Hrothgar.

Thus the great hero is remade. Not as the leader of a warrior cult out to replace an ancient religion of fertility. Not as a Christian corrective to a prehistoric paganism. But as a kind of lying Hollywood vigilante out for revenge. Thus the world progresses. Not so much with reverence for the past, but to see how we can make it fit our present.



Critical Thinking: Compare and Contrast

Ask Yourself

1. How does the interest of early scholars in *Beowulf* compare with Tolkien's interest in it?
2. How does John Grigsby view the history of Grendel and Grendel's mother? How is his view different from the original work?
3. In 1999, Seamus Heaney published a translation of *Beowulf*. Read the following excerpt from *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. How does it compare to lines 15–59 of the translation by Burton Raffel that you have read (pages 24–26)?

15 So times were pleasant for the people there
until finally one, a fiend out of hell,
began to work his evil in the world.
Grendel was the name of this grim demon
haunting the marshes, marauding round the heath
20 and the desolate fens; he had dwelt for a time
in misery among the banished monsters,
Cain's clan, whom the Creator had outlawed
and condemned as outcasts. For the killing of Abel
the Eternal Lord had exacted a price:
25 Cain got no good from committing that murder
because the Almighty made him anathema
and out of the curse of his exile sprang
ogres and elves and evil phantoms
and the giants too who strove with God
30 time and again until He gave them their reward.
So, after nightfall, Grendel set out
for the lofty house, to see how the Ring-Danes
were settling into it after their drink,
and there he came upon them, a company of the best
35 asleep from their feasting, insensible to pain

and human sorrow. Suddenly then
the God-cursed brute was creating havoc:
greedy and grim, he grabbed thirty men
from their resting places and rushed to his lair,
40 flushed up and inflamed from the raid,
blundering back with the butchered corpses.
Then as dawn brightened and the day broke,
Grendel's powers of destruction were plain:
their wassail was over, they wept to heaven
45 and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince,
the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless,
humiliated by the loss of his guard,
bewildered and stunned, staring aghast
at the demon's trail, in deep distress.
50 He was numb with grief, but got no respite
for one night later merciless Grendel
struck again with more gruesome murders.
Malignant by nature, he never showed remorse.
It was easy then to meet with a man
55 shifting himself to a safer distance
to bed in the bothies, for who could be blind
to the evidence of his eyes, the obviousness
of the hall-watcher's hate? Whoever escaped
kept a weather-eye open and moved away.

4. According to Vallely, how did the screenwriters change the original epic *Beowulf* story when adapting it for the 2007 movie?

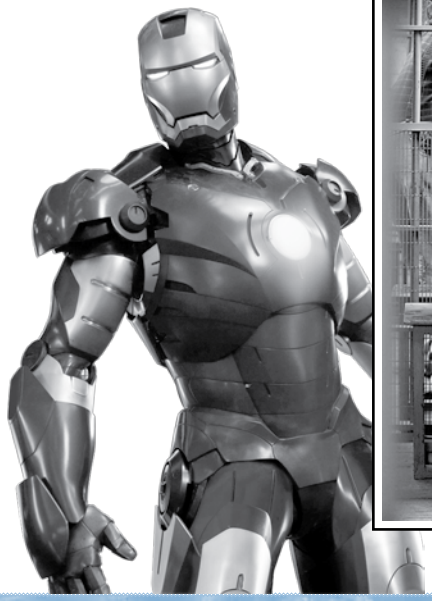
5. Watch the movie *Beowulf*. Select a scene and compare and contrast it with the section in the original epic. Discuss your findings with a partner or group.

Examine the Writing

As you read on page 22, comparing and contrasting ideas, time periods, beliefs, characters, and themes can help you understand creative works. You've discovered that while *Beowulf's* ancient voice may seem irrelevant, its themes are perhaps more relevant than ever. Heroes striving for right and justice will never die in literature—or in any of the art forms. We need these heroes and what they represent to lift us up and give us hope in any age.

Choose one of the following topics related to heroes and villains or good versus evil. Address the topic by writing an essay or giving an oral presentation.

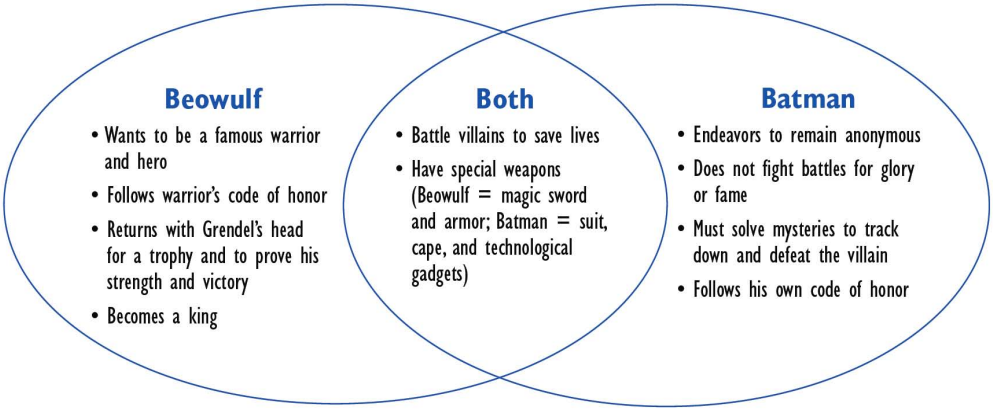
1. Research other adaptations of *Beowulf*, including those mentioned in the review. Choose one and compare it with the original poem. Or compare two of the modern adaptations. Then explain which you prefer, and why.
2. Choose a hero from a movie or book you've recently read. Compare and contrast that hero to Beowulf. Think about the villains each hero faces; the deeds each performs; and the people, values, or ideals each fights to protect.
3. Choose a villain from a book that was written within the last ten years. Compare and contrast that villain to Grendel. What is each villain out to get? How does he or she go about getting it? Who stands in the way? Who lends a hand? Which villain do you think best represents true villainy, and why?



4. Consider the hero in *Beowulf*. What are his values and his challenges? Compare them with the challenges and values of any individual today. Then answer this question in depth: Can Beowulf's heroism help me understand how to be a hero?

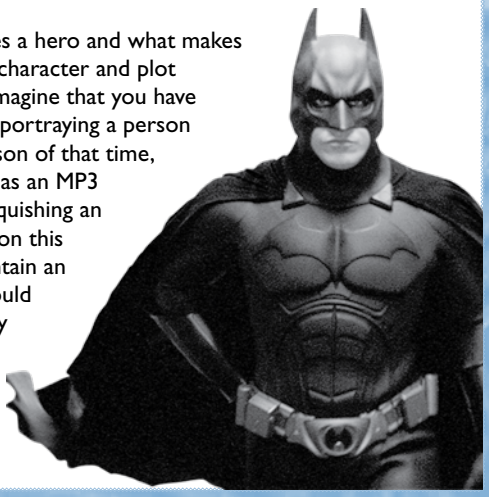
Organize Your Thoughts

You can use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast people, times, or ideas. The example below compares the heroes Beowulf and Batman. Create a Venn diagram of your own comparing Beowulf to another famous literary or film hero. Expand your thinking to come up with similarities and differences that transcend beyond the obvious.



Get Active

By now you should have a clear idea of what constitutes a hero and what makes an exciting epic plot. With a partner, list the important character and plot elements in the *Beowulf* excerpts you have read. Then imagine that you have been transported into the *Beowulf* legend—one of you portraying a person of that time and the other portraying yourself. The person of that time, seeing that the other possesses "magical" gadgets such as an MP3 player and a cell phone, pleads for heroic efforts in vanquishing an evil dragon. Write a play, humorous or dramatic, based on this imagined situation. Your play, although short, should contain an exposition, a climax, and some kind of resolution. It should also exhibit characteristics of an epic. Perform your play for the class.



Unit 2:
The Middle Ages

1066 to 1485

Eye on an Era

1066
William, Duke of Normandy leads the invasion on the kingdom of England, beginning the Norman Conquest.

1095
The First Crusade begins when Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus requests help in reclaiming the Holy city of Jerusalem.

1098
The *Song of Roland,* the oldest French epic poem, is written by an unknown author.

Just before sunset on September 27, 1066, a fleet of French ships led by William, Duke of Normandy, set off across the English Channel.

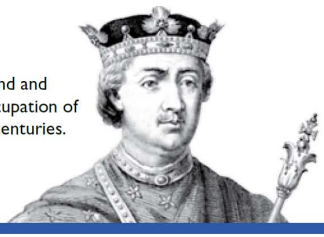
William came ashore at Pevensey with these words: "By the splendour of God I have taken possession of my realm; the earth of England is in my two hands." A few weeks later at the Battle of Hastings, the French defeated the English, and William became the first Norman king of England—William the Conqueror.

Before 1066, England had few ties to mainland Europe. The effect of the Norman invasion was to infuse the culture of continental Europe, especially French feudalism, into England. In a fervor of religious reform, France and Normandy sent knights to fight Muslims who had taken over Jerusalem. These crusaders brought back Middle Eastern influences.

Under Norman rule, French was the language of nobility, Latin was the language of the church, and English was the commoners' language. English absorbed thousands of French words in the centuries after the conquest and gradually grew into Middle English.

1152
Frederick I of Germany names his realm the "Holy Roman Empire."

1171
King Henry II lands in Ireland and begins the claim to and occupation of Ireland, which will last for centuries.



1170
Thomas á Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, is murdered by King Henry's knights.

Code of Courtly Love

- Marriage is no real excuse for not loving.
- He who is not jealous, cannot love.
- Boys do not love until they arrive at the age of maturity.
- When one lover dies, a widowhood of two years is required of the survivor.
- Love is always a stranger in the home of avarice.
- It is not proper to love any woman whom one would be ashamed to seek to marry.
- A true lover does not desire to embrace in love anyone except his beloved.
- A new love puts to flight an old one.

Feudalism

The king was the most powerful person in the feudal system. All others owed loyalty to him. He granted land to lords, who in turn granted land to subordinates called *vassals*. The lords offered protection in exchange for the vassals' loyalty. The powerful Roman Catholic Church vied for power with the secular state. The clergy were often accused of corruption. The peasants, or fiefs, were at the bottom of the ladder and lived out a miserable existence. They were, in effect, slaves to those above them with little hope of becoming free.

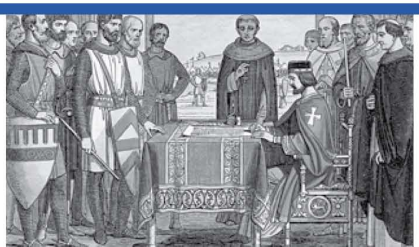
Church and State

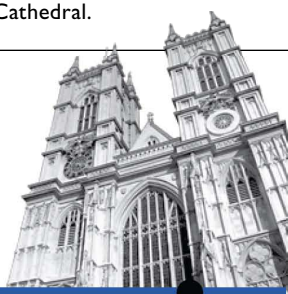
Tensions between the church and state reached a dramatic point in 1170. King Henry II wanted the state to have all the legal power, but the Church, led by the pope in Rome, insisted on the right to try and sentence its own officials. Hoping for an ally in the Church, Henry appointed his friend Thomas á Becket Archbishop of Canterbury. To Henry's dismay, however, Becket sided with the pope on the legal question. When Henry asked, "Who will rid me of this meddlesome priest?" four of his knights murdered Becket in Canterbury Cathedral.

1207
Genghis Khan begins the Mongol conquest in Asia.

1209
Cambridge University is founded in England.

1215
King John signs the Magna Carta, limiting his power.





1269
Henry III orders the rebuilding of Westminster Abbey with Gothic style architecture.

Shifting Social Structure

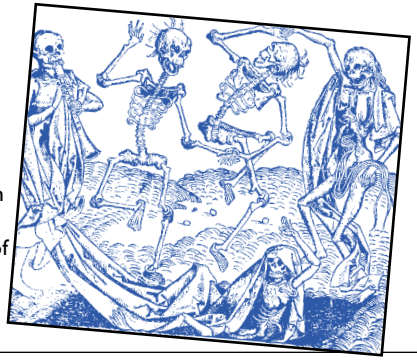
Gradually, the social structure shifted. Knights began to demand that kings be held to the rule of law. In 1215 nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta, an agreement that placed restrictions on the king's power.

Chivalry

Amidst the turbulence of the Middle Ages, a system of courteous conduct flourished, called *chivalry*. Derived from the word *chevalier*, a French knight who rode on horseback, chivalry in Britain had very prescribed rules. Knights took vows of honor and obedience and practiced courtly love—perhaps softening the harsh realities of the times.

The Plague

A plague known as the Black Death peaked throughout Europe from 1348 to 1350, killing thirty to forty percent of the population.



Code of Chivalry

- Thou shalt believe all that the Church teaches, and shalt observe all its directions.
- Thou shalt defend the Church.
- Thou shalt respect all weaknesses, and shalt constitute thyself the defender of them.
- Thou shalt love the country in which thou wast born.
- Thou shalt not recoil before thine enemy.
- Thou shalt make war against the infidel without cessation, and without mercy.
- Thou shalt perform scrupulously thy feudal duties, if they be not contrary to the laws of God.
- Thou shalt never lie, and shall remain faithful to thy pledged word.
- Thou shalt be generous, and give largess to be everywhere and always the champion of the Right and the Good against Injustice and Evil.

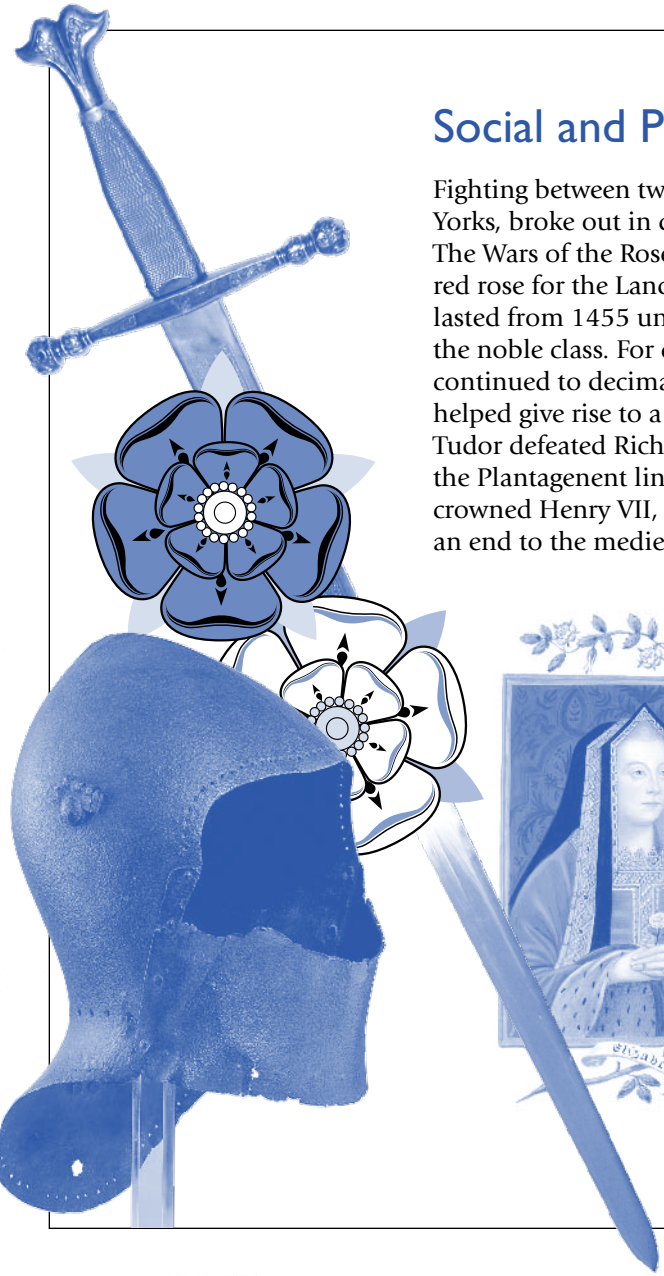
1290
Edward I orders all Jews to leave England.

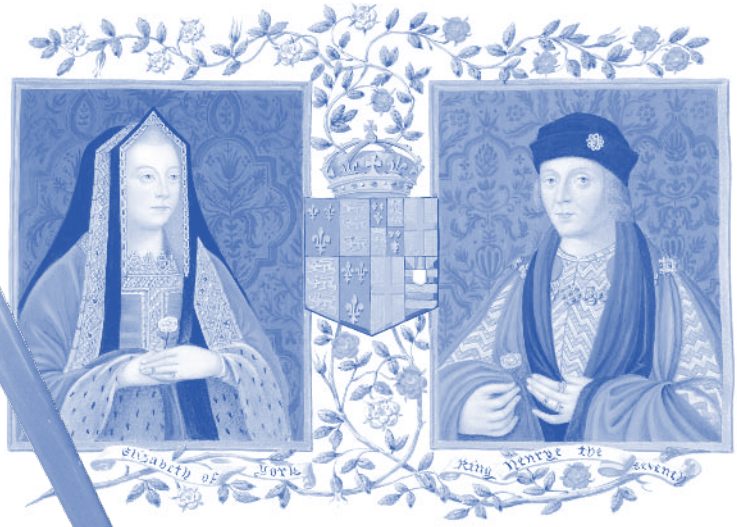
1295
King Edward summons his "Model Parliament" to raise money for his wars against France, Scotland, and Wales. This is the first representative Parliament.

1337
The Hundred Years' War begins as England and France fight to control Western Europe.

Social and Political Upheaval

Fighting between two dynastic families, the Lancasters and the Yorks, broke out in disputes over who would take over the throne. The Wars of the Roses (named for the symbols of the families—a red rose for the Lancasters and a white rose for the Yorks) lasted from 1455 until 1487 and caused great casualties within the noble class. For decades during this time, the Black Death continued to decimate much of Europe. The weakened aristocracy helped give rise to a middle class of merchants. When Henry Tudor defeated Richard III at the Battle of Bosworth Field in 1485, the Plantagenent line ended and the Tudor line began. Henry was crowned Henry VII, and the strong Tudor monarchy helped bring an end to the medieval system of feudal lords.





1348
The Black Death first plagues England.

1368
The Ming dynasty is established in China.

1387
Chaucer begins writing *The Canterbury Tales*.

1415
England, led by King Henry V, defeats France at the Battle of Agincourt.

A Teen of the Time

Like so many other teenagers throughout England, Roger had left his home at the age of fourteen to live with another family and become an apprentice. In his Somerset village of Croscombe, an area known for sheep farming, Roger was learning how to make cloth. At the end of his years of service as an apprentice, he would be able to join the Clothmaker's Guild. Some of Roger's cousins still lived in the countryside following the old ways. But as more and more craftsmen moved to villages, towns, and cities, old feudal loyalties had shifted and a middle class had risen between the peasants and the nobility. Roger was impatient for his years of service to end so he could break free from the restrictions of adults and finally be on his own. The adults in his circle referred to the teenage years as "wild and wanton." He looked forward to being regarded as "sad and wise"—qualities that separated adolescents from those who have come of age—because that's when he would get his independence.

But for now Roger had only one thing on his mind, the May Day festival. Earlier in the year his parish guild, a group of boys called the Younglyngs, had raised money for the church by blocking the streets of the village and making the girls, who belonged to the Maiden's Guild, pay to get through. The day before, the girls had done the same to the boys. Roger couldn't help but notice that on both days Alison gave him a special smile as she passed by him. He was hoping against hope that she would come to the village May Day festival, where teenagers would choose a King and a Queen of the festival and dance and have singing contests. If he were the judge of the singing contest, he would choose Alison to receive the prize—two beautiful doves.

Roger washed up with water (soap was reserved for washing clothes), dressed in his best doublet, and set out. On his way to the village green, he barely noticed the smell of the refuse in the street, stepping gingerly around it with his pointy-toed shoes. His hair was cut short in the back, in the Norman style, and he could feel the May breeze on his neck. The closer he got, the faster his heart beat.

1422
King Henry VI is crowned King of England and France when he is less than a year old.

1431
Joan of Arc, a peasant girl who led the French army to several victories in the Hundred Years' War, is burned at the stake at age nineteen.

1453
The Ottomans conquer Constantinople, causing the fall of the Byzantine Empire.

1455
The Wars of the Roses begins, a period of civil war. Gutenberg prints the first Bible in Germany.

1470
Sir Thomas Malory completes *Le Morte d'Arthur.*

1477
The first printed book is published in England by William Caxton.

1485
Henry Tudor, supported by Charles VIII of France, defeats and kills Richard III in the decisive battle of the Wars of the Roses.

Understanding the Middle Ages: Cause and Effect

When William of Normandy conquered England in 1066, he brought his French ways with him. This affected all aspects of English life—the language and the political, social, and economic systems. Feudalism installed a hierarchy of power: The king owned all the land, which he parceled to his noblemen, who hired knights to protect it and serfs to work it. When Henry II ascended the throne in 1154, his wife, Eleanor of Aquitaine, brought more French ways into the English court, including the ideals of chivalry and courtly love. Tales of chivalrous knights on quests became extremely popular, particularly the legends of King Arthur. These legends live on today, and there are many Web sites devoted to the subject. One of the most extensive is the Camelot Project http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cphome.stm. Here you learn about Arthur and his knights and the causes and effects of their actions.

Recognizing cause and effect during the medieval period can help you understand how England grew to become a literary and cultural influence. In nonfiction, causes and effects are often signaled by words such as *because, since, so, if…then, consequently, thus, since, for this reason, as a result, therefore, nevertheless,* and *accordingly.* In fiction, the causes and effects are often implied or unstated. To understand these causal relationships, you must look for clues and "read between the lines." The order of events does not necessarily signal causes and effects, and one cause can have many effects. One effect can also have numerous causes. In literary history, the fall of Camelot may be attributed to not just the death of King Arthur but to the breakdown of the social system he lived by. Effects can also be part of a chain—one effect causes another, which may cause a third effect, and so on.

As you read about this era, try to determine the causes that led to a more united, more powerful England. Think about the effect this had on other nations. Then look for causes and effects in the development of medieval literature. What led Chaucer to write *The Canterbury Tales* in English vernacular? Why did Malory write *Le Morte d'Arthur* in prose? Finally, how did these and other British writers affect the literature that followed?

Before You Read *The Canterbury Tales: "The Prologue"*

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) became an apprentice at an early age. His father was a London winemaker with good enough connections to have his son placed in a royal household as a page. Over the years, Chaucer was employed as a soldier, diplomat, and public servant under three English kings. His work and travels brought him in contact with some of the brightest people of his time. *The Canterbury Tales*, which Chaucer did not live to complete, is a collection of stories told by travelers while on a pilgrimage to a sacred place. They travel to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was murdered in 1170 and later venerated as a saint (see page 88). The travelers begin their journey at an inn called the Tabard in the town of Southwark, just south of London. The innkeeper suggests the pilgrims have a storytelling competition to entertain themselves on their journey, and he offers himself as the guide and judge.

Literary Lens

Characterization Chaucer is a master of characterization, the bringing to life of a character. Characters are developed through physical descriptions, dialogue, thoughts, and actions—as well as by what other characters say or think about them.

Tone and Irony An author's tone expresses how he or she feels about the subject or characters. In *The Prologue* that follows, the narrator's tone is ironic. Writers use irony to understate an issue, employing language that would normally signify the opposite of what he or she believes. Here, Chaucer uses humorous irony as gentle criticism.

Chaucer's Language

Chaucer wrote poetry in English even though French was the poetic language of his day. He had trouble finding his English voice, or distinct style, however. While traveling on diplomatic missions, Chaucer came under the influence of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, Italian poets who wrote realistically. In *The Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer begins his story in a seedy pub and uses characters who are identifiable to the common reader. His dialogue captures everyday speech.

The selections you are about to read are from a modern translation by Nevill Coghill. Parallel text is offered on facing pages. Read the original text first. When you encounter concepts or words you don't understand, use the context or a dictionary to figure out the meaning. Use the parallel text to check your understanding.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Look at the timeline on pages 86–91. Make three predictions about how you think this selection will reflect the times.
2. Think about a film that features characters on a quest. Briefly describe the purpose and outcome of the quest. Then compare and contrast the quest in the film to religious pilgrimages during the Middle Ages.
3. Based on what you know of Chaucer and the Middle Ages, what types of characterizations do you expect to find in *The Canterbury Tales?*

from *The Canterbury Tales*

Geoffrey Chaucer
translated by Nevill Coghill

The Prologue

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
5 When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
10 That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,

from *The Canterbury Tales*

Geoffrey Chaucer
translated by Nevill Coghill

Parallel Text

The Prologue

It was in April, when sweet showers fall,
piercing the dryness of March down to the root,
bathing each vein with a liquid
that gives birth to the flowers.
5 The sweet breath of the west wind
swept down through every grove and field
upon the tender shoots. The sun
had passed through the constellation Aries,
and all the little birds
10 that sleep at night with open eyes
(as nature urges them to do) were making melody.
It is then that people long to go on pilgrimages,
and travelers seek the strange and faraway homes
of saints well-known in many lands.

15 And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful **martyr**, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

martyr: *person who is killed because of his or her religious or other beliefs*

It happened in that season that one day
20 In Southwark, at *The Tabard*, as I lay
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most **devout** at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
25 Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That towards Canterbury meant to ride.
The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
They made us easy, all was of the best.
30 And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.

devout: *having deep religious feeling or commitment*

35 But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say
What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
40 According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.
There was a *Knight*, a most distinguished man,
Who from the day on which he first began
45 To ride abroad had followed **chivalry**,
Truth, honor, generousness and courtesy.
He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
And ridden into battle, no man more,
As well in Christian as in heathen places,

chivalry: *medieval knightly system with its own religious, moral, and social code*

From every county throughout England,
they come especially to Canterbury
to seek the holy blissful martyr,
hoping for his help when they are sick.

It all began in that season, when one day
I was staying in Southwark at the Tabard Inn,
ready to go on my pilgrimage
to Canterbury, feeling full of devout spirit.
That night, some 29 people
arrived at that inn—
various kinds of folk who happened to fall
in with one another. They, too, were all pilgrims
who planned to ride towards Canterbury.
The rooms and stables at the inn were large,
so we were comfortable, and all was of the best.
To put it briefly, when the sun went down,
I spoke to them all about the trip
and soon felt quite comfortable among them.
So we promised each other to rise early and start on our way
to Canterbury, as you heard me say before.

But nonetheless, while I have time and space
before my story goes much further,
it seems reasonable for me to say
something about these people.
I'll tell all about them as I saw them—
their appearances, professions, and social ranks,
and the clothes they wore for riding.
I'll begin with a knight—
a most distinguished man,
who began following the ways of chivalry
the very day he first began to ride,
devoting himself to truth, honor, generosity, and courtesy.
He'd served nobly in a war for his king—
none had served better. And he had ridden into battle
in both Christian and non-Christian lands,

50 And ever honored for his noble graces.

When we took Alexandria,[1] he was there.
He often sat at table in the chair
Of honor, above all nations, when in Prussia.
In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
55 No Christian man so often, of his rank.
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank
Under assault, he had been there, and in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin;
In Anatolia he had been as well
60 And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene
65 Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk;
He was of sovereign value in all eyes.
70 And though so much distinguished, he was wise
And in his bearing modest as a maid.
He never yet a boorish thing had said
In all his life to any, come what might;
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight.

75 Speaking of his equipment, he possessed
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark
With smudges where his armor had left mark;
Just home from service, he had joined our ranks
80 To do his pilgrimage and render thanks.

1 **Alexandria:** The Egyptian city of Alexandria was captured by Christians from Muslims in Chaucer's time. The following lines refer to other episodes of fighting between Christians and non-Christians.

50 and was always honored for his noble ways.

When we took Alexandria, he was there.
And in Prussia, he often sat at a table in the chair of honor
above the knights of all other nations.
No Christian man of his rank rode so often
55 in Lithuania and Russia.
In Granada, when Algeciras lost his battle,
he had been there—and also in
North Africa, raiding Benamarin.
He had been in Anatolia, too,
60 and fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,
for all along the Mediterranean coast
he sailed with many noble armies.
He'd been in fifteen deadly battles,
and at Tramissene he jousted for his faith
65 three times, and always killed his man.
This same worthy knight also joined
once with the Bey of Balat, aiding him
against another non-Christian Turk.
Everyone held him in the highest respect,
70 and although he was so famous, he was wise,
and as modest as a maid.
He never said a single rude thing
in all his life to anyone, no matter what.
He was a true, perfect, gentle knight.

75 Regarding his equipment, he had
fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.
He wore a stained, dark jacket of heavy cloth,
smudged where his armor had marked it.
He had just come home from service, and he joined us
80 to go on the pilgrimage and offer thanks.

He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*,[2]
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.
85 In stature he was of a moderate length,
With wonderful agility and strength.
He'd seen some service with the cavalry[3]
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
90 Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.
He was embroidered like a meadow bright
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.
Singing he was, or fluting all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
95 Short was his gown, the sleeves were long and wide;
He knew the way to sit a horse and ride.
He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
100 He slept as little as a nightingale.
Courteous he was, lowly and serviceable,
And carved to serve his father at the table.

There was a *Yeoman*[4] with him at his side,
No other servant; so he chose to ride.
105 This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green,
And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while
—For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
His arrows never drooped their feathers low—
110 And in his hand he bore a mighty bow.
His head was like a nut, his face was brown.
He knew the whole of woodcraft up and down.
A saucy brace was on his arm to ward
It from the bow-string, and a shield and sword

2 ***Squire:*** a candidate for knighthood serving as shield bearer and attendant to a knight
3 **cavalry:** branch of an army made up of soldiers who fought on horseback
4 ***Yeoman:*** an attendant to a nobleman

His son was with him, a fine young squire—
A fiery lover and soldier in training,
with hair so curly, it looked as though it had been pressed.
I guessed he was about 20 years old.
85 He was of moderate height,
with great strength and agility.
He'd seen some cavalry service
in parts of northern Europe,
and had fought bravely in little time,
90 hoping to win his lady's favor.
His clothes were stitched as brightly as a meadow
with the freshest red and white flowers.
All day long, he sang or played the flute,
and was as youthful as the month of May.
95 His gown was short, his sleeves long and wide,
and he knew how to sit and ride on a horse.
He could make up and recite songs and poems,
and knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He hotly loved all night long
100 and slept as little as a nightingale.
He was courteous, humble, and eager to serve,
and carved meat for his father at his table.

The knight had a yeoman,
the only servant he chose to ride with.
105 This yeoman wore a green coat and hood,
and a sheath hung at his belt
full of bright, sharp, peacock-feathered arrows—
and because he took good care of his gear,
the feathers on those arrows never drooped.
110 And he carried a mighty bow in his hand.
His head was like a nut, and his face was brown.
He knew the craft of carpentry inside and out.
He wore a tough leather strap on his arm
to guard it from the bowstring. On one side

115 Hung at one side, and at the other slipped
A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped.
A medal of St. Christopher[5] he wore
Of shining silver on his breast, and bore
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,
120 That dangled from a baldrick of bright green.
He was a proper forester, I guess.
There also was a *Nun*, a Prioress,[6]
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.
Her greatest oath was only "By St. Loy!"
125 And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And well she sang a service, with a fine
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;
130 French in the Paris style she did not know.
At meat her manners were well taught withal;
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;
But she could carry a morsel up and keep
135 The smallest drop from falling on her breast.
For courtliness she had a special zest,
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean
That not a trace of grease was to be seen
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,
140 She reached a hand sedately for the meat.
She certainly was very entertaining,
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,
A stately bearing fitting to her place,
145 And to seem dignified in all her dealings.
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
She was so charitably solicitous
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.

5 **St. Christopher:** patron saint of travelers
6 **Prioress:** a high-ranking nun

he carried a shield and sword, and at the other he wore
a fine dagger, sharp as a spear and well-kept.
He wore a shining silver medal
of St. Christopher on his breast, and carried
a brilliantly polished hunting horn
that dangled from a bright, green shoulder harness.
I thought him a proper forester.
There also was a nun, a prioress,
with a very simple, modest smile.
She scarcely ever uttered even the mildest oath,
and she was known as Madam Eglantyne.
And she sang her prayers and hymns with a fine
tone through her nose, in a lovely way,
and she spoke the most charming French—
the kind they teach in the nunnery at Stratford [in England],
not the kind spoken in Paris.
When eating, she had marvelous manners.
She never let a crumb fall from her lips
or dipped her fingers too deep in the sauce.
She hung on to every tiny morsel,
and not even the smallest drop fell to her breast.
She had a special zest for fine conduct,
and she would wipe her upper lip so clean
that you couldn't find a trace of grease
on a cup after she drank from it. When eating,
she reached for the meat with a steady hand.
She was certainly very entertaining,
pleasant and friendly in her ways, and tried very hard
to imitate the ways of a royal court.
She had a proper manner that fit her rank well,
and she seemed most dignified in all she did.
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,
she was so kind and charitable
that she would weep at the mere sight of a mouse
caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.

And she had little dogs she would be feeding
With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.
And bitterly she wept if one were dead
Or someone took a stick and made it smart;
She was all sentiment and tender heart.
Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,
Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red,
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,
Almost a span across the brows, I own;
She was indeed by no means undergrown.
Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.
She wore a coral trinket on her arm,
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,
Whence hung a golden **brooch** of brightest sheen
On which there first was graven a crowned A,
And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*.

brooch: *ornament fastened to clothing with a pin*

Another *Nun*, the secretary at her cell,
Was riding with her, and *three Priests* as well.

A *Monk* there was, one of the finest sort
Who rode the country; hunting was his sport.
A manly man, to be an Abbot[7] able;
Many a dainty horse he had in stable.
His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.
The Rule of good St. Benet or St. Maur
As old and strict he tended to ignore;
He let go by the things of yesterday
And took the modern world's more spacious way.
He did not rate that text at a plucked hen
Which says that hunters are not holy men
And that a monk uncloistered is a mere
Fish out of water, flapping on the pier,

7 **Abbot:** man who is the head of an abbey, or community, of monks

And she was always feeding little dogs
on roasted meat, milk, or fine white bread.
And she wept bitterly if one died,
or if anybody hurt one with a stick.
She had a tender, sentimental heart.
She gathered her veil in a proper way;
her nose was elegant, and her eyes gray like glass.
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red;
her forehead was certainly fine and wide—
almost nine inches across, I think.
Indeed, she wasn't by any means small.
I noticed that her cloak was charming and graceful.
She wore a coral trinket on her arm
and a set of beads, the larger ones colored green.
From these hung a bright, shining, golden brooch
on which was carved an A with a crown on it—
and below that, "Love conquers all things."

Another nun, her secretary in her room,
rode with her, and three priests as well.

There was also a monk, one of the finest
to be found riding through the country; his sport was hunting.
He was a manly man, quite worthy to serve as an abbot,
and he had many charming horses in his stable.
When he rode, you might hear his bridle
jingle in the whistling wind—
yes, ring as loudly as the bell in the chapel
where this monk oversaw other monks.
All the old, strict rules that monks were supposed to live by
he tended to ignore.
He wasn't bothered by old-fashioned ideas
and took to more modern, freer ways.
He had no use at all for the old notion
that hunters are not holy men,
and that a monk outside his monastery is just
a fish out of water, flopping about on the pier.

That is to say a monk out of his cloister.
That was a text he held not worth an oyster;
And I agreed and said his views were sound;
Was he to study till his head went round
Poring over books in cloisters? Must he toil
As Austin bade and till the very soil?
Was he to leave the world upon the shelf?
Let Austin have his labor to himself.

This Monk was therefore a good man to horse;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as birds, to course.
Hunting a hare or riding at a fence
Was all his fun, he spared for no expense.
I saw his sleeves were garnished at the hand
With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin
He had a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;
Into a lover's knot it seemed to pass.
His head was bald and shone like looking-glass;
So did his face, as if it had been greased.
He was a fat and personable priest;
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.
They glittered like the flames beneath a kettle;
Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.
He was a prelate fit for exhibition,
He was not pale like a tormented soul.
He liked a fat swan best, and roasted whole.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

There was a *Friar*, a wanton one and merry,
A Limiter, a very festive fellow.
In all Four Orders there was none so mellow,
So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.
He'd fixed up many a marriage, giving each
Of his young women what he could afford her.
He was a noble pillar to his Order.
Highly beloved and intimate was he

No, he didn't believe that at all,
didn't think that notion worth an oyster,
and I agreed with his views completely.
Was he supposed to study till his head spun,
poring over books in monasteries? Must he work the soil
as St. Augustine instructed in his writings?
Was he to forget all about the world?
Augustine could work the soil for himself.

This monk was an excellent horseback rider,
and for hunting, he had greyhounds as swift as birds.
He had great fun hunting a hare or leaping a fence,
and spared no cost in doing so.
I noticed that the cuffs of his sleeves were sewn
with fine gray fur, the best in the land.
And fastened on his hood at his chin
was a finely made pin of gold,
which looked like a lover's knot.
His head was bald and shone like a mirror,
and so did his face, as if it were smeared with grease.
What a fat and friendly priest he was!
His bulging eyeballs were always moving
and glittered like flames beneath a kettle.
His boots were soft, his horse in fine condition.
He was a fine preacher, indeed—
not pale like a tortured soul.
He liked a fat swan roasted whole more than anything,
and his riding horse was as brown as a berry.

And then there was a wild and merry friar
with a license to beg—a very happy man.
He was the cheeriest friar to be found in any order,
so quick with a bold or well-turned phrase.
He'd arranged the marriages of many young women,
and at his own cost, too.
He was a noble supporter of his order,
and was loved and known

With County folk within his boundary,
And city dames of honor and possessions;
For he was qualified to hear confessions,
Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;
He had a special license from the Pope.
Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift
With pleasant absolution, for a gift.
He was an easy man in penance-giving
Where he could hope to make a decent living;
It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given
To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,
And should he give enough he knew in verity
The penitent repented in sincerity.
For many a fellow is so hard of heart
He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.
Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer
One should give silver for a poor Friar's care.
He kept his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,
And pocket-knives, to give to pretty girls.
And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,
For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.
At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.
His neck was whiter than a lily-flower
But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.
He knew the taverns well in every town
And every innkeeper and barmaid too
Better than lepers,[8] beggars and that crew,
For in so *eminent* a man as he
It was not fitting with the dignity
Of his position, dealing with a scum
Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come
Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers,
But only with the rich and victual-sellers.
But anywhere a profit might *accrue*
Courteous he was and lowly of service too.

8 **lepers:** people who suffer from leprosy, a contagious disease that causes discoloration, lumps on the skin, and sometimes disfigurement and deformities

220 by all the people in his county,
and also by honorable city ladies.
For he was more qualified to hear confessions
than even a priest—or so he said—
because he was licensed by the Pope himself.
225 He listened sweetly to sinners at confession
and repaid them with kindly forgiveness.
He forgave sins easily
when he could hope to gain a little money by it.
He was always glad to forgive a man
230 who was willing to make a gift to the poor order—
and if he gave enough, the friar knew
that the sinner was sincerely sorry.
For there are many fellows so hard-hearted
that they cannot weep, no matter how they hurt inside.
235 So instead of weeping and prayer,
they should give silver to a poor Friar.
He kept his pocket stuffed with hairpins
and pocketknives to give to pretty girls.
And his voice was certainly gay and strong,
240 for he sang well and played stringed instruments.
At singing songs, no one could match him.
His throat was whiter than a lily,
but he was strong enough to knock a tough man down.
In towns, he knew all the taverns,
245 and all the innkeepers and barmaids too—
knew them better than lepers, beggars, and their kind.
For he was a truly worthy man
who thought it beneath the dignity
of his position to deal with filthy lepers.
250 Nothing good could come
of hanging around those who live in slums and gutters.
It was better to know rich folks and food-sellers.
But wherever he had a chance to make some money,
he was always courteous and willing to serve.

Natural gifts like his were hard to match.
He was the finest beggar of his batch,
And, for his begging-district, paid a rent;
His brethren did no poaching where he went.
For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,
So pleasant was his holy how-d'ye-do
He got his farthing from her just the same
Before he left, and so his income came
To more than he laid out. And how he romped,
Just like a puppy! He was ever prompt
To arbitrate disputes on settling days
(For a small fee) in many helpful ways,
Not then appearing as your cloistered scholar
With threadbare habit hardly worth a dollar,
But much more like a Doctor or a Pope.
Of double-worsted was the semi-cope
Upon his shoulders, and the swelling fold
About him, like a bell about its mold
When it is casting, rounded out his dress.
He lisped a little out of wantonness
To make his English sweet upon his tongue.
When he had played his harp, or having sung,
His eyes would twinkle in his head as bright
As any star upon a frosty night.
This worthy's name was Hubert, it appeared.

There was a *Merchant* with a forking beard
And motley dress; high on his horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat
And on his feet daintily buckled boots.
He told of his opinions and pursuits
In solemn tones, he harped on his increase
Of capital; there should be sea-police
(He thought) upon the Harwich-Holland ranges;
He was expert at dabbling in exchanges.
This estimable Merchant so had set
His wits to work, none knew he was in debt,
He was so stately in administration,

255 Natural gifts like his were hard to match.
He was the finest beggar around,
and paid good rent for his begging district,
so no other friars begged where he did.
For though a widow might not have a shoe,
260 his holy talk was so pleasant
that he always managed to get some money from her
before he left. And so he always managed to take in
more money than he laid out. And how he romped,
just like a puppy! He was always quick
265 to referee on days when disputes were settled,
and was most helpful—for a small fee.
He wouldn't show up then as a monkish scholar
in worthless, threadbare clothes,
but much more like a doctor or a pope.
270 The short cloak on his shoulders
was made of expensive cloth,
and this completed his outfit well,
surrounding him like a bell when it is being cast on its mold.
He lisped a little,
275 trying to make his English sound sweeter.
When he sang or played his harp,
his eyes would twinkle as brightly
as any star on a frosty night.
I believe this worthy man's name was Hubert.

280 There was also a merchant with a forked beard
and multicolored clothes. He sat high on his horse
and wore a Flemish beaver hat on his head
and charming buckled boots on his feet.
He told of his opinions and activities
285 in serious tones, carrying on about how rich
he was getting. There should be sea police
(he thought) patrolling between Holland and England.
He was good at turning a profit
by exchanging money from different countries.
290 No one knew he was in debt, he seemed so shrewd
and skillful at managing things,

In loans and bargains and negotiation.
He was an excellent fellow all the same;
To tell the truth I do not know his name.

An *Oxford Cleric*, still a student though,
One who had taken logic long ago,
Was there; his horse was thinner than a rake,
And he was not too fat, I undertake,
But had a hollow look, a sober stare;
The thread upon his overcoat was bare.
He had found no preferment in the church
And he was too unworldly to make search
For secular employment. By his bed
He preferred having twenty books in red
And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,
Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.
Though a philosopher, as I have told,
He had not found the stone for making gold.[9]
Whatever money from his friends he took
He spent on learning or another book
And prayed for them most earnestly, returning
Thanks to them thus for paying for his learning.
His only care was study, and indeed
He never spoke a word more than was need,
Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

A *Sergeant at the Law* who paid his calls,
Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's
There also was, of noted excellence.
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.
He often had been Justice of Assize

wary: *showing caution about possible dangers or problems*

9 **philosopher . . . gold:** Alchemists, often referred to as *philosophers*, sought the secret of making gold from ordinary metals.

especially loans, bargains, and other kinds of business.
All the same, he was an excellent fellow—
but to tell the truth, I do not know his name.

295 And an Oxford clergyman—though still a student—
was also there. He had studied logic long ago.
His horse was thinner than a rake,
and I must say he was not too fat, himself.
He had a hollow look, a sober stare,
300 and he wore a threadbare overcoat.
He had not risen up through the ranks of the church
and was too unworldly to seek
worldly employment. He liked
having twenty books printed in red and black by his bed—
305 especially Aristotle. He preferred this
to having costly clothes, fiddle, or harp.
Though a philosopher, he had clearly not succeeded
in the alchemist's quest for making gold.
Whenever he took money from his friends,
310 he spent it on books and learning
then prayed for his friends most earnestly,
thus thanking them for paying for his studies.
Indeed, he cared for nothing but study,
and he never said a word more than he had to.
315 When he did, he was extremely respectful,
brief, to the point, and spoke of serious things.
His speech always had a highly moral tone,
and he was always glad to learn and teach.

And there was also a high-ranking lawyer
320 with many clients at St. Paul's [in London]—
a wary and wise man, noted for his excellence.
He was wise and worthy of respect,
or so he seemed, because he said so many fine things.
He often traveled to hear cases,

325 By letters patent, and in full commission.
His fame and learning and his high position
Had won him many a robe and many a fee.
There was no such conveyancer as he;
All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,
330 Not one conveyance could be called in question.
Though there was nowhere one so busy as he,
He was less busy than he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case and crime
Ever recorded since King William's[10] time.
335 He could dictate defenses or draft **deeds**;
No one could pinch a comma from his screeds
And he knew every statute off by rote.
He wore a homely parti-colored coat,
Girt with a silken belt of pin-stripe stuff;
340 Of his appearance I have said enough.

deeds: *legal documents regarding the ownership of property or legal rights*

There was a *Franklin*[11] with him, it appeared;
White as a daisy-petal was his beard.
A sanguine man, high-colored and benign,
He loved a morning sop of cake in wine.
345 He lived for pleasure and had always done,
For he was Epicurus' very son,
In whose opinion sensual delight
Was the one true felicity in sight.
As noted as St. Julian was for bounty
350 He made his household free to all the County.
His bread, his ale were finest of the fine
And no one had a better stock of wine.
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies
355 It positively snowed with meat and drink
And all the dainties that a man could think.
According to the seasons of the year
Changes of dish were ordered to appear.
He kept fat partridges in coops, beyond,

10 **King William:** William the Conqueror, who invaded England in 1066
11 ***Franklin:*** a wealthy landowner

325 commissioned by the king.
His fame, learning, and high position
had gotten him many robes and high fees.
There was no lawyer like him for dealing with property
disputes.
He treated all lands as freely owned property,
330 so no one could question his decisions.
Though he was the busiest of men,
he wasn't as busy as he seemed to be.
He knew of every judgment, case, and crime
recorded since the time of King William.
335 He could lay out defenses or draft deeds
so perfectly that no one could fault a comma,
and he knew every law in the books by heart.
He wore a simple, multicolored coat
tied with a pinstriped silk belt.
340 But I've said enough of his appearance.
A franklin was with this lawyer,
and he had a beard as white as a daisy petal.
He was a cheerful man, rosy-cheeked and kindly,
who loved to have a piece of cake soaked in wine for breakfast.
345 He had always lived for pleasure,
for he was a true follower of [the philosopher] Epicurus,
who said that sensual delight
was the only true happiness.
He was as noted as St. Julian for generosity,
350 and opened up his house to all the county.
His bread and ale were of the very finest,
and no one kept better wine.
His house was never short of bake-meat pies,
fish, and meat—and he had so much of these
355 that it positively snowed meat, drink,
and all other tasty things.
He ordered changes of the menu
according to the seasons of the year.
He kept fat partridges in coops

360 Many a bream and pike were in his pond.
Woe to the cook unless the sauce was hot
And sharp, or if he wasn't on the spot!
And in his hall a table stood arrayed
And ready all day long, with places laid.
365 As Justice at the Sessions none stood higher;
He often had been Member for the Shire.[12]
A dagger and a little purse of silk
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.
370 He was a model among landed gentry.

A *Haberdasher*, a *Dyer*, a *Carpenter*,
A *Weaver* and a *Carpet-maker* were
Among our ranks, all in the livery
Of one impressive guild-fraternity.[13]
375 They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass
For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass
But wrought with purest silver, which avouches
A like display on girdles and on pouches.
Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace
380 A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.
Their wisdom would have justified a plan
To make each one of them an alderman;
They had the capital and revenue,
Besides their wives declared it was their due.
385 And if they did not think so, then they ought;
To be called "*Madam*" is a glorious thought,
And so is going to church and being seen
Having your mantle carried, like a queen.

They had a *Cook* with them who stood alone
390 For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,
Sharp flavoring-powder and a spice for savor.
He could distinguish London ale by flavor,

12 **Shire:** the Parliament, or governmental body that makes laws in England
13 **guild-fraternity:** a medieval organization of people involved in similar trades

360 and filled his pond with fish.
Woe to the cook if the sauce wasn't hot
and sharp, or if he was too slow!
And in his hall, a table was spread
and ready all day long, with places laid.
365 He ranked highest at local court sessions,
for he had often served in Parliament.
A dagger and a little silk purse
hung on his belt, which was as white as milk.
As Sheriff, he collected taxes tirelessly.
370 He was a model among wealthy landowners.

A tailor, a dyer, a carpenter,
a weaver, and a carpet maker were also
with us. They wore the uniform
of their impressive guild.
375 They were so neat and fresh that their outfits
looked new. Their knives weren't decorated with brass,
but with pure silver,
and their belts and purses were just as fine.
Each seemed a worthy citizen, fit to sit
380 in a seat upon the platform in a guild hall.
They were all wise enough
to have been made town councilors.
They certainly had the wealth for it—
and besides, their wives thought they deserved it.
385 And after all, why wouldn't they think so?
To be called "Madam" is a glorious thought,
and so is going to church and having
your cloak carried, like a queen.

They had a cook with them who was unmatched
390 at boiling chicken with a marrow bone,
adding spice and powder for flavor.
He could tell London ales apart by taste,

And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
395 But what a pity—so it seemed to me,
That he should have an **ulcer** on his knee.
As for blancmange, he made it with the best.

ulcer: *open sore on an internal or external surface of the body*

There was a *Skipper* hailing from far west;
He came from Dartmouth, so I understood.
400 He rode a farmer's horse as best he could,
In a woolen gown that reached his knee.
A dagger on a lanyard falling free
Hung from his neck under his arm and down.
The summer heat had tanned his color brown,
405 And certainly he was an excellent fellow.
Many a draft of vintage, red and yellow,
He'd drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.
The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.
If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank,
410 He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.
As for his skill in **reckoning** his tides,
Currents and many another risk besides,
Moons, harbors, pilots, he had such dispatch
That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.
415 Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;
His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,
And he knew all the havens as they were
From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;
420 The barge he owned was called *The Maudelayne.*

reckoning: *calculating*

A *Doctor* too emerged as we proceeded;
No one alive could talk as well as he did
On points of medicine and of surgery,
For, being grounded in astronomy,
425 He watched his patient closely for the hours
When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers
Of favorable planets, then ascendant,
Worked on the images for his dependent.
The cause of every malady you'd got

and could roast, broil, fry, and boil,
and make good, thick soup and bake a tasty pie.
395 But it seemed a pity to me
that he had an ulcer on his knee.
As for chicken stew with almonds, no one made better.

There was a skipper who came from western parts—
way over in Dartmouth, I believe.
400 He rode a farmer's horse as well as he could
in a woolen gown that reached his knee.
A dagger on a cord hung freely
from his neck, down around his arms.
The summer heat had tanned him brown,
405 and he certainly was an excellent fellow.
In Bordeaux, he'd drunk many glasses
of red and white wine while the man who sold it dozed.
He wasn't a stickler for rules of conscience.
If he sank an enemy vessel in a fight,
410 he sent his prisoners home by water; they walked the plank.
As for his skill in reckoning tides,
currents, moons, harbors, pilots,
and many kinds of risks, he was so sharp
that he had no match in England or in Europe.
415 He was a hardy man, and sensible, too.
His beard had been shaken in many storms,
and he knew all the ports
from Gottland [in the Baltic Sea] to Cape Finisterre [in France],
and every creek in French Bretagne and in Spain.
420 The ship he owned was called the *Maudelayne*.

A doctor joined us too, as we went along.
No man alive could talk as well as he could
about medicine and surgery,
for he knew his astrology well.
425 He watched his patient closely,
and used his horoscope
to determine when the planets were favorable
and what spells and charms to use.
He knew what caused every sickness you could get,

430 He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;[14]
He knew their seat, their humor and condition.
He was a perfect practicing physician.
These causes being known for what they were,
He gave the man his medicine then and there.
435 All his apothecaries in a tribe
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe
And each made money from the other's guile;
They had been friendly for a goodish while.
He was well-versed in Aesculapius too
440 And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine.[15]
445 In his own diet he observed some measure;
There were no superfluities for pleasure,
Only digestives, nutritives and such.
He did not read the Bible very much.
In blood-red garments, slashed with bluish grey
450 And lined with taffeta, he rode his way;
Yet he was rather close as to expenses
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.
Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told.
He therefore had a special love of gold.

455 A worthy *woman* from beside *Bath* city
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
In making cloth she showed so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.
In all the parish not a dame dared stir

14 **dry, cold, moist or hot:** In Chaucer's time, sickness and health were thought to depend upon the four so-called elements—earth, air, fire, and water. Good health required a proper balance of these elements.

15 **Aesculapius . . . Gilbertine:** All these names are connected with the practice of medicine; Aesculapius is the Greek god of medicine.

whether dry, cold, moist, or hot,
and also where and how they affected the body.
He was really a perfect doctor.
Once he knew the cause of an illness,
he'd give the patient his medicine then and there.
All his druggists together
were ready with whatever he'd prescribe,
and each made money from the other's shrewdness,
for they'd been friends for quite a while.
He was well versed in the teachings of Aesculapius,
Hippocrates, Rufus,
Dioscorides, Galen,
Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesen, and Gilbertine.
He was careful in his own diet,
and never ate too much for pleasure—
only what was good for digestion and nutrition.
He did not read the Bible very much.
He went riding in bloodred clothes
with bluish-gray slashes, lined with smooth cloth.
All in all, he was rather tight-fisted
and kept all the gold he earned during plague times.
We've all heard that gold gladdens the heart,
so he had a special love for gold.

A worthy wife from near the city of Bath
was with us—somewhat deaf, which was a pity.
She made even better cloth
than the fabric makers in the great Flemish cities.
No woman of her neighborhood dared step

Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity.
Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.
Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.
A worthy woman all her life, what's more
She'd had five husbands, all at the church door,
Apart from other company in youth;
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;
She'd been to Rome and also to Boulogne,
St. James of Compostella and Cologne,
And she was skilled in wandering by the way.
She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.
Easily on an ambling horse she sat
Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;
She had a flowing mantle that concealed
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.
In company she liked to laugh and chat
And knew the remedies for love's mischances,
An art in which she knew the oldest dances.

A holy-minded man of good renown
There was, and poor, the *Parson*[16] to a town,
Yet he was rich in holy thought and work.
He also was a learned man, a clerk,
Who truly knew Christ's gospel and would preach it
Devoutly to **parishioners**, and teach it.
Benign and wonderfully diligent,
And patient when adversity was sent

parishioners: *people who belong to or attend a particular church*

16 ***Parson***: an appointed member of the clergy

in front of her toward the church altar—
and if they did, she became so angry
that she could be quite cruel.
Her shawls were finely woven,
and I'm sure the ones she wore on her head on Sundays
weighed a good ten pounds altogether.
Her hose were a fine, scarlet red
and tightly-gartered, and her shoes were soft and new.
Her face was bold, handsome, and reddish-colored.
She'd always been a worthy woman and had
married five husbands in proper church weddings—
apart from other lovers when she was young,
but we needn't speak of that right now.
She'd been to Jerusalem three times
and had seen and crossed many foreign rivers.
She'd been to Rome and Boulogne [in Italy,
and on other pilgrimages in Spain and Germany],
and was a well-seasoned traveler.
To tell the truth, she had a widely set gap between her teeth.
She sat easily on a jogging horse,
her head and neck well-covered, and wore a hat
as broad as a shield.
Her flowing cloak covered
her large hips, and she wore sharp spurs on her heels.
She liked to laugh and chat with people,
and knew how to cure love's sicknesses—
for she knew that old, old dance by heart.

There was also a well-known, holy-minded man—
the parson of a town. He was very poor,
but rich in pious thoughts and deeds.
He was learned and scholarly,
and knew Christ's gospel and would preach it
sincerely to his parishioners.
He was kind, extremely devoted,
and patient whenever there was trouble—

495 (For so he proved in much adversity)
He hated cursing to extort a fee,[17]
Nay rather he preferred beyond a doubt
Giving to poor parishioners round about
Both from church offerings and his property;
500 He could in little find sufficiency.
Wide was his parish, with houses far asunder,
Yet he neglected not in rain or thunder,
In sickness or in grief, to pay a call
On the remotest, whether great or small,
505 Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.
This noble example to his sheep he gave
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;
And it was from the Gospel he had caught
Those words, and he would add this figure too,
510 That if gold rust, what then will iron do?
For if a priest be foul in whom we trust
No wonder that a common man should rust;
And shame it is to see—let priests take stock—
A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.
515 The true example that a priest should give
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.
He did not set his benefice to hire
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
Or run to London to earn easy bread
520 By singing masses for the wealthy dead,
Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.
He stayed at home and watched over his fold
So that no wolf should make the sheep miscarry.
He was a shepherd and no mercenary.
525 Holy and virtuous he was, but then
Never contemptuous of sinful men,
Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,
But was discreet in teaching and benign.
His business was to show a fair behavior

17 **cursing to extort a fee:** excommunication, or depriving a person of church membership

495 and he found plenty of trouble, indeed.
He hated using excommunication to force people to make offerings.
Far from it, he preferred
giving church offerings and his own belongings
to poor parishioners,
500 so he often found it hard to get by.
His parish was large, with houses far and near,
but he was never neglectful even in thunder and rain.
When folks were sick or grieving, he'd pay them a call,
no matter how far away they were, or rich or poor,
505 and always on foot with a staff in his hand.
In this way, he first *showed* his flock a noble example,
then taught it afterwards.
He learned all this from the Gospel,
and he liked to add, in his own words,
510 "If gold rusts, what will iron do?"
For if a priest we trust proves to be wicked,
it's no wonder that a common man should rust.
And it's a shame to see (let priests take note)
a filthy shepherd with a snow-white flock.
515 A priest should give an example
of true cleanliness, showing how the sheep should live.
This parson did not hire someone to perform his own parish duties,
leaving his sheep trapped in filth.
Nor did he hurry to London to earn easy money
520 singing masses for the wealthy dead,
or join some rich religious brotherhood.
He stayed at home and watched over his flock,
making sure no wolf carried off any sheep.
He was a shepherd, not a money seeker.
525 But as holy and virtuous as he was,
he never looked down his nose at sinful folks—
was never proud or snobbish.
Instead, he was a prudent, kindly teacher.
His business was to show a good example,

530 And draw men thus to Heaven and their Savior,
Unless indeed a man were obstinate;
And such, whether of high or low estate,
He put to sharp rebuke, to say the least.
I think there never was a better priest.
535 He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,
No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.
Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore
He taught, but followed it himself before.

There was a *Plowman* with him there, his brother;
540 Many a load of dung one time or other
He must have carted through the morning dew.
He was an honest worker, good and true,
Living in peace and perfect charity,
And, as the gospel bade him, so did he,
545 Loving God best with all his heart and mind
And then his neighbor as himself, repined
At no misfortune, slacked for no content,
For steadily about his work he went
To thrash his corn, to dig or to manure
550 Or make a ditch; and he would help the poor
For love of Christ and never take a penny
If he could help it, and, as prompt as any,
He paid his tithes[18] in full when they were due
On what he owned, and on his earnings too.
555 He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

There was a *Reeve*,[19] also a *Miller* there,
A College *Manciple*[20] from the Inns of Court,[21]
A papal *Pardoner* and, in close consort,
A Church-Court *Summoner*,[22] riding at a trot,
560 And finally myself—that was the lot.

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18 **tithes:** one-tenth of a person's income paid to support the church
19 ***Reeve:*** manager of an estate
20 ***Manciple:*** servant who buys food
21 **Inns of Court:** London law schools
22 ***Summoner:*** one who summons people to a church court

530 and in that way, draw men to heavenly salvation—
unless a man happened to be stubborn.
If so, he would scold him sharply,
to say the least, whether he was high-born or low.
I don't think there was ever a better priest.
535 He never sought pomp or glory,
nor did he quibble about what he believed.
He taught the same lessons as Christ and His Twelve Apostles,
but followed those lessons himself first.

His brother, a plowman, came along with him.
540 He must have carted many a load of manure
through the morning dew at one time or other.
He was a good, true, honest worker,
and lived a peaceful, kindly existence,
always doing as the Gospel said.
545 He loved God best with all his heart and mind,
and then his neighbor as himself.
He never complained over misfortune, and never slacked off
in his work, just steadily
thrashed his corn, dug, fertilized,
550 or made a ditch. And he helped the poor
for love of Christ, never asking a penny
for it. And he was always prompt
to fully pay his tithes when they were due—
not just on what he owned, but also on his earnings.
555 He wore a heavy jacket and rode a mare.

There were also a reeve, a miller,
a manciple from the Inns of Court,
and a pardoner. Along with the pardoner
rode a church-court summoner at a trot.
560 Finally, there was myself—and that was everybody.

The *Miller* was a chap of sixteen stone,
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.
He did well out of them, for he could go
And win the ram at any wrestling show.
565 Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast
He could heave any door off hinge and post,
Or take a run and break it with his head.
His beard, like any sow or fox, was red
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;
570 And, at its very tip, his nose displayed
A wart on which there stood a tuft of hair
Red as the bristles in an old sow's ear.
His nostrils were as black as they were wide.
He had a sword and buckler at his side,
575 His mighty mouth was like a furnace door.
A wrangler and buffoon, he had a store
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.
His was a master-hand at stealing grain.
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew
580 Its quality and took three times his due—
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!
He wore a hood of blue and a white coat.
He liked to play his bagpipes up and down
And that was how he brought us out of town.

585 The *Manciple* came from the Inner Temple;
All caterers might follow his example
In buying victuals; he was never rash
Whether he bought on credit or paid cash.
He used to watch the market most precisely
590 And got in first, and so he did quite nicely.
Now isn't it a marvel of God's grace
That an illiterate fellow can outpace
The wisdom of a heap of learned men?
His masters—he had more than thirty then—

The miller weighed some 220 pounds or so—
a big, bony, muscular fellow.
His strength served him well, for he could
win a ram at any wrestling contest.
565 Broad, knotty, and big-shouldered, he claimed
he could rip any door off its hinges
or break it open by running at it with his head.
His beard was as red as any sow or fox,
and was as broad as a shovel.
570 On the very tip of his nose
was a wart with a tuft of hair
as red as the bristles in an old sow's ear,
and his nostrils were wide and black.
He carried a sword and shield,
575 and his mighty mouth was like a furnace door.
A fighter and a fool, he had many
tavern stories, most of them filthy.
He was an expert at stealing grain.
By feeling it with his thumb, he could tell
580 its quality, then took three times what he'd paid for.
By God, he had a gold thumb for judging oats!
He wore a blue hood and a white coat.
He liked to play his bagpipes everywhere,
and did so as we rode out of town.

585 The manciple came from one of the Inns of Court.
All caterers might learn a thing or two from him
about buying food. He never rushed it,
whether buying on credit or with cash.
He used to watch the market carefully,
590 and got better deals than anybody.
Now isn't it a marvel of God's favor
that an illiterate fellow can outdo
the wisdom of many learned men?
For he had more than 30 masters

All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,
Could have produced a dozen from their College
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game
To any Peer in England you could name,
And show him how to live on what he had
Debt-free (unless of course the Peer were mad)
Or be as frugal as he might desire,
And make them fit to help about the Shire
In any legal case there was to try;
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye.

The *Reeve* was old and choleric and thin;
His beard was shaven closely to the skin,
His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop
Above his ears, and he was docked on top
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,
Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.
He kept his bins and garners very trim;
No auditor could gain a point on him.
And he could judge by watching drought and rain
The yield he might expect from seed and grain.
His master's sheep, his animals and hens,
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens
Were wholly trusted to his government.
He had been under contract to present
The accounts, right from his master's earliest years.
No one had ever caught him in arrears.
No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,
He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;
Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.
He had a lovely dwelling on a heath,
Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.
A better hand at bargains than his lord,
He had grown rich and had a store of treasure
Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure
His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,

595 versed in the most difficult legal knowledge,
who could produce a dozen students
fit to manage land, rents, and game
for any nobleman in England. And those students
could show a nobleman how to live without debt
600 (unless, of course, the nobleman was mad),
and live as thriftily as he liked.
And these students could also serve the county
in any legal case to be tried.
And yet, this manciple was shrewder than them all.

605 The reeve was old, thin, and irritable.
His beard was shaved close to the skin,
his hair was cut
above his ears, and he was shaved bald on top
just like a priest. His legs were as lean
610 as sticks, and he had no calf to speak of.
He managed his barrels and storage buildings so well
that no inspector could find anything against him.
And he could judge from dryness or rain
the amount of seed and grain he might need.
615 His master's sheep, hens,
pigs, horses, dairies, storage places, and cattle pens
were completely trusted to his care.
He'd been in charge of all accounts
since his master's earliest years.
620 No one had ever caught him with unpaid debts.
No manager, laborer, or herdsman dared pull anything on him,
for he knew all their tricks and dodges.
He was feared like the plague by those who worked under him.
He had a lovely house out in the fields,
625 shaded by green, leafy trees.
He had a better way with bargains than his lord,
so he had grown rich and had a store of treasure
tucked away. Yet he used some of it to please
his lord with loans or gifts,

To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.
When young he'd learnt a useful trade and still
He was a carpenter of first-rate skill.
The stallion-cob he rode at a slow trot
Was dapple-grey and bore the name of Scot.
He wore an overcoat of bluish shade
And rather long; he had a rusty blade
Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,
From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.
His coat was tucked under his belt and splayed.
He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

There was a *Summoner* with us at that Inn,
His face on fire, like a cherubin,
For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,
He was as hot and lecherous[23] as a sparrow.
Black scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.
Children were afraid when he appeared.
No quicksilver, lead ointment, tartar creams,
No brimstone, no boracic, so it seems,
Could make a salve that had the power to bite,
Clean up or cure his whelks of knobby white
Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.
Garlic he loved, and onions too, and leeks,
And drinking strong red wine till all was hazy.
Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,
And wouldn't speak a word except in Latin
When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in;
He only had a few, say two or three,
That he had mugged up out of some **decree**;
No wonder, for he heard them every day.
And, as you know, a man can teach a jay
To call out "Walter" better than the Pope.
But had you tried to test his wits and grope
For more, you'd have found nothing in the bag.
Then *"Questio quid juris"* was his tag.

decree: *formal and authoritative order*

23 **lecherous:** vulgar and ignorant

630 for which he received thanks, and even coats and hoods.
When young, he'd learned a useful trade,
and he was still a first-rate carpenter.
He rode at a slow trot on a thickset,
dapple-gray stallion named Scot.
635 He wore a rather long, bluish overcoat,
and had a rusty blade
slung at his side. I heard that he came
from Norfolk [in eastern England], near a place called
Baldeswell.
His coat was tucked into his belt,
640 and he rode last in our group.

A summoner was with us at the inn
with a fiery, red face, like an angel's,
for he had huge pimples. He had narrow eyes,
and he was as hot and lewd as a sparrow.
645 He had black, scabby brows and a thin beard,
and he frightened children when he came along.
No mercury, lead ointment, tartar creams,
sulfur, or borax
worked as a cure
650 for his knobby, white swellings
or got rid of those pimples of his.
He loved garlic, onions, and leeks,
and drank too much strong, red wine.
When drunk, he would shout and jabber as if crazy
655 and only spoke in Latin,
using brief quotes he'd happened to learn.
He only knew two or three phrases
that he'd picked up out of some decree—
which was no surprise, for he heard decrees every day.
660 As you know, a man can teach a bird
to say "Walter" better than the pope could say it.
But if you tested that bird's wits,
you'd find it knew nothing more than mere words.
He liked to say the Latin phrase for "how does the law apply?"

He was a noble varlet and a kind one,
You'd meet none better if you went to find one.
Why, he'd allow—just for a quart of wine—
Any good lad to keep a concubine
A twelvemonth and dispense him altogether!
And he had finches of his own to feather:
And if he found some rascal with a maid
He would instruct him not to be afraid
In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse
(Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)
For in his purse the punishment should be.
"Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell," said he.
But well I know he lied in what he said;
A curse should put a guilty man in dread,
For curses kill, as shriving brings, salvation.
We should beware of excommunication.
Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress
On any young fellow in the diocese.
He knew their secrets, they did what he said.
He wore a garland set upon his head
Large as the holly-bush upon a stake
Outside an ale-house, and he had a cake,
A round one, which it was his joke to wield
As if it were intended for a shield.

He and a gentle *Pardoner* rode together,
A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,
Just back from visiting the Court of Rome.
He loudly sang, *"Come hither, love, come home!"*
The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,
No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.
In driblets fell his locks behind his head
Down to his shoulders which they overspread;
Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.
He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;
The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,

He was as kind and noble a rascal
as you could ever hope to find.
Why, for just a quart of wine, he'd allow
any good lad to keep a prostitute
a full year without paying!
He did have ways getting money out of people, though.
If he caught some rascal with a girl,
he'd teach him not to be afraid
of excommunication by the Archdeacon—
although he'd tell that lad to fear the Archdeacon's purse,
which was where the real punishment was.
"His purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell," he'd say.
But I know well that he lied in saying so.
Excommunication should fill a guilty man with dread,
for it destroys salvation as surely as confession brings it.
We should beware of excommunication.
Anyway, the man could put pressure
on any young fellow in the church district.
He knew their secrets, and they did what he said.
Upon his head he wore a garland
as large as the holly wreaths
you find on tavern signs, and he had a round cake
which he'd jokingly wave
as if it were a shield.

He rode together with a gentle pardoner—
the same type of fellow, from Charing Cross [in London],
just back from visiting the court of Rome.
He'd loudly sing that song, "Come Hither, Love, Come Home!"
The summoner would sing right along,
sounding twice as strong as any trumpet.
The pardoner had bright yellow hair,
which hung down smoothly like yellow fabric.
His locks fell in wisps behind his head
and spread over his shoulders,
falling thinly, one by one, like rat tails.
To please himself, he wore no hood on his head.
He kept it inside his satchel,

He aimed at riding in the latest mode;
But for a little cap his head was bare
And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.
705 He'd sewed a holy relic on his cap;
His wallet lay before him on his lap,
Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.
He had the same small voice a goat has got.
His chin no beard had harbored, nor would harbor,
710 Smoother than ever chin was left by barber.
I judge he was a gelding, or a mare.
As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware
There was no pardoner of equal grace,
For in his trunk he had a pillow-case
715 Which he asserted was Our Lady's veil.
He said he had a gobbet of the sail
Saint Peter had the time when he made bold
To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.
He had a cross of metal set with stones
720 And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones.
And with these relics, any time he found
Some poor up-country parson to astound,
In one short day, in money down, he drew
More than the parson in a month or two,
725 And by his flatteries and prevarication
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.
But still to do him justice first and last
In church he was a noble ecclesiast.
How well he read a lesson or told a story!
730 But best of all he sang an Offertory,
For well he knew that when that song was sung
He'd have to preach and tune his honey-tongue
And (well he could) win silver from the crowd.
That's why he sang so merrily and loud.

735 Now I have told you shortly, in a clause,
The rank, the array, the number and the cause
Of our assembly in this company
In Southwark, at that high-class hostelry
Known as *The Tabard*, close beside *The Bell*.

for he wanted to ride in the latest style.
So his head was bare except for a little cap,
and he had bulging eyeballs like a hare.
705 He'd sewn upon his cap a holy relic,
and his satchel lay before him on his lap,
all full of pardons from Rome, fresh and hot.
His small voice sounded like a goat's,
and his chin had always been beardless, and always would be—
710 smoother than a barber ever left a chin.
I suspect he wasn't quite altogether a man.
As for his trade, there was no pardoner in England,
north or south, to match him,
for in his trunk he had a pillowcase,
715 which he claimed to be the Virgin Mary's veil.
He said he had a piece of the sail of St. Peter's boat,
from when Peter tried to walk the waves
and was rescued by Jesus.
He had a metal cross with stones set in it
720 and a bottle of pigs' bones.
He'd get out these relics any time he found
some easily impressed, poor country parson,
and in a single day, he'd make more money
than the parson did in a month or two.
725 And with flatteries and lies,
he'd make monkeys of the priest and his flock.
But to be completely fair to him,
he really was a fine preacher in church.
How well he read a lesson or told a story!
730 He was at his best chanting when bread and wine were offered.
For he knew that when that song was over,
he'd have to tune his honey tongue and preach his best
to win silver from the crowd—and then he'd do just that.
That's why he sang so loudly and merrily.

735 So now I've briefly told you
all about these people—their ranks, appearances, and number,
and also why they had gathered
in Southwark, in that high-class inn
called the Tabard, not far from the Bell.

740 And now the time has come for me to tell
How we behaved that evening; I'll begin
After we had alighted at the Inn,
Then I'll report our journey, stage by stage,
All the remainder of our pilgrimage.
745 But first I beg of you, in courtesy,
Not to condemn me as unmannerly
If I speak plainly and with no concealings
And give account of all their words and dealings,
Using their very phrases as they fell.
750 For certainly, as you all know so well,
He who repeats a tale after a man
Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,
Each single word, if he remembers it,
However rudely spoken or unfit,
755 Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,
The things pretended and the phrases new.
He may not flinch although it were his brother,
He may as well say one word as another.
And Christ Himself spoke broad in Holy Writ,
760 Yet there is no scurrility in it,
And Plato says, for those with power to read,
"The word should be as cousin to the deed."
Further I beg you to forgive it me
If I neglect the order and degree
765 And what is due to rank in what I've planned.
I'm short of wit as you will understand.

Our *Host* gave us great welcome; everyone
Was given a place and supper was begun.
He served the finest victuals you could think,
770 The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.
A very striking man our Host withal,
And fit to be a marshal in a hall.
His eyes were bright, his girth a little wide;
There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.
775 Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,
There was no manly attribute he lacked,

740 And now it's time for me to say
what we did that evening. I'll start
after we'd all arrived at the Inn.
Then I'll describe our journey, little by little,
and everything else about our pilgrimage.
745 But first, I must ask you for a favor.
Please don't think me vulgar
if I speak plainly and frankly
as I tell of all these people's words and deeds,
using the very phrases that they used.
750 For you know very well
that anyone who repeats a tale
is obliged to say, as nearly as he can,
every single word exactly as he remembers it,
no matter how rude or improper.
755 Otherwise, the tale he tells will be untrue,
with made-up events and language.
Even if he's repeating his own brother's words,
he must say them accurately.
For Christ himself spoke bluntly in the Bible,
760 and yet there's no coarseness in what he said.
And Plato, if you have read him,
says, "The word should fit the deed."
Also, I beg you to forgive me
if I sometimes fail to take proper account
765 of the ranks and classes of the characters I speak of.
I'm not too bright, as you will learn.

Our host welcomed us warmly. Everyone
found a place at the table, and supper started.
He served the finest food you could imagine,
770 with strong wine that we were glad to drink.
Moreover, our Host was a very striking man,
fit to take charge of a nobleman's banquet.
His eyes were bright, and he was somewhat stocky.
You couldn't find a better citizen in Cheapside [in London].
775 His speech was bold, but he was wise and tactful,
and he lacked no manly quality—

What's more he was a merry-hearted man.
After our meal he jokingly began
To talk of sport, and, among other things
780 After we'd settled up our reckonings,
He said as follows: "Truly, gentlemen,
You're very welcome and I can't think when
—Upon my word I'm telling you no lie—
I've seen a gathering here that looked so spry,
785 No, not this year, as in this tavern now.
I'd think you up some fun if I knew how.
And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred
To please you, costing nothing, on my word.
You're off to Canterbury—well, God speed!
790 Blessed St. Thomas answer to your need!
And I don't doubt, before the journey's done
You mean to while the time in tales and fun.
Indeed, there's little pleasure for your bones
Riding along and all as dumb as stones.
795 So let me then propose for your enjoyment,
Just as I said, a suitable employment.
And if my notion suits and you agree
And promise to submit yourselves to me
Playing your parts exactly as I say
800 Tomorrow as you ride along the way,
Then by my father's soul (and he is dead)
If you don't like it you can have my head!
Hold up your hands, and not another word."

Well, our opinion was not long deferred,
805 It seemed not worth a serious debate;
We all agreed to it at any rate
And bade him issue what commands he would.
"My lords," he said, "now listen for your good,
And please don't treat my notion with disdain.
810 This is the point. I'll make it short and plain.
Each one of you shall help to make things slip
By telling two stories on the outward trip
To Canterbury, that's what I intend,
And, on the homeward way to journey's end

and what's more, he was a merry-hearted man.
After our meal, he began jokingly
to talk of fun. After we'd settled
780 up our bills, he said this,
among other things: "Gentlemen,
you're truly welcome. Upon my word,
I'm telling you no lie—I can't remember when
I've seen a gathering here that looked so lively.
785 No, not this year, not in this tavern.
I wish I could think up some fun for you.
And as it happens, a thought just dawned on me
to please you—and will cost nothing, I promise.
You're off to Canterbury—well, God give you good luck!
790 And may blessed St. Thomas answer all your wishes!
And before the journey's over, I'm sure
you'll pass the time with stories and fun.
Indeed, it would give your bones little pleasure
to ride along and say nothing at all.
795 So let me suggest a suitable activity
for your enjoyment, just as I said.
And if you like this idea, then promise
to do as I tell you,
playing your parts exactly as I say
800 tomorrow as you ride along.
And then, by the soul of my dead father,
if you don't like it, you can have my head!
Hold up your hands if you want to hear what I've got in mind."

Well, it didn't take long for us to decide,
805 nor did it seem worth a serious debate.
We all agreed at once
and asked him to give his instructions.
"My lords," he said, "listen for your own good,
and please don't sneer at my idea.
810 Here it is, I'll make it short and plain.
To help the time pass, each of you
shall tell two stories on the outward trip
to Canterbury—that's what I have in mind.
Then, on the journey back home,

Another two, tales from the days of old;
And then the man whose story is best told,
That is to say who gives the fullest measure
Of good morality and general pleasure,
He shall be given a supper, paid by all,
Here in this tavern, in this very hall,
When we come back again from Canterbury.
And in the hope to keep you bright and merry
I'll go along with you myself and ride
All at my own expense and serve as guide.
I'll be the judge, and those who won't obey
Shall pay for what we spend upon the way.
Now if you all agree to what you've heard
Tell me at once without another word,
And I will make arrangements early for it."

Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it
Delightedly, and made entreaty too
That he should act as he proposed to do,
Become our Governor in short, and be
Judge of our tales and general referee,
And set the supper at a certain price.
We promised to be ruled by his advice
Come high, come low; unanimously thus
We set him up in judgement over us.
More wine was fetched, the business being done;
We drank it off and up went everyone
to bed without a moment of delay.

Early next morning at the spring of day
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,
Gathering us together in a flock,
And off we rode at slightly faster pace
Than walking to St. Thomas' watering-place;
And there our Host drew up, began to ease
His horse, and said, "Now, listen if you please,
My lords! Remember what you promised me.

815 you'll tell another two stories from olden days.
We'll see which man tells the finest story—
that is, whose story has the best
moral message and is also the most pleasant.
He shall have his supper, paid by all of us,
820 right here in this tavern
when we come back again from Canterbury.
And to keep everyone happy and cheerful,
I'll ride along with you myself
at my own expense, serving as your guide.
825 I'll be the judge, and anyone who doesn't obey me
shall pay for what we spend along the way.
Now if you all agree to what you've heard,
tell me right away,
and I'll start arranging everything."

830 Of course, we all agreed. In fact, we swore to it
with joy. And we begged him
to do just as he proposed to do—
in short, to take charge of us,
judge and referee our tales,
835 then serve a supper at a certain price.
We promised to do just as he said,
no matter what. And so, with total agreement,
we made him judge over us all.
Business was then done, and more wine was served.
840 We drank it, and then everyone
went to bed without a moment's delay.

Early next morning, right at daybreak,
our host got up and roused us like a rooster,
gathering us together in a flock.
845 Then we rode off at a pace slightly faster than a walk
until we got to St. Thomas' watering place.
There our host slowed down his horse
and said, "Now, please listen,
my lords! Remember what you promised me.

850 If evensong and matins will agree
Let's see who shall be first to tell a tale.
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,
However much the journey costs, he pays.
855 Now draw for cut and then we can depart;
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start."

850 If you feel the same way this morning as you did last night,
let's see who tells a tale first.
And as I hope to keep on drinking good wine and ale,
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys
will pay for the journey, no matter how much it costs.
855 Now let's draw straws before we leave.
The man who draws the shortest straw shall start."

After You Read *The Canterbury Tales: "The Prologue"*

Literary Lens: Irony

The narrator uses irony while describing the Friar and the Pardoner, which challenges readers to draw conclusions about them. Make a chart like the one below, and complete it with examples of how irony is used for these and other characters. An example is provided.

Pilgrim	What the Narrator Says	What the Narrator Means
Friar	He was ever prompt / to arbitrate disputes on settling days / (For a small fee) in many helpful ways	He is only helpful if he is paid.

Explore Context: The Church in Medieval England

How is the church portrayed in "The Prologue?" Write a paragraph giving specific details about the church's influence in the pilgrim's lives. Then research the church in England at the time of Chaucer and add a second paragraph explaining how your findings reinforce or contradict the portrayal of the church in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Apply and Create: Characterization

Choose two pilgrims, and reread their sections in "The Prologue." Highlight details about their clothes, mannerisms, horses, and physical features. Use these details to create an image of each pilgrim. Drawings, collages, or photographs are a few possibilities.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpts from *The Prologue* and answer the questions that follow.

He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.

* * *

He'd seen some service with the cavalry
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy
And had done valiantly in little space
Of time, in hope to win his lady's grace.

* * *

He could make songs and poems and recite,
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale
He slept as little as a nightingale.

1. Does the Squire seem to follow the codes of chivalry and courtly love? Give specific reasons for your answer.
2. What is the narrator's attitude toward the squire? How does it compare to his attitude toward the Monk? Give evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. What seems to be the motivation for the Squire's actions and choice of hobbies?

Before You Read *The Canterbury Tales: The Pardoner's Tale*

Geoffrey Chaucer's original plan was to write 120 tales—each pilgrim would tell a tale on the way to the shrine and then tell another tale on the way home. He didn't live to complete his masterpiece, however, having written only twenty-four tales before he died. In fact, his work was so incomplete that the pilgrims never even reach the shrine.

Several questions surround *The Canterbury Tales:* Why a pilgrimage? Who were the pilgrims? Some critics contend that the idea came to him while he lived in Greenwich, a town on route to Canterbury. He most likely saw many pilgrims pass through on their way to the shrine, and pilgrims were known for telling tales during their journey. The familiarity of the characters and their realistic speech has led some critics to argue that the pilgrims were in fact depictions of people Chaucer actually knew. Others feel his characters were based on medieval stories of the day or that they sprang from his keen observations of daily life. Theories notwithstanding, it is apparent that Chaucer had an unusual talent for making characters come to life.

Literary Lens

Frame Story Chaucer uses a frame story—or a story within a story—to unify his collection of tales. Unlike other frame stories, which feature a single narrator or narrators from one social class, Chaucer's narrators represent members of many social classes as well as occupations. Their stories reflect their rank. For example, the Knight tells a tale of courtly love. The Pardoner—whose job is to sell documents that supposedly save people from their sins—is a corrupt man who tells a tale of three men who end up dying due to their own selfishness. Chaucer links the stories using dialogue among the pilgrims. A tale is often told in response to the previous one.

Chaucer's Language

Chaucer is considered England's first great writer, and he did a great deal to establish English as a literary language. In 1066, the French-speaking Normans conquered England, establishing French as the preferred language for poetry. But from the start of his literary career, Chaucer wrote poetry in Middle English, although his earliest works were heavily based on French styles and themes. His works became very popular and influential, and many writers tried to imitate Chaucer's style. When the printing press was introduced in England during the late fifteenth century, *The Canterbury Tales* was one of the first works printed.

The tales you are about to read include parallel text on facing pages. Read the original text first. Use the parallel text to check your understanding.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. What are some examples of storytelling today? Explain how you think storytelling has evolved from Chaucer's time to today.
2. The Pardoner could be thought of as a scam artist. What are some ways people try to scam others out of money today? Do you think there are any similarities with scams today and scams during Chaucer's time?
3. The story you are about to read, "The Pardoner's Tale," is about greed. Analyze the causes of greed. What are its harmful effects?

from The Pardoner's Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer
translated by Nevill Coghill

The Prologue

"My lords," he said, "in churches where I preach
I cultivate a haughty kind of speech
And ring it out as roundly as a bell;
I've got it all by heart, the tale I tell.
I have a text, it always is the same
And always has been, since I learnt the game,
Old as the hills and fresher than the grass,
Radix malorum est cupiditas.

I preach, as you have heard me say before,
And tell a hundred lying mockeries more.
I take great pains, and stretching out my neck
To east and west I crane about and peck
Just like a pigeon sitting on a barn.
My hands and tongue together spin the yarn
And all my antics are a joy to see.
The curse of avarice and cupidity
Is all my sermon, for it frees the pelf.
Out come the pence, and specially for myself,
For my exclusive purpose is to win
And not at all to castigate their sin.
Once dead what matter how their souls may fare?
They can go blackberrying, for all I care!

And thus I preach against the very **vice**
I make my living out of—avarice.

vice: *weakness of character or behavior; bad habit*

from The Pardoner's Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer
translated by Nevill Coghill

Parallel Text

The Prologue

"My lords," he said, "when I preach in churches,
I speak in a lofty style,
and my voice rings out as loudly as a bell.
I know what I'm going to say by heart,
and I use a saying which I've never changed
since I first learned this game.
It is as old as the hills, yet fresher than the grass:
'The love of money is the root of all evil.'

As I said before, I tell
a hundred false tales whenever I preach.
I really go all out, stretching my neck
to the east and west, and pecking
just like a pigeon sitting in a barn.
I spin my yarn, using hands and tongue together,
and my tricks are a joy to see.
My sermon is all about the curse
of greed and selfishness, for that loosens the purse strings.
Then out comes money, just for me.
For my real purpose is to get richer,
not at all to criticize sin.
Once they're dead, who cares what happens to their souls?
They can go gathering blackberries for all I care!

And so I preach against the very vice
I make my living out of—greed.

And yet however guilty of that sin
Myself, with others I have power to win
Them from it, I can bring them to repent;
But that is not my principal intent.
Covetousness is both the root and stuff
Of all I preach. That ought to be enough.

"Well, then I give examples thick and fast
From bygone times, old stories from the past.
A yokel mind loves stories from of old,
Being the kind it can repeat and hold.
What! Do you think, as long as I can preach
And get their silver for the things I teach,
That I will live in poverty, from choice?
That's not the counsel of my inner voice!
No! Let me preach and beg from kirk to kirk
And never do an honest job of work,
No, nor make baskets, like St. Paul, to gain
A livelihood. I do not preach in vain.
There's no apostle[1] I would counterfeit;
I mean to have money, wool and cheese and wheat
Though it were given me by the poorest lad
Or poorest village widow, though she had
A string of starving children, all agape.
No, let me drink the liquor of the grape
And keep a jolly wench in every town!

"But listen, gentlemen; to bring things down
To a conclusion, would you like a tale?
Now as I've drunk a draft of corn-ripe ale,
By God it stands to reason I can strike
On some good story that you all will like.
For though I am a wholly vicious man
Don't think I can't tell moral tales. I can!
Here's one I often preach when out for winning. . . ."

1 **apostle:** any of the early followers of Jesus who carried the Christian message into the world

But although I'm guilty of that sin
myself, I have the power to save
others from it and bring them to repent.
Even so, that's not what I'm really trying to do.
Envy is both the message and the cause
of all my preaching. That ought to be enough.

"Well, I keep stories coming thick and fast
—old stories from bygone times.
A simpleton loves stories from long ago,
because they're easier to repeat and remember.
What! Do you think I'll willingly live in poverty
as long as I can preach
and get people's silver by it?
My conscience doesn't tell me to do that!
No! Let me preach and beg from church to church
and never take an honest job.
I'll not make baskets to earn a living
like St. Paul did. I do not preach for nothing.
There's no apostle I want to imitate.
I mean to have money, wool, cheese, and wheat.
I don't care if it's given to me by the poorest lad in the village—
or by the poorest widow, either, even if she has
a bunch of starving children with their mouths hanging open.
No, let me drink wine
and keep a jolly girl in every town!

"But listen, gentlemen. To get right
to the point, do you want a story?
Now that I've drunk a glass of tasty ale,
by God, you can be sure I'll tell
some good story that you all will like.
For even though I'm completely vicious,
don't think I can't tell moral tales. I can!
Here's one I often preach when I'm really out for money. . . ."

The Pardoner's Tale

It's of three rioters[2] I have to tell
Who, long before the morning service bell,
60 Were sitting in a tavern for a drink.
And as they sat, they heard the hand-bell clink
Before a coffin going to the grave;
One of them called the little tavern-knave
And said "Go and find out at once—look spry!—
65 Whose corpse is in that coffin passing by;
And see you get the name correctly too."
"Sir," said the boy, "no need, I promise you;
Two hours before you came here I was told.
He was a friend of yours in days of old,
70 And suddenly, last night, the man was slain,
Upon his bench, face up, dead drunk again.
There came a privy thief, they call him Death,
Who kills us all round here, and in a breath
He speared him through the heart, he never stirred.
75 And then Death went his way without a word.
He's killed a thousand in the present plague,
And, sir, it doesn't do to be too vague
If you should meet him; you had best be wary.
Be on your guard with such an adversary,

2 **rioters:** revelers; partygoers

The Pardoner's Tale

"I'm going to tell a tale of three rioters.
Long before the morning church bells rang,
60 they were sitting in a tavern, drinking.
As they sat, they heard the clink of a little funeral bell
going in front of a coffin headed for the grave.
One of them called the little serving boy
and said, "Go out there at once—look lively!
65 And find out whose corpse is in that coffin passing by.
And be sure to get the name right, too."
"Sir," said the boy, "I promise you, there is no need.
I was told two hours before you showed up here.
He used to be a friend of yours,
70 and suddenly, last night, he was killed,
lying face up on his bench, dead drunk as usual.
A cunning thief named Death,
who kills us all around here, killed him. Death speared your friend
through the heart with a breath, and he never stirred again.
75 Then Death went away without a word.
He's killed a thousand in the plague lately,
and sir, you'd better take care
if you should meet him. Be cautious
and on your guard against an enemy like that,

Be primed to meet him everywhere you go,
That's what my mother said. It's all I know."

The publican joined in with, "By St. Mary,
What the child says is right; you'd best be wary,
This very year he killed, in a large village
A mile away, man, woman, serf at tillage,
Page in the household, children—all there were.
Yes, I imagine that he lives round there.
It's well to be prepared in these alarms,
He might do you dishonor." "Huh, God's arms!"
The rioter said, "Is he so fierce to meet?
I'll search for him, by Jesus, street by street.
God's blessed bones! I'll register a vow!
Here, chaps! The three of us together now,
Hold up your hands, like me, and we'll be brothers
In this affair, and each defend the others,
And we will kill this traitor Death, I say!
Away with him as he has made away
With all our friends. God's dignity! Tonight!"

They made their bargain, swore with appetite,
These three, to live and die for one another
As brother-born might swear to his born brother.
And up they started in their drunken rage
And made towards this village which the page
And publican had spoken of before.
Many and grisly were the **oaths** they swore,
Tearing Christ's blessed body to a shred;
"If we can only catch him, Death is dead!"

oaths: *profane expressions used to express anger or strong feelings*

When they had gone not fully half a mile,
Just as they were about to cross a stile,
They came upon a very poor old man
Who humbly greeted them and thus began,
"God look to you, my lords, and give you quiet!"
To which the proudest of these men of riot
Gave back the answer, "What, old fool? Give place!

and always be prepared to meet him everywhere you go.
That's what my mother said, and that's enough for me."

The innkeeper joined right in, and said, "By St. Mary,
the boy is right, you'd better watch out.
This very year, Death killed off an entire village
a mile from here. Men, women, farmers,
servants, children—he killed them all.
Yes, I imagine that he lives around there.
So be warned, and stay on guard,
or he might do you harm." "Huh, by God's arms!"
the rioter said. "Is he really so fierce?
I'll search for him, by Jesus, street by street.
God's blessed bones! I promise it right now.
Here, chaps! Let's all three of us
raise our hands together, and we'll be brothers
in this business. We'll defend each other
and kill this traitor Death, I swear!
We'll do away with him, just as he has done away
with all our friends. By God, we'll do it tonight!"

All three of them agreed, and they swore eagerly
to live and die for one another,
just as born brothers might do.
And they got up in their drunken rage
and made toward the village that the servant
and innkeeper had spoken of before.
They swore many grim oaths,
tearing Christ's blessed body to shreds with words,
saying, "If we can only catch him, Death is dead!"

They hadn't gone a full half a mile
when they reached some steps leading over a wall.
There they met a very poor old man,
who humbly greeted them with these words:
"God bless you, my lords, and give you peace!"
To which the proudest of these rioters
replied, "What, old fool? Get out of the way!

115 Why are you all wrapped up except your face?
Why live so long? Isn't it time to die?"

The old, old fellow looked him in the eye
And said, "Because I never yet have found,
Though I have walked to India, searching round
120 Village and city on my pilgrimage,
One who would change his youth to have my age.
And so my age is mine and must be still
Upon me, for such time as God may will.

"Not even Death, alas, will take my life;
125 So, like a wretched prisoner at strife
Within himself, I walk alone and wait
About the earth, which is my mother's gate,
Knock-knocking with my staff from night to noon
And crying, 'Mother, open to me soon!
130 Look at me, mother, won't you let me in?
See how I wither, flesh and blood and skin!
Alas! When will these bones be laid to rest?
Mother, I would exchange—for that were best—
The wardrobe in my chamber, standing there
135 So long, for yours! Aye, for a shirt of hair
To wrap me in!' She has refused her grace,
Whence comes the pallor of my withered face.

"But it dishonored you when you began
To speak so roughly, sir, to an old man,
140 Unless he had injured you in word or deed.
It says in holy writ, as you may read,
'Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head
And honor it.' And therefore be it said
'Do no more harm to an old man than you,
145 Being now young, would have another do
When you are old'—if you should live till then.
And so may God be with you, gentlemen,
For I must go whither I have to go."

"By God," the gambler said, "you shan't do so,

Why are you all wrapped up except for your face?
Why do you live so long? Isn't it about time you were dead?"

The old, old fellow looked him in the eye
and said, "I'm here because I've walked
all the way to India, searching
in villages and cities everywhere, but I've never found
anyone who would give up his youth to take my age.
And so I have my age and always shall,
until God decides to take it from me.

"Alas, not even Death will take my life.
So like a prisoner struggling
inside himself, I walk alone, waiting
upon the earth, which is like a mother's gate.
I knock on the ground with my staff night and day,
crying, 'Mother, open to me soon!
Look at me, mother, won't you let me in?
See how my flesh, blood, and skin all wither!
Alas! When will my bones be laid to rest?
Mother, I know it would be best to exchange
the chest which has long stood in my room
for yours! Oh, for a rough shirt
to wrap around myself!' But she has refused her favor,
and that is why my withered face is pale.

"But it was shameful of you
to speak so roughly to an old man, sir—
unless he had injured you in word or deed.
You may well read in the Bible where it says,
'You shall stand up before a white-haired man
and honor him.' And so let it be said,
'Do not harm an old man any more than you,
now young, would wish another to do
when you are old'—if you live that long.
And so may God be with you, gentlemen,
for I must go where I must go."

"By God," the gambler said, "you won't go yet.

You don't get off so easy, by St. John!
I heard you mention, just a moment gone,
A certain traitor Death who singles out
And kills the fine young fellows hereabout.
And you're his spy, by God! You wait a bit.
Say where he is or you shall pay for it,
By God and by the Holy Sacrament![3]
I say you've joined together by consent
To kill us younger folk, you thieving swine!"
"Well, sirs," he said, "if it be your design
To find out Death, turn up this crooked way
Towards that grove, I left him there today
Under a tree, and there you'll find him waiting.
He isn't one to hide for all your prating.
You see that oak? He won't be far to find.
And God protect you that redeemed mankind,
Aye, and amend you!" Thus that ancient man.

The parallel text for "The Pardoner's Tale" ends here. In the portion that follows, brief summaries appear to help you understand the text.

3 **Holy Sacrament:** communion, in which bread and wine are believed to become the body and blood of Christ

150 By St. John, you don't get off that easy!
Just a moment ago, I heard you mention
a certain traitor Death who chooses
and kills fine young people in these parts.
And you're his spy, by God! You wait a bit.
155 Tell where he is, or by God and the Holy Sacrament,
you'll pay for it!
I say you two have agreed to work together
to kill us younger folk, you thieving swine!"
"Well, sirs," the old man said, "if it's your plan
160 to find Death, go up this crooked path
toward the grove. I left him there today
under a tree, and you'll find him waiting there.
He isn't likely to hide, despite all your talk.
You see that oak? He won't be far away.
165 And may God, who saved mankind, protect you—
yes, and improve you, too!" So said that old, old man.

The three young men hurry off to find the tree where the old man told them Death was waiting. But there they find something unexpected. . . .

At once the three young rioters began
To run, and reached the tree, and there they found
A pile of golden florins[4] on the ground,
170 New-coined, eight bushels of them as they thought.
No longer was it Death those fellows sought,
For they were all so thrilled to see the sight,
The florins were so beautiful and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious pile.
175 The wickedest spoke first after a while.
"Brothers," he said, "you listen to what I say.
I'm pretty sharp although I joke away.
It's clear that Fortune has bestowed this treasure
To let us live in jollity and pleasure.
180 Light come, light go! We'll spend it as we ought.
God's precious dignity! Who would have thought
This morning was to be our lucky day?

The friends make plans to remove the gold coins after nightfall. When the youngest man hurries into town to buy bread and wine, the other two scheme to kill him.

"If one could only get the gold away,
Back to my house, or else to yours, perhaps—
185 For as you know, the gold is ours, chaps—
We'd all be at the top of fortune, hey?
But certainly it can't be done by day.
People would call us robbers—a strong gang,
So our own property would make us hang.
190 No, we must bring this treasure back by night
Some prudent way, and keep it out of sight.
And so as a solution I propose
We draw for lots[5] and see the way it goes;
The one who draws the longest, lucky man,

4 **florins:** coins
5 **lots:** objects, such as straws or pebbles, drawn or thrown from a container to decide a question or choice by chance

195 Shall run to town as quickly as he can
To fetch us bread and wine—but keep things dark—
While two remain in hiding here to mark
Our heap of treasure. If there's no delay,
When night comes down we'll carry it away,
200 All three of us, wherever we have planned."

He gathered lots and hid them in his hand

Bidding them draw for where the luck should fall.
It fell upon the youngest of them all,
And off he ran at once towards the town.

205 As soon as he had gone the first sat down
And thus began a **parley** with the other:
"You know that you can trust me as a brother;
Now let me tell you where your profit lies;
You know our friend has gone to get supplies
210 And here's a lot of gold that is to be
Divided equally amongst us three.
Nevertheless, if I could shape things thus
So that we shared it out—the two of us—
Wouldn't you take it as a friendly act?"

parley: *informal discussion or conference, especially between enemies in a truce to discuss terms.*

215 "But how?" the other said. "He knows the fact
That all the gold was left with me and you;
What can we tell him? What are we to do?"
"Is it a bargain," said the first, "or no?
For I can tell you in a word or so
220 What's to be done to bring the thing about."
"Trust me," the other said, "you needn't doubt
My word. I won't betray you, I'll be true."
"Well," said his friend, "you see that we are two,
And two are twice as powerful as one.
225 Now look; when he comes back, get up in fun
To have a wrestle; then, as you attack,
I'll up and put my dagger through his back
While you and he are struggling, as in game;
Then draw your dagger too and do the same.

Then all this money will be ours to spend,
Divided equally of course, dear friend.
Then we can gratify our lusts and fill
The day with dicing[6] at our own sweet will."
Thus these two **miscreants** agreed to slay
The third and youngest, as you heard me say.

miscreants: *scoundrels; villains*

The youngest man devises his own plan to kill the other two. He purchases poison from a druggist and puts it in the wine.

The youngest, as he ran towards the town,
Kept turning over, rolling up and down
Within his heart the beauty of those bright
New florins, saying, "Lord, to think I might
Have all that treasure to myself alone!
Could there be anyone beneath the throne
Of God so happy as I then should be?"
And so the Fiend, our common enemy,
Was given power to put it in his thought
That there was always poison to be bought,
And that with poison he could kill his friends.
To men in such a state the Devil sends
Thoughts of this kind, and has a full permission
To lure them on to sorrow and **perdition**;
For this young man was utterly content
To kill them both and never to **repent**.

perdition: *loss of the soul; damnation*

repent: *to express sincere regret for one's wrongdoings*

And on he ran, he had no thought to **tarry**,
Came to the town, found an apothecary[7]
And said, "Sell me some poison if you will,
I have a lot of rats I want to kill
And there's a polecat[8] too about my yard
That takes my chickens and it hits me hard;
But I'll get even, as is only right,
With vermin that destroy a man by night."

tarry: *to delay or be tardy in acting*

6 **dicing:** gambling with dice
7 **apothecary:** person who prepares and sells medicines and drugs
8 **polecat:** a weasel-like animal

260 The chemist answered, "I've a preparation
Which you shall have, and by my soul's salvation
If any living creature eat or drink
A mouthful, ere he has the time to think,
Though he took less than makes a grain of wheat,
265 You'll see him fall down dying at your feet;
Yes, die he must, and in so short a while
You'd hardly have the time to walk a mile,
The poison is so strong, you understand."

This cursed fellow grabbed into his hand
270 The box of poison and away he ran
Into a neighboring street, and found a man
Who lent him three large bottles. He withdrew
And deftly poured the poison into two.
He kept the third one clean, as well he might,
275 For his own drink, meaning to work all night
Stacking the gold and carrying it away.
And when this rioter, this devil's clay,
Had filled his bottles up with wine, all three,
Back to rejoin his comrades sauntered he.

The summaries end here. Main ideas are highlighted in colored text throughout the rest of the selection to aid comprehension.

280 Why make a sermon of it? Why waste breath?
Exactly in the way they'd planned his death
They fell on him and slew him, two to one.
Then said the first of them when this was done,
"Now for a drink. Sit down and let's be merry,
285 For later on there'll be the corpse to bury."
And, as it happened, reaching for a sup,
He took a bottle full of poison up
And drank; and his companion, nothing loth,[9]
Drank from it also, and they perished both.

9 **loth:** also *loath*, meaning "unwilling or reluctant"

There is, in Avicenna's long relation[10]
Concerning poison and his operation,
Trust me, no ghastlier section to transcend
What these two wretches suffered at their end.
Thus these two murderers received their due,
So did the treacherous young poisoner too.

O cursed sin! O blackguardly excess!
O treacherous homicide! O wickedness!
O **gluttony** that lusted on and diced!

gluttony: *excessive eating and drinking*

Dearly beloved, God forgive your sin
And keep you from the vice of avarice![11]
My holy pardon frees you all of this,
Provided that you make the right approaches,
That is with sterling, rings, or silver brooches.
Bow down your heads under this holy bull!
Come on, you women, offer up your wool!
I'll write your name into my ledger; so!
Into the bliss of Heaven you shall go.
For I'll absolve you by my holy power,
You that make offering, clean as at the hour
When you were born. . . . That, sirs, is how I preach.
And Jesu Christ, soul's healer, aye, the leech
Of every soul, grant pardon and relieve you
Of sin, for that is best, I won't deceive you.

One thing I should have mentioned in my tale,
Dear people. I've some relics in my bale
And pardons too, as full and fine, I hope,
As any in England, given me by the Pope.
If there be one among you that is willing
To have my **absolution** for a shilling[12]
Devoutly given, come! and do not harden
Your hearts but kneel in humbleness for pardon;
Or else, receive my pardon as we go.

absolution: *remission of sin or the punishment of sin*

10 **Avicenna's long relation:** a medical text from the eleventh century describing the effects of various poisons
11 **vice of avarice:** bad habit of insatiable desire or greed
12 **shilling:** twelve English pence

You can renew it every town or so
Always provided that you still renew
325 Each time, and in good money, what is due.
It is an honor to you to have found
A pardoner with his credentials sound
Who can absolve you as you ply the spur
In any accident that may occur.
330 For instance—we are all at Fortune's beck—
Your horse may throw you down and break your neck.
What a security it is to all
To have me here among you and at call
With pardon for the lowly and the great
335 When soul leaves body for the future state!
And I advise our Host here to begin,
The most enveloped of you all in sin.
Come forward, Host, you shall be the first to pay,
And kiss my holy relics right away.
340 Only a groat. Come on, unbuckle your purse!"

"No, no," said he, "not I, and may the curse
Of Christ descend upon me if I do! . . ."
The Pardoner said nothing, not a word;
He was so angry that he couldn't speak.
345 "Well," said our Host, "if you're for showing **pique**,
I'll joke no more, not with an angry man."

pique: *feeling of resentment, as from a wound to pride*

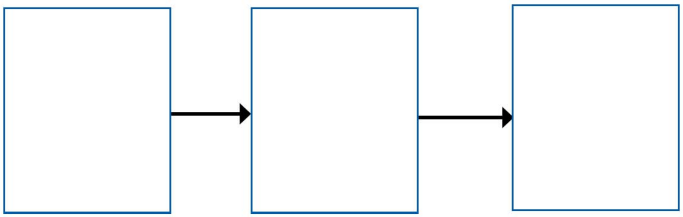
The worthy Knight immediately began,
Seeing the fun was getting rather rough,
And said, "No more, we've all had quite enough.
350 Now, Master Pardoner, perk up, look cheerly!
And you, Sir Host, whom I esteem so dearly,
I beg of you to kiss the Pardoner.

"Come, Pardoner, draw nearer, my dear sir.
Let's laugh again and keep the ball in play."
355 They kissed, and we continued on our way.

After You Read *The Canterbury Tales: The Pardoner's Tale*

Literary Lens: Frame Story

Chaucer uses several techniques to link each story within the frame to the larger story. Complete a diagram like the one below to show how Chaucer links *The Pardoner's Tale* to those of the other pilgrims. Look back to *The Prologue* on pages 148–150 to help you.



Explore Context: Death in the Middle Ages

During the Middle Ages, few people lived to an old age. Based on what you read about the political and social upheaval and the Black Death on page 89, write a paragraph explaining why you think the Pardoner tells a tale about death. Then research daily life in the Middle Ages and write another paragraph describing what life was like and why few people had long life spans.

Apply and Create: Frame Your Own Tale

In a group, sketch out an idea for a frame story involving five recent high school graduates of different backgrounds who take a cross-country trip to Washington, D.C., or New York City. Think of a story that each character might tell reflecting his or her values, goals, and personality. Present your ideas to the class.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from "The Pardoner's Tale" and answer the questions that follow.

"By God," the gambler said, "you shan't do so,
150 You don't get off so easy, by St. John!
I heard you mention, just a moment gone,
A certain traitor Death who singles out
And kills the fine young fellows hereabout.
And you're his spy, by God! You wait a bit.
155 Say where he is or you shall pay for it,
By God and by the Holy Sacrament!
I say you've joined together by consent
To kill us younger folk, you thieving swine!"

"Well, sirs," he said, "if it be your design
To find out Death, turn up this crooked way
Towards that grove, I left him there today
Under a tree, and there you'll find him waiting.
He isn't one to hide for all your prating.
You see that oak? He won't be far to find.
And God protect you that redeemed mankind,
Aye, and amend you!" Thus that ancient man.
At once the three young rioters began
To run, and reached the tree, and there they found
A pile of golden florins on the ground,
New-coined, eight bushels of them as they thought.
No longer was it Death those fellows sought,
For they were all so thrilled to see the sight,
The florins were so beautiful and bright,
That down they sat beside the precious pile.
The wickedest spoke first after a while.
"Brothers," he said, "you listen to what I say.
I'm pretty sharp although I joke away.
It's clear that Fortune has bestowed this treasure . . .

1. Personification gives human qualities to objects or concepts. What effect does the personification of Death have on the tale?
2. What examples of foreshadowing can you find in these lines? Explain their significance.
3. What conclusions can you draw about the three rioters based on their reaction to the gold florins?

Before You Read *The Canterbury Tales: "The Wife of Bath's Tale"*

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) lived during a turbulent time in England. Though London was growing into a prosperous commercial city, England was engaged in the Hundred Years' War with France. As a teenager, Chaucer served at the court of Prince Lionel, where he most likely met John of Gaunt, who became Chaucer's patron. Later Chaucer joined the army of King Edward III, then served as a royal messenger. His relationship with Gaunt, along with his service to Prince Lionel, won him favor with the royal family and helped secure him a career in politics and diplomacy. In 1374, Chaucer received his first royal appointment. He soon began traveling on diplomatic missions, which helped introduce him to the French and Italian literature of the day. His travels would greatly influence his writing.

In 1377, Richard II inherited the throne, and Chaucer remained at court. In 1386, Chaucer became a Member of Parliament, and during the 1390s, King Richard appointed him to various positions as well, including clerk of the king's work. In 1399, Henry Bolingbroke overthrew Richard II and was crowned King Henry IV. Chaucer remained at court but died the following year.

Literary Lens

Narrator The narrator is the person telling a story. The narrator can be a character in the story or someone outside it. In *The Canterbury Tales,* Chaucer identifies himself as the narrator of *The Prologue*. He then introduces the pilgrims, each of whom becomes the narrator of his or her own tale.

Voice and Perspective Chaucer uses a different voice for each narrator. The voice he chooses matches the character's personality, occupation, and social status. His use of distinct voices strongly differentiates each character from the others. The reader can easily understand each one's perspective.

Chaucer's Language

Chaucer wrote in Middle English, which is more similar to modern English than to Old English. Although Middle English incorporated many French words and grammatical conventions, it did not add endings to nouns as an indication of gender, as in French. In Middle English, however, spelling was inconsistent. Words from different regions were often spelled differently. By the thirteenth century, people no longer read or understood Old English. Scholars began "glossing"—or adding explanations to—Old English texts.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Reread the description of the Wife of Bath in "The Prologue" (pages 120–122). How do you think her voice will differ from the Pardoner's?
2. "The Wife of Bath's Tale" is about love and marriage. Using what you read about life during medieval times on pages 88–91, what do you predict the wife's view on these subjects will be?
3. How do you think the wife's views of love and marriage might differ from a modern woman's views?

The Wife of Bath's Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer
translated by Nevill Coghill

The Prologue

The Pardoner started up, and thereupon
"Madam," he said, "by God and by St. John,
That's noble preaching[1] no one could surpass!
I was about to take a wife; alas!
Am I to buy it on my flesh so dear?
There'll be no marrying for me this year!"

"You wait," she said, "my story's not begun.
You'll taste another brew before I've done;
You'll find it doesn't taste as good as ale;
And when I've finished telling you my tale
Of **tribulation** in the married life
In which I've been an expert as a wife,
That is to say, myself have been the whip.
So please yourself whether you want to sip
At that same **cask** of marriage I shall broach.
Be cautious before making the approach,
For I'll give instances, and more than ten.
And those who won't be warned by other men,
By other men shall suffer their correction,
So Ptolemy[2] has said, in this connection.
You read his *Almagest*; you'll find it there."

tribulation: *cause of great trouble or suffering*

cask: *barrel*

1 **noble preaching:** The Wife of Bath has just finished talking about her views on marriage.
2 **Ptolemy:** famous astronomer, mathematician, and geographer who lived in ancient Egypt

"Madam, I put it to you as a prayer,"
The Pardoner said, "go on as you began!
Tell us your tale, spare not for any man.
25 Instruct us younger men in your technique."
"Gladly," she said, "if you will let me speak,
But still I hope the company won't reprove me
Though I should speak as fantasy may move me,
And please don't be offended at my views;
30 They're really only offered to amuse. . . ."

The Wife of Bath's Tale

When good King Arthur[3] ruled in ancient days
(A king that every Briton loves to praise)
This was a land brim-full of fairy folk.
The Elf-Queen and her courtiers joined and broke
35 Their elfin dance on many a green mead,[4]
Or so was the opinion once, I read,
Hundreds of years ago, in days of yore.
But no one now sees fairies any more.
For now the saintly charity and prayer
40 Of holy friars seem to have purged the air;
They search the countryside through field and stream
As thick as motes that speckle a sun-beam,[5]
Blessing the halls, the chambers, kitchens, bowers,[6]
Cities and boroughs, castles, courts and towers,
45 Thorpes[7], barns and stables, outhouses and dairies,
And that's the reason why there are no fairies.
Wherever there was wont to walk an elf
Today there walks the holy friar himself
As evening falls or when the daylight springs,
50 Saying his matins[8] and his holy things,
Walking his limit round from town to town.

3 **King Arthur:** legendary British ruler who was memorialized in medieval histories and romances
4 **mead:** meadow
5 **motes . . . sun-beam:** tiny dust particles that are revealed when sunlight hits them
6 **bowers:** bedrooms
7 **Thorpes:** villages
8 **matins:** services of public prayer, said in the morning, in the Anglican church

Women can now go safely up and down
By every bush or under every tree;
There is no other incubus[9] but he,
55 So there is really no one else to hurt you
And he will do no more than take your virtue.

Now it so happened, I began to say,
Long, long ago in good King Arthur's day,
There was a knight who was a lusty liver.
60 One day as he came riding from the river
He saw a maiden walking all forlorn
Ahead of him, alone as she was born.
And of that maiden, spite of all she said,
By very force he took her maidenhead.[10]
65 This act of violence made such a stir,
So much petitioning to the king for her,
That he condemned the knight to lose his head
By course of law. He was as good as dead
(It seems that then the **statutes** took that view)
70 But that the queen, and other ladies too,
Implored the king to exercise his grace
So ceaselessly, he gave the queen the case
And granted her his life, and she could choose
Whether to show him mercy or refuse.

statutes: *written laws*

implored: *begged*

75 The queen returned him thanks with all her might,
And then she sent a summons to the knight
At her convenience, and expressed her will:
"You stand, for such is the position still,
In no way certain of your life," said she,
80 "Yet you shall live if you can answer me:
What is the thing that women most desire?
Beware the axe and say as I require.

"If you can't answer on the moment, though,
I will concede you this: you are to go
85 A twelvemonth and a day to seek and learn

9 **incubus:** male demon believed to have sexual intercourse with sleeping women
10 **maidenhead:** virginity

extort: *obtain by force, threat, or other unfair means*

Sufficient answer, then you shall return.
I shall take gages[11] from you to **extort**
Surrender of your body to the court."

Sad was the knight and sorrowfully sighed,
90 But there! All other choices were denied,
And in the end he chose to go away
And to return after a year and day
Armed with such answer as there might be sent
To him by God. He took his leave and went.

95 He knocked at every house, searched every place,
Yes, anywhere that offered hope of grace.
What could it be that women wanted most?
But all the same he never touched a coast,
Country or town in which there seemed to be
100 Any two people willing to agree.

11 **gages:** pledges

Some said that women wanted wealth and treasure,
"Honor," said some, some "Jollity and pleasure,"
Some "Gorgeous clothes" and others "Fun in bed,"
"To be oft widowed and remarried," said
105 Others again, and some that what most mattered
Was that we should be cosseted[12] and flattered.
That's very near the truth, it seems to me;
A man can win us best with flattery.
To dance attendance on us, make a fuss,
110 Ensnares us all, the best and worst of us.

Some say the things we most desire are these:
Freedom to do exactly as we please,
With no one to reprove our faults and lies,
Rather to have one call us good and wise.
115 Truly there's not a woman in ten score[13]
Who has a fault, and someone rubs the sore,
But she will kick if what he says is true;
You try it out and you will find so too.
However vicious we may be within
120 We like to be thought wise and void of sin.
Others assert we women find it sweet
When we are thought dependable, **discreet**
And secret, firm of purpose and controlled,
Never betraying things that we are told.
125 But that's not worth the handle of a rake;
Women conceal a thing? For Heaven's sake!
Remember Midas?[14] Will you hear the tale?

discreet: *careful in one's speech and actions to avoid causing trouble or to gain an advantage*

Among some other little things, now stale,
Ovid relates that under his long hair

12 **cosseted:** pampered
13 **ten score:** two hundred
14 **Midas:** in Greek mythology, a king who could turn anything he touched to gold

The unhappy Midas grew a splendid pair
Of ass's ears; as subtly as he might,
He kept his foul deformity from sight;
Save for his wife, there was not one that knew.[15]
He loved her best, and trusted in her too.
He begged her not to tell a living creature
That he possessed so horrible a feature.
And she—she swore, were all the world to win,
She would not do such villainy and sin
As saddle her husband with so foul a name;
Besides to speak would be to share the shame.
Nevertheless she thought she would have died
Keeping this secret bottled up inside;
It seemed to swell her heart and she, no doubt,
Thought it was on the point of bursting out.

Fearing to speak of it to woman or man,
Down to a reedy marsh she quickly ran
And reached the sedge.[16] Her heart was all on fire
And, as a bittern bumbles in the mire,[17]
She whispered to the water, near the ground,
"Betray me not, O water, with thy sound!
To thee alone I tell it: it appears
My husband has a pair of ass's ears!
Ah! My heart's well again, the secret's out!
I could no longer keep it, not a doubt."
And so you see, although we may hold fast
A little while, it must come out at last,
We can't keep secrets; as for Midas, well,
Read Ovid for his story; he will tell.

This knight that I am telling you about
Perceived at last he never would find out
What it could be that women loved the best.

---

15 **Ovid . . . knew:** Ovid was a Roman poet whose works included *Metamorphoses*, an epic poem that contains many different Greek myths. Ovid wrote that Midas's secret of his donkey ears was spoiled by a barber and not Midas's wife.

16 **sedge:** marsh grasses

17 **bittern . . . mire:** A bittern is a wading bird known for its bumbling, or booming, call in the mire, or swamp.

Faint was the soul within his sorrowful breast,
As home he went, he dared no longer stay;
His year was up and now it was the day.

As he rode home in a **dejected** mood
Suddenly, at the margin of a wood,
He saw a dance upon the leafy floor
Of four and twenty ladies, nay, and more.
Eagerly he approached, in hope to learn
Some words of wisdom ere he should return;
But lo! Before he came to where they were,
Dancers and dance all vanished into air!
There wasn't a living creature to be seen
Save one old woman crouched upon the green.
A fouler-looking creature I suppose
Could scarcely be imagined. She arose
And said, "Sir knight, there's no way on from here.
Tell me what you are looking for, my dear,
For peradventure[18] that were best for you;
We old, old women know a thing or two."

"Dear Mother," said the knight, "alack the day!
I am as good as dead if I can't say
What thing it is that women most desire;
If you could tell me I would pay your hire."
"Give me your hand," she said, "and swear to do
Whatever I shall next require of you
—If so to do should lie within your might—
And you shall know the answer before night."
"Upon my honor," he answered, "I agree."
"Then," said the **crone**, "I dare to guarantee
Your life is safe; I shall make good my claim.
Upon my life the queen will say the same.
Show me the very proudest of them all

dejected: *sad; depressed*

crone: *old woman who is thin and ugly*

18 **peradventure:** perhaps

In costly coverchief[19] or jewelled caul[20]
That dare say no to what I have to teach.
Let us go forward without further speech."
And then she **crooned** her gospel[21] in his ear
And told him to be glad and not to fear.

crooned: *hummed, sang, or said in a soft, low voice, especially in a sentimental manner*

They came to court. This knight, in full array,
Stood forth and said, "O Queen, I've kept my day
And kept my word and have my answer ready."

heady: *intoxicating; having a strong, exhilarating effect*

There sat the noble matrons and the **heady**
Young girls, and widows too, that have the grace
Of wisdom, all assembled in that place,
And there the queen herself was throned to hear
And judge his answer. Then the knight drew near
And silence was commanded through the hall.

The queen gave order he should tell them all
What thing it was that women wanted most.
He stood not silent like a beast or post,
But gave his answer with the ringing word
Of a man's voice and the assembly heard:

sovereignty: *supreme power or authority*

"My liege[22] and lady, in general," said he,
"A woman wants the self-same **sovereignty**
Over her husband as over her lover,
And master him; he must not be above her.
That is your greatest wish, whether you kill
Or spare me; please yourself. I wait your will."

In all the court not one that shook her head
Or contradicted what the knight had said;
Maid, wife and widow cried, "He's saved his life!"

And on the word up started the old wife,
The one the knight saw sitting on the green,

19 **coverchief:** kerchief
20 **caul:** ornamental hairnet
21 **gospel:** message
22 **liege:** lord

And cried, "Your mercy, sovereign lady queen!
225 Before the court disperses, do me right!
'Twas I who taught this answer to the knight,
For which he swore, and pledged his honor to it,
That the first thing I asked of him he'd do it,
So far as it should lie within his might.
230 Before this court I ask you then, sir knight,
To keep your word and take me for your wife;
For well you know that I have saved your life.
If this be false, deny it on your sword!"

"Alas!" he said, "Old lady, by the Lord
235 I know indeed that such was my behest,[23]
But for God's love think of a new request,
Take all my goods, but leave my body free."
"A curse on us," she said, "if I agree!
I may be foul, I may be poor and old,
240 Yet will not choose to be, for all the gold
That's bedded in the earth or lies above,
Less than your wife, nay, than your very love!"

"My love?" said he. "By heaven, my damnation!
Alas that any of my race and station[24]
245 Should ever make so foul a misalliance!"[25]
Yet in the end his pleading and defiance
All went for nothing, he was forced to wed.
He takes his ancient wife and goes to bed.

Now peradventure some may well suspect
250 A lack of care in me since I neglect
To tell of the rejoicing and display
Made at the feast upon their wedding-day.
I have but a short answer to let fall;
I say there was no joy or feast at all,

255 Nothing but heaviness of heart and sorrow.

23 **behest:** promise
24 **race and station:** family and rank
25 **misalliance:** improper or incompatible marriage

He married her in private on the morrow
And all day long stayed hidden like an owl,
It was such torture that his wife looked foul.

Great was the anguish churning in his head
260 When he and she were piloted to bed;[26]
He wallowed back and forth in desperate style.
His ancient wife lay smiling all the while;
At last she said, "Bless us! Is this, my dear,
How knights and wives get on together here?
265 Are these the laws of good King Arthur's house?
Are knights of his all so **contemptuous**?
I am your own beloved and your wife,
And I am she, indeed, that saved your life;
And certainly I never did you wrong.
270 Then why, this first of nights, so sad a song?
You're carrying on as if you were half-witted.
Say, for God's love, what sin have I committed?
I'll put things right if you will tell me how."

contemptuous: *showing that someone or something is worthless or deserving scorn*

"Put right?" he cried. "That never can be now!
275 Nothing can ever be put right again!
You're old, and so abominably plain,
So poor to start with, so low-bred to follow;
It's little wonder if I twist and wallow!
God, that my heart would burst within my breast!"

280 "Is that," said she, "the cause of your unrest?"

"Yes, certainly," he said, "and can you wonder?"

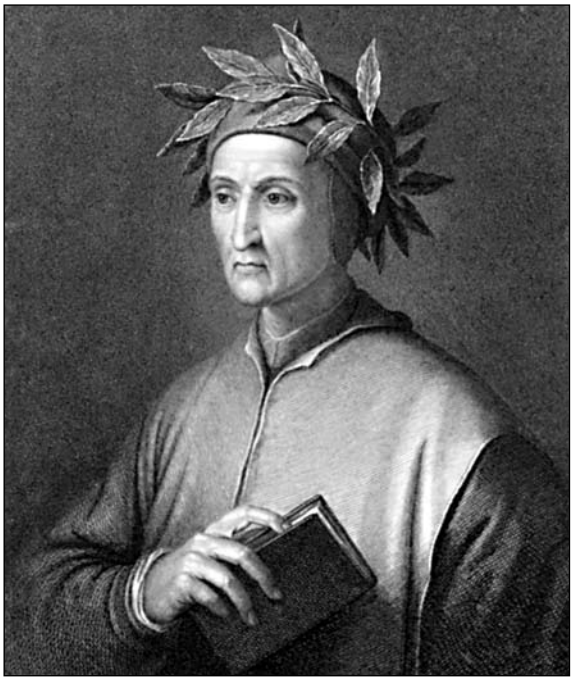
"I could set right what you suppose a blunder,
That's if I cared to, in a day or two,
If I were shown more courtesy by you.
285 Just now," she said, "you spoke of gentle birth,
Such as descends from ancient wealth and worth.
If that's the claim you make for gentlemen
Such arrogance is hardly worth a hen.

26 **piloted to bed:** In the Middle Ages, it was customary for the wedding party to escort the bride and groom to their bedchamber.

Whoever loves to work for virtuous ends,
290 Public and private, and who most intends
To do what deeds of gentleness he can,
Take him to be the greatest gentleman.
Christ wills we take our gentleness from Him,
Not from a wealth of ancestry long dim,
295 Though they **bequeath** their whole establishment
By which we claim to be of high descent.
Our fathers cannot make us a bequest
Of all those virtues that became them best
And earned for them the name of gentlemen,
300 But bade us follow them as best we can.

bequeath: *to pass on or leave to someone else*

"Thus the wise poet of the Florentines,[27]
Dante by name, has written in these lines,
For such is the opinion Dante launches:
'Seldom arises by these slender branches



27 **Florentines:** inhabitants of Florence, Italy

prowess: *skill or expertise in a particular activity or field*

temporal: *relating to worldly affairs; secular*

305 **Prowess** of men, for it is God, no less,
Wills us to claim of Him our gentleness.'[28]
For of our parents nothing can we claim
Save **temporal** things, and these may hurt and maim.

"But everyone knows this as well as I;
310 For if gentility[29] were implanted by
The natural course of lineage down the line,
Public or private, could it cease to shine
In doing the fair work of gentle deed?

No vice or villainy could then bear seed.
315 "Take fire and carry it to the darkest house
Between this kingdom and the Caucasus,[30]
And shut the doors on it and leave it there,
It will burn on, and it will burn as fair
As if ten thousand men were there to see,
320 For fire will keep its nature and degree,
I can assure you, sir, until it dies.

"But gentleness, as you will recognize,
Is not annexed in nature to possessions.
Men fail in living up to their professions;[31]
325 But fire never ceases to be fire.
God knows you'll often find, if you enquire,
Some lording full of villainy and shame.
If you would be esteemed for the mere name
Of having been by birth a gentleman
330 And stemming from some virtuous, noble clan,
And do not live yourself by gentle deed
Or take your father's noble code and creed,
You are no gentleman, though duke or earl.
Vice and bad manners are what make a churl.[32]

---

28 **Seldom . . . gentleness:** lines from *The Divine Comedy*, the most famous work of Dante, a medieval Italian poet

29 **gentility:** quality of being polite, refined, and respectable

30 **Caucasus:** region between the Black and Caspian Seas in western Asia

31 **professions:** beliefs or ideals

32 **churl:** person of low class

335 "Gentility is only the renown
For bounty that your fathers handed down,
Quite foreign to your person, not your own;
Gentility must come from God alone.
That we are gentle comes to us by grace
340 And by no means is it bequeathed with place.

"Reflect how noble (says Valerius)[33]
Was Tullius surnamed Hostilius,[34]
Who rose from poverty to nobleness.
And read Boethius, Seneca[35] no less,
345 Thus they express themselves and are agreed:
'Gentle is he that does a gentle deed.'
And therefore, my dear husband, I conclude
That even if my ancestors were rude,
Yet God on high—and so I hope He will—
350 Can grant me grace to live in virtue still,
A gentlewoman only when beginning
To live in virtue and to shrink from sinning.

"As for my poverty which you reprove,
Almighty God Himself in whom we move,
355 Believe and have our being, chose a life
Of poverty, and every man or wife,
Nay, every child can see our Heavenly King
Would never stoop to choose a shameful thing.
No shame in poverty if the heart is gay,
360 As Seneca and all the learned say.
He who accepts his poverty unhurt
I'd say is rich although he lacked a shirt.
But truly poor are they who whine and fret
And **covet** what they cannot hope to get.

covet: *to long to have or possess something*

33 **Valerius:** Valerius Maximus was a Roman historian and moralist who wrote a collection of historical anecdotes.

34 **Tullius . . . Hostilius:** Tullius Hostilius succeeded Pompilius as the third king of the Romans.

35 **Boethius, Seneca:** Anicius Manlius Serverinus Boethius is regarded as one of the most important philosophers in the time between ancient philosophy and the Latin Middle Ages. Lucius Annaeus Seneca was a Roman philosopher, writer, and teacher who served as tutor and advisor to Emperor Nero.

365 And he that, having nothing, covets not,
Is rich, though you may think he is a sot.[36]

"True poverty can find a song to sing.
Juvenal[37] says a pleasant little thing:
'The poor can dance and sing in the relief
370 Of having nothing that will tempt a thief.'
Though it be hateful, poverty is good,
A great incentive to a livelihood,
And a great help to our capacity
For wisdom, if accepted patiently.
375 Poverty is, though wanting in estate,
A kind of wealth that none **calumniate**.
Poverty often, when the heart is lowly,
Brings one to God and teaches what is holy,
Gives knowledge of oneself and even lends
380 A glass by which to see one's truest friends.
And since it's no offense, let me be plain;
Do not rebuke my poverty again.

calumniate: *to make false and defamatory statements about*

"Lastly you taxed me, sir, with being old.
Yet even if you never had been told
385 By ancient books, you gentlemen engage,
Yourselves in honor to respect old age.
To call an old man 'father' shows good breeding,
And this could be supported from my reading.

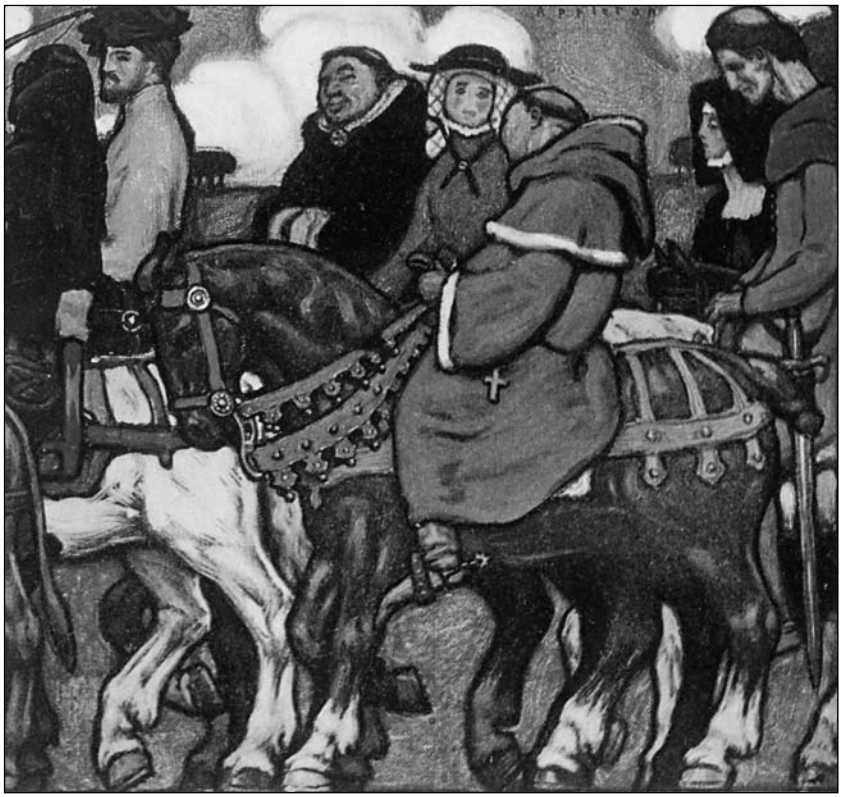
"You say I'm old and fouler than a fen.[38]
390 You need not fear to be a cuckold,[39] then.
Filth and old age, I'm sure you will agree,
Are powerful wardens over chastity.
Nevertheless, well knowing your delights,
I shall fulfil your worldly appetites.

395 "You have two choices; which one will you try?
To have me old and ugly till I die,

36 **sot:** fool
37 **Juvenal:** Roman poet and satirist
38 **fen:** marsh
39 **cuckold:** man whose wife is unfaithful

But still a loyal, true, and humble wife
That never will displease you all her life,
Or would you rather I were young and pretty
400 And chance your arm[40] what happens in a city
Where friends will visit you because of me,
Yes, and in other places too, maybe.
Which would you have? The choice is all your own."

The knight thought long, and with a piteous groan
405 At last he said, with all the care in life,
"My lady and my love, my dearest wife,
I leave the matter to your wise decision.
You make the choice yourself, for the provision
Of what may be agreeable and rich



40 **chance your arm:** take your chance on

410 In honor to us both, I don't care which;
Whatever pleases you suffices me."

"And have I won the mastery?" said she,
"Since I'm to choose and rule as I think fit?"
"Certainly, wife," he answered her, "that's it."
415 "Kiss me," she cried. "No quarrels! On my oath
And word of honor, you shall find me both,
That is, both fair and faithful as a wife;
May I go howling mad and take my life
Unless I prove to be as good and true
420 As ever wife was since the world was new!
And if tomorrow when the sun's above
I seem less fair than any lady-love,
Than any queen or empress east or west,
Do with my life and death as you think best.
425 Cast up the curtain, husband. Look at me!"

And when indeed the knight had looked to see,
Lo, she was young and lovely, rich in charms.
In ecstasy he caught her in his arms,
His heart went bathing in a bath of blisses
430 And melted in a hundred thousand kisses,
And she responded in the fullest measure
With all that could delight or give him pleasure.

So they lived ever after to the end
In perfect bliss; and may Christ Jesus send
435 Us husbands meek and young and fresh in bed,
And grace to overbid them when we wed.
And—Jesu hear my prayer!—cut short the lives
Of those who won't be governed by their wives;
And all old, angry niggards[41] of their pence,
440 God send them soon a very **pestilence**!

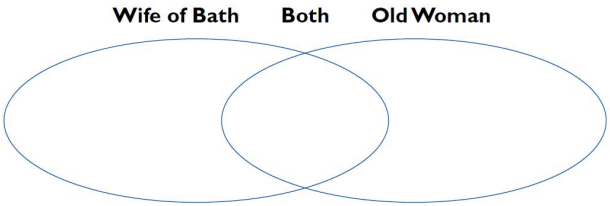
pestilence: *fatal epidemic disease, especially the bubonic plague*

41 **niggards:** stingy and ungenerous people

After You Read *The Canterbury Tales: "The Wife of Bath's Tale"*

Literary Lens: Perspective

What views about men, marriage, and love are revealed in "The Wife of Bath's Tale"? Make a Venn diagram like the one below, and compare the wife's opinions on these topics with those of the old woman. Support your answer.



Explore Context: Women's Roles

What role in society did the Wife of Bath play? Do you think she represented the life of a lady? Write a paragraph describing her role. Then research women's roles during Chaucer's time. Write another paragraph describing the roles of other women, such as peasants, widows, married women, and women of the church.

Apply and Create: A Modern Tale

Think about how "The Wife of Bath's Tale" would be different if it were told from a modern man or woman's point of view. Work with a partner to use a modern voice to retell the tale. You may rephrase the question to discover what men want or what human beings want. Perform your tale for the class.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from the "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and answer the questions that follow.

395 "You have two choices; which one will you try?
To have me old and ugly till I die,
But still a loyal, true, and humble wife
That never will displease you all her life,
Or would you rather I were young and pretty
400 And chance your arm what happens in a city
Where friends will visit you because of me,
Yes, and in other places too, maybe.
Which would you have? The choice is all your own."
The knight thought long, and with a piteous groan

405 At last he said, with all the care in life,
"My lady and my love, my dearest wife,
I leave the matter to your wise decision.
You make the choice yourself, for the provision
Of what may be agreeable and rich
410 In honor to us both, I don't care which;
Whatever pleases you suffices me."
"And have I won the mastery?" said she,
"Since I'm to choose and rule as I think fit?"
"Certainly, wife," he answered her, "that's it."
415 "Kiss me," she cried. "No quarrels! On my oath
And word of honor, you shall find me both,
That is, both fair and faithful as a wife;
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420 As ever wife was since the world was new!
And if tomorrow when the sun's above
I seem less fair than any lady-love,
Than any queen or empress east or west,
Do with my life and death as you think best.
425 Cast up the curtain, husband. Look at me!"
And when indeed the knight had looked to see,
Lo, she was young and lovely, rich in charms.
In ecstasy he caught her in his arms . . .

1. Why does the old woman ask the knight to choose which wife he wants?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the knight based on his response? What do you think the outcome would have been had he given a different response?
3. What might the old woman's transformation indicate about love?

Before You Read *"Lord Randal" and "Get Up and Bar the Door"*

Like the creator of *Beowulf,* the composers of the English ballads "Lord Randal" and "Get Up and Bar the Door" are unknown. Because these songs were passed along orally, many different versions exist today. Many of our most popular English ballads come from the border regions of England and Scotland. Some of them, such as "Lord Randal," revolve around a murder or other tragic incident.

Both ballads have found their way into different cultures around the world. Lord Randal has reappeared in several American folk songs, especially in Appalachia. English ballads have continued to influence modern songwriters, particularly during the civil rights and antiwar movements of the 1960s. Echoes of "Lord Randal" can be heard in Bob Dylan's song "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall."

Literary Lens

Ballad Stanza Most English ballads consist of four-line stanzas called *quatrains*. The lines have a regular meter, with the first and third lines having four stressed syllables, and the second and fourth lines having three stressed syllables. Originally the meter was enhanced by the melodies that accompanied them.

Rhyme and Repetition Most ballads contain dialogue, repetition, rhythm, and rhyme. The meter in "Get Up and Bar the Door" is enhanced by the rhyming scheme *abcb*, in which the last words in the second and fourth lines rhyme. "Lord Randal" uses repetition and fixed expressions to emphasize the mood.

The Poets' Language

Scholars are uncertain as to when various English ballads were composed because many that have survived were written in a Scots dialect. The style of the ballads is different than that of epics or other verse. English ballads usually contain only a few dramatic scenes. Because little information is given and the story is compressed, the plot is inferred from the dialogue and the action. In fact, what often makes these ballads so powerful is what is *not* told. Parallel text is included to aid your comprehension of these ballads.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. What modern ballads are you familiar with? How do you think they will compare with the English ballads?
2. Based on your own experience, evaluate the effect repetition and rhyme have on a listener.
3. Why do you think many ballads revolve around tragic incidents or have supernatural elements? Look back to Unit 1 and find selections that support your answer.

LORD RANDAL

"O where ha' you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?"
"I ha' been at the greenwood; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

"And wha' met ye there, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha' met you there, my handsome young man?"
"O I met wi' my true-love; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

"And wha' did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha' did she give you, my handsome young man?"
"Eels fried in a pan; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

"And wha' gat your leavin's, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha' gat your leavin's, my handsome young man?"
"My hawks and my hounds; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

"And wha' becam' of them, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha' becam' of them, my handsome young man?"
"They stretched their legs out and died; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

"O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man!"
"O yes, I am poisoned; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

LORD RANDAL

Parallel Text

"O, where have you been, Lord Randal, my son?
O, where have you been, my handsome young man?"
"I've been to the green woods. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary from hunting, and I'd like to lie down."

"And who did you meet there, Lord Randal, my son?
And who did you meet there, my handsome young man?"
"O, I met with my true love. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary from hunting, and I'd like to lie down."

"And what did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?"
"Eels fried in a pan. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary from hunting, and I'd like to lie down."

"And who ate the scraps, Lord Randal, my son?
And who ate the scraps, my handsome young man?"
"My hawks and my hounds. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary from hunting, and I'd like to lie down."

"And what happened to them, Lord Randal, my son?
And what happened to them, my handsome young man?"
"They stretched their legs out and died. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm weary from hunting, and I'd like to lie down."

"O, I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man!"
"O, yes, I am poisoned. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I'd like to lie down."

"What d' ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?"
"Four and twenty milk kye; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d' ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?"
"My gold and my silver; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d' ye leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your brother, my handsome young man?"
"My houses and my lands; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What d' ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?"
"I leave her hell and fire; mother make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

"What do you leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?
What do you leave to your mother, my handsome young man?"
"Twenty-four milk cows. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I'd like to lie down."

"What do you leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?
What do you leave to your sister, my handsome young man?"
My gold and my silver. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I'd like to lie down."

"What do you leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?
What do you leave to your brother, my handsome young man?"
"My houses and lands. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I'd like to lie down."

"What do you leave to your true love, Lord Randal, my son?
What do you leave to your true love, my handsome young man?"
"I leave her hell and fire. Mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I'd like to lie down."

Get Up and **Bar the Door**

It fell about the Martinmas[1] time,
And a gay time it was then,
When our goodwife[2] got puddings to make,
And she's boild them in the pan.

5 The wind sae cauld blew south and north,
And blew into the floor;
Quoth our goodman[3] to our goodwife,
"Gae out and **bar** the door."

bar: *to fasten with a bar or bars*

"My hand is in my hussyfskap,
10 Goodman, as ye may see;
An it should nae be barrd this hundred year,
It's no be barrd for me."

They made a paction tween them twa,
They made it firm and sure,
15 That the first word whaeer should speak,
Should rise and bar the door.

Then by there came two gentlemen,
At twelve o clock at night,
And they could neither see house nor hall,
20 Nor coal nor candle-light.

"Now whether is this a rich man's house,
Or whether it is a poor?"
But neer a word ane o them speak,
For barring of the door.

1 **Martinmas:** the feast of St. Martin, celebrated on November 11
2 **goodwife:** Mrs.; woman of the house
3 **goodman:** Mr.; man of the house

Get Up and **Bar the Door**

Parallel Text

It happened around Martinmas,
And a gay time it was then.
Our goodwife was making sausages
And was boiling them in the pan.

The cold, cold wind blew south and north,
And blew upon the floor.
Said our goodman to our goodwife,
"Go out and bar the door."

"I'm busy with my household work,
Goodman, as you can see.
If the door's not barred for a hundred years,
It'll not be barred by me."

They made a pact between them then,
They made it firm and sure,
That whichever of them did speak first,
Must get up and bar the door.

Then two gentlemen came by
At twelve o'clock at night.
And they could see neither house nor hall,
Nor coal nor candlelight.

Asked, "Is this a rich man's house,
Or is it instead poor?"
But neither wife nor husband spoke,
For barring of the door.

And first they ate the white puddings,
And then they ate the black;
Tho muckle thought the goodwife to hersel,
Yet neer a word she spake.

Then said the one unto the other,
"Here, man, tak ye my knife;
Do ye tak aff the auld man's beard,
And I'll kiss the goodwife."

"But there's nae water in the house,
And what shall we do than?"
"What ails ye at the pudding-broo,
That boils into the pan?"

O up then started our goodman,
An angry man was he:
"Will ye kiss my wife before my een,
And scad me wi pudding-bree?"

Then up and started our goodwife,
Gied three skips on the floor:
"Goodman, you've spoken the foremost word,
Get up and bar the door."

The gentlemen ate the white sausages first,
And then they ate the black.
Though the wife thought much of this,
Not one word did she speak.

Then one gentleman said to the other,
"Here, man, take my knife.
Use it to shave the old man's beard,
And I'll kiss the goodwife."

"But there's no water for shaving here,
So what shall we do then?"
"What's wrong with using the sausage brew
That boils up in the pan?"

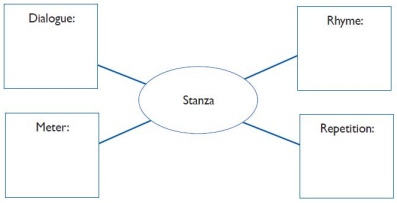
Oh, then our goodman started up—
An angry man it's true:
"Will you kiss my wife before my eyes,
And scald me with sausage brew?"

And then our goodwife started up,
And skipped three times on the floor.
"Goodman, it's you who've spoken first.
Get up and bar the door."

After You Read *"Lord Randal"* and *"Get Up and Bar the Door"*

Literary Lens: Stanza

Most English ballads consist of four-line stanzas called *quatrains*. These ballads are also characterized by dialogue, rhyme, meter, and repetition. Create a chart and list examples of each element from one of the ballads.



Explore Context: Courtly Love

The "Lord Randal" and his mother refer to the woman he meets as his "true-love." Based on the ballad and what you read about courtly love (pages 88–89), do you think courtly love is being exemplified here? Write a paragraph about how love is portrayed in this poem. Then do more research on courtly love, and add a paragraph comparing Lord Randal's love with courtly love.

Apply and Create: Modern Ballad

With a partner, reread "Get Up and Bar the Door." Study the rhyme and meter. Then listen to some modern ballads, such as one by Bob Dylan. Then write your own modern ballad. Think of a story you can tell, such as a recounting of a recent event or a personal memory. Write your ballad using a meter, rhyme, or repetition similar to one of the selections. If you have time, find music to accompany your ballad. Then recite your ballad to another group.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpts from "Lord Randal" and answer the questions.

"And wha' did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
10 And wha' did she give you, my handsome young man?"
"Eels fried in a pan; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin', and fain wad lie down."

* * *

25 "What d' ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?"
"Four and twenty milk kye; mother, make my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

* * *

"What d' ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?"
"I leave her hell and fire; mother make my bed soon,
40 For I'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down."

1. What is ironic in this poem? Explain what makes it both ironic and humorous.
2. What is Lord Randal's mother trying to find out? How do her questions change?
3. Ballads often leave out scenes and details. What do you think has been left out here? Assess the effect of the omissions.

Before You Read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

The Pearl Poet wrote *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* during the late fourteenth century. The earliest surviving manuscript of *Sir Gawain* contains three other poems: "Pearl," "Purity," and "Patience." Because "Pearl" is considered to be the most sophisticated and powerful of the poems, the author, who is unknown, is commonly known as the "Pearl Poet."

At the time *Sir Gawain* was written, chivalry was highly valued, and audiences loved tales of courtly love and noble, heroic knights (see pages 88–89.) The legends of King Arthur and his knights were particularly popular at this time. In these stories, Arthur and his wife Guinevere entertained the knights of the Round Table in the city of Camelot. Sir Gawain, who was Arthur's nephew, was one of these knights.

Literary Lens

Romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a romance, a poetic narrative telling the story of a near-perfect hero on a dangerous quest whose character is tested before he can win the love of a lady or the respect of his fellows. Such romances often include supernatural elements and a larger-than-life enemy. Below are a few other characteristics of a romance.

- The plot deals with private issues rather than public affairs, and the hero, often a knight, acts as an individual not a representative of a society or a monarch.
- The events of the story are governed by chance, not by a rational course of events.
- Great importance is placed on the noble actions and deeds of the hero.
- The action is often set in an exotic or strange place distinct from the everyday world.
- At some point, the world of the courtly realm is depicted in the story.
- The story usually has a happy ending.

Alliterative Verse The form of *Sir Gawain* is alliterative verse, a type of poetry structured primarily by the use of alliteration as a unifying device. Here the poet uses the "bob and wheel"—a metric device made up of one very short line and four longer lines that include rhyme.

The Pearl Poet's Language

Although both Chaucer and the Pearl Poet wrote in Middle English, the Pearl Poet's "Midlands" dialect was extremely different from Chaucer's London dialect. Even English speakers today who can work their way through Chaucer's original language would have a difficult time reading *Sir Gawain*.

The selection presented here is a modern translation by John Gardner. The first part of the selection includes parallel text, occasional summaries, and highlighting of main events to help you keep track of the action in the story. As always, read the original text first.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Think about other romances you are familiar with. Based on these examples, what features do you think you will find in this romance?
2. Based on what you know about King Arthur and his knights, predict the characteristics you expect the knight in this story to exhibit.

from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The Pearl Poet
translated by John Gardner

As King Arthur and his followers celebrate Christmas and the new year, they are interrupted by the arrival of a gigantic knight who is green from head to toe.

Splendid that knight errant stood in a splay of green,
And green, too, was the mane of his mighty destrier;
Fair fanning tresses enveloped the fighting man's shoulders,
And over his breast hung a beard as big as a bush;
The beard and the huge mane burgeoning forth from his head
Were clipped off clean in a straight line over his elbows,
And the upper half of each arm was hidden underneath
As if covered by a king's chaperon, closed round the neck.
The mane of the marvelous horse was much the same,
Well crisped and combed and carefully pranked with knots,
Threads of gold interwoven with the glorious green,
Now a thread of hair, now another thread of gold;
The tail of the horse and the forelock were tricked the same way,
And both were bound up with a band of brilliant green
Adorned with glittering jewels the length of the dock,
Then caught up tight with a thong in a criss-cross knot
Where many a bell tinkled brightly, all burnished gold.
So monstrous a mount, so mighty a man in the saddle
Was never once encountered on all this earth

from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

The Pearl Poet
translated by John Gardner

Parallel Text

That wandering knight stood splendidly in a green space,
And the mane of his mighty horse was green too.
Light, thick hair covered the fighting man's shoulders
And a beard as big as a bush hung over his breast.
5 The beard and huge mane sprouting forth from his head
Were clipped off clean in a straight line over his elbows.
The upper half of each arm was hidden underneath
As if covered by a king's hood closed round the neck.
The mane of the marvelous horse was much the same,
10 Well cut and combed, and carefully tied with bows.
Threads of gold were woven with the glorious green,
Here a thread of hair, there another thread of gold.
The horse's tail and the top of his mane were trimmed the same way,
And both were tied up with a band of brilliant green.
15 The tail had glittering jewels down its length,
Held tight with a strap in a criss-cross knot
Where many bells of glistening gold tinkled brightly.
So monstrous a horse, so mighty a man in the saddle
Was never once encountered on all this earth

till then;
His eyes, like lightning, flashed,
And it seemed to many a man,
That any man who clashed
With him would not long stand.
But the huge man came unarmed, without helmet or hauberk,
No breastplate or gorget or iron cleats on his arms;
He brought neither shield nor spearshaft to shove or to smite,
But instead he held in one hand a bough of the holly
That grows most green when all the groves are bare
And held in the other an ax, immense and unwieldy,
A pitiless battleblade terrible to tell of.
King Arthur stared down at the stranger before the high dais
And greeted him nobly, for nothing on earth frightened him.
And he said to him, "Sir, you are welcome in this place;
I am the head of this court. They call me Arthur.
Get down from your horse, I beg you, and join us for dinner,
And then whatever you seek we will gladly see to."
But the stranger said, "No, so help me God on high,
My errand is hardly to sit at my ease in your castle!
But friend, since your praises are sung so far and wide,
Your castle the best ever built, people say, and your barons
The stoutest men in steel armor that ever rode steeds,
Most mighty and most worthy of all mortal men
And tough devils to toy with in tournament games,
And since courtesy is in flower in this court, they say,
All these tales, in truth, have drawn me to you at this time.
You may be assured by this holly branch I bear
That I come to you in peace, not spoiling for battle.
If I'd wanted to come in **finery**, fixed up for fighting,
I have back at home both a helmet and a hauberk,
A shield and a sharp spear that shines like fire,
And other weapons that I know pretty well how to use.
But since I don't come here for battle, my clothes are mere cloth.
Now if you are truly as bold as the people all say,

finery: *expensive or showy clothes or decoration*

20 till then.
His eyes, like lightning, flashed.
It seemed to many a man,
That any man who clashed
With him would not long stand.
25 But the huge man came unarmed, without helmet or armor—
No iron on his breast, throat, or arms.
He brought neither shield nor spear to shove or to strike.
Instead, he held in one hand a branch of the holly
That grows greenest when all the groves are bare.
30 And he held in the other hand an ax, huge and bulky—
A fierce battleblade terrible to tell of.
King Arthur stared down at the stranger before the high platform
And greeted him nobly, for nothing on earth frightened him.
He said to him, "Sir, you are welcome in this place.
35 I am the head of this court. They call me Arthur.
Get down from your horse, I beg you, and join us for dinner.
Then whatever you seek we will gladly see to."
But the stranger said, "No, help me God on high,
My errand is hardly to sit at ease in your castle!
40 Friend, your praises are sung far and wide.
People say your castle is the best ever built, and your knights
Are the boldest men ever to ride horses in armor—
Most mighty and most worthy of all mortal men,
And tough devils to fight in tournament games.
45 And they say courtesy flowers in this court.
So all these tales have drawn me to you now.
Be assured by this holly branch I bear
That I come to you in peace, not eager for battle.
I could have come in finery, fixed up for fighting.
50 Back home I have both a helmet and armor,
A shield and a sharp spear that shines like fire,
And other weapons that I know pretty well how to use.
But since I don't come here for battle, my clothes are mere cloth.
Now if you are truly as bold as all people say,

You will grant me gladly the little game that I ask
as my right."
Arthur gave him answer
And said, "Sir noble knight,
If it's a duel you're after,
We'll furnish you your fight."

"Good heavens, I want no such thing! I assure you, Sire,
You've nothing but beardless babes about this bench!
If I were hasped in my armor and high on my horse,
You haven't a man that could match me, your might is so
feeble.
And so all I ask of this court is a Christmas game,
For the Yule is here, and New Year's, and here sit young men;
If any man holds himself, here in this house, so hardy,
So bold in his blood—and so brainless in his head—
That he dares to stoutly exchange one stroke for another,
I shall let him have as my present this lovely gisarme,
This ax, as heavy as he'll need, to handle as he likes,
And I will abide the first blow, bare-necked as I sit.
If anyone here has the daring to try what I've offered,
Leap to me lightly, lad; lift up this weapon;
I give you the thing forever—you may think it your own;
And I will stand still for your stroke, steady on the floor,
Provided you honor my right, when my inning comes,
to repay.
But let the respite be
A twelvemonth and a day;
Come now, my boys, let's see

What any here can say."
If they were like stone before, they were stiller now,
Every last lord in the hall, both the high and the low;
The stranger on his destrier stirred in the saddle
And ferociously his red eyes rolled around;
He lowered his grisly eyebrows, glistening green,
And waved his beard and waited for someone to rise;
When no one answered, he coughed, as if embarrassed,

feeble: *lacking physical strength; weak*

55 You will grant me gladly the little game that I ask
as my right."
Arthur gave him answer.
He said, "Sir noble knight,
If it's a duel you're after,
60 We'll give you your fight."

"Good heavens, I want no such thing! I assure you, Sire,
You've nothing but beardless babes about this bench!
If I were clad in armor, high on my horse,
You haven't a man that could match me, your might is so
feeble.
65 And so all I ask of this court is a Christmas game.
For Christmas is here, and New Year's, and here sit young men.
Does any man in this house think himself so hardy,
So bold in his blood and brainless in his head,
To bravely dare exchange one stroke for another?
70 If so, I'll let him have this lovely battle-ax for a present,
As heavy as he'll need, to handle as he likes.
And I'll suffer the first blow, bare-necked as I sit.
If anyone here has the daring to try what I've offered,
Leap to me lightly, lad. Lift up this weapon.
75 I give you the thing forever—you may think it your own.
And I will stand still for your stroke, steady on the floor,
As long as you honor my right, when my turn comes,
to repay.
But let the delay be
80 A year and a day.
Come now, my boys, let's see

What any here can say."
If they were like stone before, they were more still now,
Every last lord in the hall, both high and low.
85 The stranger on his horse stirred in the saddle
And rolled his red eyes fiercely.
He lowered his fearful, glistening green eyebrows,
And waved his beard and waited for someone to rise.
When no one answered, he coughed as if embarrassed,

And drew himself up straight and spoke again:
"What! Can this be King Arthur's court?" said the stranger,
"Whose renown runs through many a realm, flung far and wide?
What has become of your chivalry and your conquest,
Your greatness-of-heart and your grimness and grand words?
Behold the radiance and renown of the mighty Round Table
Overwhelmed by a word out of one man's mouth!
You shiver and blanch before a blow's been shown!"
And with that he laughed so loud that the lord was distressed;
In chagrin, his blood shot up in his face and limbs so fair;
More angry he was than the wind,
And likewise each man there;
And Arthur, bravest of men,
Decided now to draw near.
And he said, "By heaven, sir, your request is strange;
But since you have come here for **folly**, you may as well find it.
I know no one here who's aghast of your great words.
Give me your gisarme, then, for the love of God,
And gladly I'll grant you the gift you have asked to be given."
Lightly the King leaped down and clutched it in his hand;
Then quickly that other lord alighted on his feet.
Arthur lay hold of the ax, he gripped it by the handle,
And he swung it up over him sternly, as if to strike.
The stranger stood before him, in stature higher
By a head or more than any man here in the house;
Sober and thoughtful he stood there and stroked his beard,
And with patience like a priest's he pulled down his collar,
No more unmanned or dismayed by Arthur's might
Than he'd be if some baron on the bench had brought him a glass of wine.
Then Gawain, at Guinevere's side,
Made to the King a sign:
"I beseech you, Sire," he said,
"Let this game be mine.

folly: *act of foolishness*

And drew himself up straight and spoke again.
"What! Can this be King Arthur's court?" said the stranger,
"Whose fame runs through many a realm, far and wide?
What has become of your chivalry and conquests,
Your greatness-of-heart, your grimness and grand words?
Look, how the bright fame of the mighty Round Table
Is overwhelmed by a word out of one man's mouth!
You shiver and turn pale before a blow's been shown!"
And with that he laughed so hard that Arthur was disturbed.
In shame, his blood rose in his face and limbs
so fair.
He was more angry than the wind,
And so was each man there.
And Arthur, bravest of men,
Decided now to draw near.
And he said, "By heaven, sir, your request is strange.
But since you have come here for folly, you'll get it.
I know no one here who's frightened of your great words.
So give me your battle-ax, for the love of God,
And I'll gladly grant you the gift you've asked for."
Lightly the King leaped down and clutched it in his hand,
Then quickly that other lord lit on his feet.
Arthur lay hold of the ax, gripping it by the handle,
And sternly swung it up over him, as if to strike.
The stranger stood before him, taller
By a head or more than any man in the house.
Sober and thoughtful he stood there and stroked his beard,
And with patience like a priest's he pulled down his collar.
He was no more frightened or dismayed by Arthur's might
Than he'd be if some knight on the bench had brought him
a glass
of wine.
Then Gawain, at Guinevere's side,
Made to the King a sign.
"I beg you, Sire," he said,
"Let this game be mine.

125 "Now if you, my worthy lord," said Gawain to the King,
"Would command me to step from the dais and stand with you there,
That I might without bad manners move down from my place
(Though I couldn't, of course, if my liege lady disliked it)
I'd be deeply honored to advise you before all the court;
130 For I think it unseemly, if I understand the matter,
That challenges such as this churl has chosen to offer
Be met by Your Majesty—much as it may amuse you—
When so many bold-hearted barons sit about the bench:
No men under Heaven, I am sure, are more hardy in will
135 Or better in body on the fields where battles are fought;
I myself am the weakest, of course, and in wit the most feeble;
My life would be least missed, if we let out the truth.
Only as you are my uncle have I any honor,
For excepting your blood, I bear in my body slight virtue.
140 And since this affair that's befallen us here is so foolish,
And since I have asked for it first, let it fall to me.
If I've reasoned incorrectly, let all the court say, without blame."
The nobles gather round
145 And all advise the same:
"Let the King step down
And give Sir Gawain the game!"

On the ground, the Green Knight got himself into position,
His head bent forward a little, the bare flesh showing,
150 His long and lovely locks laid over his crown
So that any man there might note the naked neck.
Sir Gawain laid hold of the ax and he hefted it high,
His pivot foot thrown forward before him on the floor,
And then, swiftly, he slashed at the naked neck;
155 The sharp of the battleblade shattered asunder the bones
And sank through the shining fat and slit it in two,
And the bit of the bright steel buried itself in the ground.
The fair head fell from the neck to the floor of the hall

125 "Please, my worthy lord," said Gawain to the king,
"Command me to step from the platform and stand with you
there.
Then I might move down from my place without bad
manners—
Though I couldn't, of course, if my queen disliked it.
I'd be deeply honored to advise you before all the court.
130 For this whole thing's wrong, if I understand the matter.
Challenges such as the one offered by this brute
Should not be met by Your Majesty, much as it may amuse
you—
Not when so many bold-hearted knights sit around the bench.
I am sure no men under Heaven are more hardy in will
135 Or better in body on the fields where battles are fought.
Of course, I myself am the weakest, and the most feeble in
wit.
To tell the truth, my life would be least missed.
My only honor is in having you as my uncle,
For except your blood, I bear little virtue in my body.
140 And since the business at hand is so foolish,
And since I have asked for it first, let it fall to me.
If I think wrongly, let all the court say so
without blame."
The nobles gathered round,
145 And all advised the same:
"Let the King step down
And give Sir Gawain the game!"

On the ground, the Green Knight got himself into position.
He bent his head forward a little so his bare flesh showed,
150 And his long and lovely hair spread over his head
So that any man there might note the naked neck.
Sir Gawain laid hold of the ax and raised it high,
With one foot braced before him on the floor,
Then swiftly slashed at the naked neck.
155 The edge of the battleblade shattered the bones apart
And sank through the shining fat and slit it in two,
And the bright steel buried itself in the ground.
The fair head fell from the neck to the floor of the hall,

And the people all kicked it away as it came near their feet.
160 The blood splashed up from the body and glistened on the green,
But he never faltered or fell for all of that,
But swiftly he started forth upon stout shanks
And rushed to reach out, where the King's retainers stood,
Caught hold of the lovely head, and lifted it up,
165 And leaped to his steed and snatched up the reins of the bridle,
Stepped into stirrups of steel and, striding aloft,
He held his head by the hair, high, in his hand;
And the stranger sat there as steadily in his saddle
As a man entirely unharmed, although he was headless
170 on his steed.
He turned his trunk about,
That baleful body that bled,
And many were faint with fright
When all his say was said.
175 He held his head in his hand up high before him,
Addressing the face to the dearest of all on the dais;
And the eyelids lifted wide, and the eyes looked out,
And the mouth said just this much, as you may now hear:
"Look that you go, Sir Gawain, as good as your word,
180 And seek till you find me, as loyally, my friend,
As you've sworn in this hall to do, in the hearing of the knights.
Come to the Green Chapel, I charge you, and take
A stroke the same as you've given, for well you deserve
To be readily requited on New Year's morn.
185 Many men know me, the Knight of the Green Chapel;
Therefore if you seek to find me, you shall not fail.
Come or be counted a coward, as is fitting."
Then with a rough jerk he turned the reins
And haled away through the hall-door, his head in his hand,
190 And fire of the flint flew out from the hooves of the foal.
To what kingdom he was carried no man there knew,
No more than they knew what country it was he came from.

And the people all kicked it away as it came near their feet.
160 The blood splashed from the body and glistened on the green,
But he never stumbled or fell even so.
He swiftly started forth on sturdy legs
And rushed toward where the king's men stood.
He caught hold of the lovely head, lifted it up,
165 And leaped to his horse and snatched up the reins of the bridle.
He stepped into steel stirrups, and riding along,
He held his head high in his hand by the hair.
And the stranger sat there as steadily in his saddle
As a man entirely unharmed, although he was headless
170 on his horse.
He turned his body about,
That menacing body that bled.
And many were faint with fright
At what he then said.
175 He held his head in his hand high up before him,
Turning the face to the dearest of all on the platform.
And the eyelids lifted wide, and the eyes looked out,
And the mouth said just what you are about to hear:
"Sir Gawain, be sure to keep your word, and go
180 And seek till you find me. Do so loyally, my friend,
As you've sworn in this hall to do, in the hearing of the knights.
I command you to come to the Green Chapel, and take
A stroke the same as you've given. For you well deserve
To be readily repaid on New Year's morning.
185 Many men know me, the Knight of the Green Chapel.
So if you seek to find me, you shall not fail.
Come or be proved a coward, as is fitting."
Then with a rough jerk he turned the reins
And hurried away through the hall-door, his head in his hand.
190 And fire of the flint flew from the horse's hooves.
To what kingdom he rode no man there knew,
No more than they knew what country he had come from.

What then?
The King and Gawain there
195 Laugh at the thing and grin;
And yet, it was an affair
Most marvelous to men.

The parallel text for Sir Gawain and the Green Knight *ends here. In the portion that follows, brief summaries appear to help you comprehend the original text.*

A year passes, and Sir Gawain sets out in search of the Green Chapel. After many dangerous adventures, he meets the lord of a magnificent castle. Gawain accepts the lord's offer of food and lodging and also agrees to an unusual proposal. The lord will go out to hunt each day while Gawain remains at the castle. At the end of each day, the men will exchange whatever they have received. For the first two days, the lady of the castle tries to seduce Gawain, but the knight refuses her advances, accepting only a modest kiss. Gawain keeps his promise and passes each kiss on to the lord. On the third day, however, the lady offers Gawain a gold ring, which he refuses because he does not want to be in her debt. She then asks him to take a green silk sash of hers, which she says is worth far less than the gold. At first he refuses, though he pledges to be her knight.

She held toward him a ring of the yellowest gold
And, standing aloft on the band, a stone like a star
200 From which flew splendid beams like the light of the sun;
And mark you well, it was worth a rich king's ransom.
But right away he refused it, replying in haste,
"My lady gay, I can hardly take gifts at the moment;
Having nothing to give, I'd be wrong to take gifts in turn."
205 She implored him again, still more earnestly, but again
He refused it and swore on his knighthood that he could
take nothing.
Grieved that he still would not take it, she told him then:
"If taking my ring would be wrong on account of its worth,
And being so much in my debt would be bothersome to you,

What then?
The King and Gawain there
195 Laughed at the thing and grinned.
And yet, it was an affair
Most marvelous to men.

I'll give you merely this sash that's of slighter value."
She swiftly unfastened the sash that encircled her waist,
Tied around her fair tunic, inside her bright mantle:
It was made of green silk and was marked of gleaming gold
Embroidered along the edges, ingeniously stitched.
This too she held out to the knight, and she earnestly begged him
To take it, trifling as it was, to remember her by.
But again he said no, there was nothing at all he could take,
Neither treasure nor token, until such time as the Lord
Had granted him some end to his adventure.
"And therefore, I pray you, do not be displeased,
But give up, for I cannot grant it, however fair or right.
I know your worth and price,
And my debt's by no means slight;
I swear through fire and ice
To be your humble knight."

The lady explains that the sash is magic and that it will protect whoever wears it from any harm. Gawain worries about having to face the Green Knight and finally agrees to take it. She promises not to tell anyone, and she kisses him.

"Do you lay aside this silk," said the lady then,
"Because it seems unworthy—as well it may?
Listen. Little as it is, it seems less in value,
But he who knew what charms are woven within it
Might place a better price on it, perchance.
For the man who goes to battle in this green lace,
As long as he keeps it looped around him,
No man under Heaven can hurt him, whoever may try,
For nothing on earth, however **uncanny**, can kill him."
The knight cast about in distress, and it came to his heart
This might be a treasure indeed when the time came to take
The blow he had bargained to suffer beside the Green Chapel
If the gift meant remaining alive, it might well be worth it;
So he listened in silence and suffered the lady to speak,
And she pressed the sash upon him and begged him to take it,

uncanny: *strange or mysterious, especially in an unsettling way*

And Gawain did, and she gave him the gift with great pleasure
And begged him, for her sake, to say not a word,
And to keep it hidden from her lord. And he said he would,
245 That except for themselves, this business would never be known
to a man.
He thanked her earnestly,
And boldly his heart now ran;
And now a third time she
250 Leaned down and kissed her man.

On New Year's Day, Gawain puts on the sash and leaves the castle in search of the Green Chapel. Instead, he encounters the Green Knight, who is carefully sharpening his ax. Frightened but prepared for an honorable death, Gawain bows his head and waits for the blow. The Green Knight mocks him for flinching when he brings his ax down as if to hit Gawain. Gawain quickly recovers and turns the mockery on the Green Knight.

Quickly then the man in the green made ready,
Grabbed up his keen-ground ax to strike Sir Gawain;
With all the might in his body he bore it aloft
And sharply brought it down as if to slay him;
255 Had he made it fall with the force he first intended
He would have stretched out the strongest man on earth.
But Sir Gawain cast a side glance at the ax
As it glided down to give him his Kingdom Come,
And his shoulders jerked away from the iron a little,
260 And the Green Knight caught the handle, holding it back,
And mocked the prince with many a proud reproof:
"*You* can't be Gawain," he said, "who's thought so good,
A man who's never been daunted on hill or dale!
For look how you flinch for fear before anything's felt!
265 I never heard tell that Sir Gawain was ever a coward!
I never moved a muscle when *you* came down;
In Arthur's hall I never so much as winced.
My head fell off at my feet, yet I never flickered;
But you! You tremble at heart before you're touched!

I'm bound to be called a better man than you, then,
my lord."
Said Gawain, "I shied once:
No more. You have my word.
But if my head falls to the stones
It cannot be restored.

"But be brisk, man, by your faith, and come to the point!
Deal out my doom if you can, and do it at once,
For I'll stand for one good stroke, and I'll start no more
Until your ax has hit—and that I swear."
"Here goes, then," said the other, and heaves it aloft
And stands there waiting, scowling like a madman;
He swings down sharp, then suddenly stops again,
Holds back the ax with his hand before it can hurt,
And Gawain stands there stirring not even a nerve;
He stood there still as a stone or the stock of a tree
That's wedged in rocky ground by a hundred roots.
O, merrily then he spoke, the man in green:
"Good! You've got your heart back! Now I can hit you.
May all that glory the good King Arthur gave you
Prove **efficacious** now—if it ever can—
And save your neck." In rage Sir Gawain shouted,
"*Hit* me, hero! I'm right up to here with your threats!
Is it *you* that's the cringing coward after all?"
"Whoo!" said the man in green, "he's wrathful, too!
No pauses, then; I'll pay up my pledge at once,
I vow!"
He takes his stride to strike
And lifts his lip and brow;
It's not a thing Gawain can like,
For nothing can save him now!

efficacious: *effective in producing a desired result*

The summaries end here. Main ideas are highlighted in colored text throughout the rest of the selection to aid comprehension.

He raises that ax up lightly and flashes it down,
And that blinding bit bites in at the knight's bare neck—
But hard as he hammered it down, it hurt him no more
Than to nick the nape of his neck, so it split the skin;

305 The sharp blade slit to the flesh through the shiny hide,
And red blood shot to his shoulders and spattered the ground.

And when Gawain saw his blood where it blinked in the snow
He sprang from the man with a leap to the length of a spear;
He snatched up his helmet swiftly and slapped it on,
310 Shifted his shield into place with a jerk of his shoulders,
And snapped his sword out faster than sight; said boldly—
And, mortal born of his mother that he was,
There was never on earth a man so happy by half—
"No more strokes, my friend; you've had your swing!
315 I've stood one swipe of your ax without resistance;
If you offer me any more, I'll repay you at once
With all the force and fire I've got—as you will see.
I take one stroke, that's all,
320 For that was the compact we Arranged in Arthur's hall;
But now, no more for me!"

The Green Knight remained where he stood, relaxing on his ax—
Settled the shaft on the rocks and leaned on the sharp end—
325 And studied the young man standing there, shoulders hunched,
And considered that **staunch** and **doughty** stance he took,
Undaunted yet, and in his heart he liked it;
And then he said merrily, with a mighty voice—
With a roar like rushing wind he reproved the knight—
330 "Here, don't be such an ogre on your ground!
Nobody here has behaved with bad manners toward you
Or done a thing except as the contract said.
I owed you a stroke, and I've struck; consider yourself
Well paid. And now I release you from all further duties.
335 If I'd cared to hustle, it may be, perchance, that I might

staunch: *firm or steadfast in principle or loyalty*

doughty: *brave and persistent*

feinted: *pretended to throw a blow to distract an opponent*

Have hit somewhat harder, and then you might well be cross!
The first time I lifted my ax it was lighthearted sport,
I merely **feinted** and made no mark, as was right,
For you kept our pact of the first night with honor
340 And abided by your word and held yourself true to me,
Giving me all you owed as a good man should.
I feinted a second time, friend, for the morning
You kissed my pretty wife twice and returned me the kisses;
And so for the first two days, mere feints, nothing more severe.
A man who's true to his word,
There's nothing he needs to fear;
You failed me, though, on the third Exchange, so I've tapped you here.
350 "That sash you wear by your scabbard belongs to me;
My own wife gave it to you, as I ought to know.
I know, too, of your kisses and all your words
And my wife's advances, for I myself arranged them.
It was I who sent her to test you. I'm convinced
You're the finest man that ever walked this earth.
As a pearl is of greater price than dry white peas,
So Gawain indeed stands out above all other knights.
But you lacked a little, sir; you were less than loyal;
But since it was not for the sash itself or for lust
But because you loved your life, I blame you less."
Sir Gawain stood in a study a long, long while,
So miserable with disgrace that he wept within,
And all the blood of his chest went up to his face
And he shrank away in shame from the man's gentle words.
365 The first words Gawain could find to say were these:
"Cursed be cowardice and covetousness both,
Villainy and vice that destroys all virtue!"
He caught at the knots of the girdle and loosened them
And fiercely flung the sash at the Green Knight.
370 "There, there's my fault! The foul fiend vex it!
Foolish cowardice taught me, from fear of your stroke,
To bargain, covetous, and abandon my kind,

The selflessness and loyalty suitable in knights;
Here I stand, faulty and false, much as I've feared them,
375 Both of them, untruth and treachery; may they see sorrow
and care!
I can't deny my guilt;
My works shine none too fair!
Give me your good will
380 And henceforth I'll beware."

At that, the Green Knight laughed, saying graciously,
"Whatever harm I've had, I hold it amended
Since now you're confessed so clean, acknowledging sins
And bearing the plain penance of my point;
385 I consider you polished as white and as perfectly clean
As if you had never fallen since first you were born.
And I give you, sir, this gold-embroidered girdle,
For the cloth is as green as my gown. Sir Gawain, think
On this when you go forth among great princes;
390 Remember our struggle here; recall to your mind
This rich token. Remember the Green Chapel.
And now, come on, let's both go back to my castle
And finish the New Year's revels with feasting and joy,
not **strife**,
I beg you," said the lord,
395 And said, "As for my wife,
She'll be your friend, no more
A threat against your life."
"No, sir," said the knight, and seized his helmet
And quickly removed it, thanking the Green Knight,
400 "I've reveled too well already; but fortune be with you;
May He who gives all honors honor you well."
And so they embraced and kissed and commended each other
To the Prince of Paradise, and parted then in the cold;
Sir Gawain turned again
405 To Camelot and his lord;
And as for the man in green,
He went wherever he would.

strife: *bitter conflict*

After You Read *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Literary Lens: Romance

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight has many elements of a romance. Make a chart like the one below, listing the characteristics of a romance and examples from the text. Circle the elements you think are the most powerful.

Characteristics of a Romance	Examples from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Explore Context: Code of Chivalry

Write a paragraph explaining how Sir Gawain's behavior reflects the code of chivalry. Use details from the text to support your answer. Then research knights of the Middle Ages and add a second paragraph comparing and contrasting them to Sir Gawain.

Apply and Create: Alliterative Verse

Working with a partner, look for some examples of alliteration the poet uses when describing the Green Knight or the contest between Gawain and the Green Knight. Then think of a battle Sir Gawain might have or an enemy he might face on his way home to Camelot. Write alliterative verse of six to ten lines describing the battle. Share your verse with the class.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and answer the questions that follow.

350 "That sash you wear by your scabbard belongs to me;
My own wife gave it to you, as I ought to know.
I know, too, of your kisses and all your words
And my wife's advances, for I myself arranged them.
It was I who sent her to test you. I'm convinced
355 You're the finest man that ever walked this earth.
As a pearl is of greater price than dry white peas,
So Gawain indeed stands out above all other knights.
But you lacked a little, sir; you were less than loyal;
But since it was not for the sash itself or for lust
360 But because you loved your life, I blame you less."
Sir Gawain stood in a study a long, long while,
So miserable with disgrace that he wept within,
And all the blood of his chest went up to his face
And he shrank away in shame from the man's gentle words.

1. What effect did the Green Knight's test have on Gawain?
2. What does Gawain's reaction to having his life spared reveal about him?
3. Compare Beowulf and Gawain. Which is the greater hero? Why?

Before You Read *Le Morte d'Arthur*

Sir Thomas Malory's (c. 1405–1471) actual identity remains a bit of a mystery. Most scholars believe that the Malory who wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* was imprisoned several times for breaking the law, fought in the Hundred Years' War, and was knighted in 1442. He is also thought to have been involved in plots against the crown in support of the House of Lancaster's claim to the English throne. Scholars believe he began writing this book while in prison and finished it two years before his death. He never titled the work.

Le Morte d'Arthur is one of the most complete works of the French Arthurian legends and has been a source for many who have written about King Arthur since. Alfred Lord Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* was surely influenced by *Le Morte d'Arthur*, as was T. H. White's *The Once and Future King*. The tone of Malory's book is elegiac, telling of bygone days and heroes. The book recounts the rise and fall of Arthur and his kingdom of Camelot. Being a knight himself, Malory's inspiration might have come from witnessing the decline of the chivalric code.

Literary Lens

Conflict A conflict is the struggle between two forces that moves the plot forward. There are two types: external and internal. An external conflict is a struggle with an outside force, such as another character, nature, society, or a physical condition. An internal conflict is a struggle that takes place within the character. Typically, the main character may have to overcome more than one conflict. Minor characters may also face struggles that complicate the plot.

Malory's Language

Contrary to the accepted style of the day, Malory wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* in prose rather than verse. Just as Chaucer's great work set the stage for the acceptance of poetry in English, Malory succeeded in making prose an acceptable form for literature. His language is simple and his characters and dialogue are realistic.

In 1485, William Caxton printed the first edition of the book, and he named the untitled manuscript *Le Morte d'Arthur,* for the last section of the work. Although Malory was not the first to write about Arthur, his translation and adaptation of the French legends were essential to the growth of the genre.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Think about what you know about King Arthur's knights. What would cause a man to train to become a knight?
2. Based on what you have read, what conflicts do you predict Arthur and his knights will face?
3. How do you think reading this legend in prose will be different from reading the poetry of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? How do prose and verse create different experiences for a reader?

from Le Morte d'Arthur

Sir Thomas Malory

King Arthur's dream of Camelot, a glorious kingdom ruled with honor and justice, is dealt a heavy blow when his favorite knight, Lancelot, falls in love with Queen Guinevere. Arthur travels to France in pursuit of Lancelot but is forced to return to England when he learns that his illegitimate son Mordred has taken control of the kingdom. When the king arrives, Mordred attacks, and Arthur's nephew Gawain is killed. Before he dies, however, he manages to send a message to Lancelot telling him that Camelot is threatened and that Arthur needs help.

So upon Trinity Sunday[1] at night King Arthur dreamed a wonderful dream, and in his dream him seemed that he saw upon a chafflet[2] a chair, and the chair was fast[3] to a wheel, and thereupon sat King Arthur in the richest cloth of gold that might be made. And the King thought there was under him, far from him, an hideous deep black water, and therein was all manner of serpents, and worms, and wild beasts, foul and horrible. And suddenly the King thought that the wheel turned upside down, and he fell among the serpents, and every beast took him by a limb. And then the King cried as he lay in his bed, "Help, help!"

And then knights, squires,[4] and yeomen[5] awaked the King, and then he was so amazed that he wist not where he was. And then so he awaked until it was nigh[6] day, and then he fell on slumbering again, not sleeping nor thoroughly waking. So the King seemed verily that there came Sir Gawain unto him with a number of fair ladies with him. So when King Arthur saw him, he said, "Welcome, my sister's son. I weened ye had been dead.[7] And now I see thee on-live, much am I beholden unto[8] Almighty Jesu. Ah, fair nephew and my sister's son, what been[9] these ladies that hither be come with you?"

"Sir," said Sir Gawain, "all these be ladies for whom I have foughten for when I was man living. And all these are those that I did battle for in righteous quarrels, and God hath given them that grace, at their great prayer, because I did battle for them for their right, that they should bring me hither unto you. Thus much hath given me leave God, for to warn you of your death.[10] For and ye fight as tomorn[11] with Sir Mordred, as ye both have assigned,[12] doubt ye not ye must be slain, and the most party of your people on both parties. And for the great grace and goodness that Almighty Jesu hath unto you, and for pity of you and many

1 **Trinity Sunday:** the eighth Sunday after Easter
2 **chafflet:** platform
3 **fast:** fastened
4 **squires:** knights' attendants
5 **yeomen:** small landholders
6 **nigh:** nearly
7 **I . . . dead:** I thought you had died.
8 **beholden unto:** indebted to
9 **what been:** who are
10 **Thus . . . death:** So God has allowed me this much—to warn you of your death.
11 **tomorn:** tomorrow
12 **assigned:** agreed

more other good men there shall be slain, God hath sent me to you of his special grace to give you warning that in no wise ye do battle as tomorn, but that ye take a treaty for a month from today. And **proffer** you largely you so that tomorn ye put in a delay. For within a month shall come Sir Lancelot with all his noble knights and rescue you worshipfully and slay Sir Mordred and all that ever will hold with him."

proffer: *to hold out to someone for acceptance; offer*

Then Sir Gawain and all the ladies vanished. And anon[13] the King called upon his knights, squires, and yeomen, and charged them wightly[14] to fetch his noble lords and wise bishops unto him. And when they were come the King told them of his avision, that Sir Gawain had told him and warned him that, and he fought on the morn, he should be slain. Then the King commanded Sir Lucan the Butler and his brother Sir Bedivere the Bold, with two bishops with them, and charged them in any wise to take a treaty for a month from today with Sir Mordred. "And spare not: proffer him lands and goods as much as ye think reasonable."

So then they departed and came to Sir Mordred where he had a grim host[15] of an hundred thousand, and there they **entreated** Sir Mordred long time. And at the last Sir Mordred was agreed for to have Cornwall and Kent[16] by King Arthur's days, and after that, all England, after the days of King Arthur.

entreated: *asked earnestly or anxiously; begged*

Then were they condescended[17] that King Arthur and Sir Mordred should meet betwixt[18] both their hosts, and each of them should bring fourteen persons. And so they came with this word unto Arthur. Then said he, "I am glad that this is done," and so he went into the field.

And when King Arthur should depart, he warned all his host that, and they see any sword drawn, "Look ye come on fiercely and slay that traitor Sir Mordred, for I in no wise trust him." In like wise Sir Mordred warned his host that "And ye see any manner of sword drawn, look that ye come on fiercely, an so slay all that ever before you standeth, for in no wise I will not trust for this treaty." And in

13 **anon:** soon
14 **wightly:** quickly
15 **host:** army
16 **Cornwall and Kent:** counties in England
17 **were they condescended:** they agreed
18 **betwixt:** between

the same wise said Sir Mordred unto his host, "For I know well my father will be avenged upon me."

And so they met as their pointment[19] was and were agreed and accorded thoroughly. And wine was fetched and they drank together. Right so came an adder[20] out of a little heathbush, and it stung a knight in the foot. And so when the knight felt him so stung, he looked down and saw the adder. And anon he drew his sword to slay the adder, and thought none other harm. And when the host on both parties saw that sword drawn, then they blew beams, trumpets, horns, and shouted grimly. And so both hosts dressed them together.[21] And King Arthur took his horse and said, "Alas, this unhappy day!" and so rode to his party, and Sir Mordred in like wise.

And never since was there never seen a more dolefuller[22] battle in no Christian land, for there was but rushing and riding, lunging and striking; and many a grim word was there spoken of either to other, and many a deadly stroke. But ever King Arthur rode throughout the battle of Sir Mordred many times and did full nobly, as a noble king should do, and at all times he fainted never.[23] And Sir Mordred did his devoir[24] that day and put himself in great **peril**.

peril: *serious and immediate danger*

And thus they fought all the long day, and never stinted[25] till the noble knights were laid to the cold earth. And ever they fought still till it was near night, and by then was there an hundred thousand laid dead upon the down.[26] Then was King Arthur wood-wroth out of measure[27] when he saw his people so slain from him. And so he looked about him and could see no more of all his host, and good knights left no more on-live, but two knights:[28] the t'one was Sir Lucan the Butler and the other his brother Sir Bedivere. And yet they were full sore wounded.

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19 **pointment:** plan
20 **adder:** snake
21 **And . . . together:** And so both armies charged each other.
22 **more dolefuller:** sadder
23 **at all times he fainted never:** he never showed fear
24 **devoir:** duty
25 **stinted:** stopped
26 **down:** field
27 **Then . . . measure:** King Arthur went completely mad with rage.
28 **good . . . knights:** Of all his good knights, only two were left.

"Jesu, mercy," said the King, "where are all my noble knights become? Alas that ever I should see this doleful day! For now," said King Arthur, "I am come to mine end. But would to God," said he, "that I wist not where were that traitor Sir Mordred that has caused all this mischief."

Then King Arthur looked about and was ware where stood Sir Mordred leaning upon his sword among a great heap of dead men.

"Now give me my spear," said King Arthur unto Sir Lucan, "for yonder I have espied the traitor that all this woe hath wrought."

"Sir, let him be," said Sir Lucan, "for he is unhappy. And if ye pass this unhappy day ye shall be right well revenged upon him. And, good lord, remember ye of your night's dream, and what the spirit of Sir Gawain told you tonight, and yet God of his great goodness hath preserved you hitherto. And for God's sake, my lord, leave off by this, for, blessed be God, ye have won the field: for yet we been here three on-live, and with Sir Mordred is not one on-live.[29] And therefore if ye leave off now, this wicked day of destiny is past."

"Now, tide me death, tide me life,"[30] said the King, "now I see him yonder alone, he shall never escape mine hands. For at a better avail shall I never have him."[31]

"God speed you well!" said Sir Bedivere.

Then the King got his spear in both his hands and ran toward Sir Mordred, crying and saying, "Traitor, now is thy deathday come!"

And when Sir Mordred saw King Arthur he ran until him with his sword drawn in his hand, and there King Arthur smote[32] Sir Mordred under the shield, with a thrust of his spear, throughout the body more than a fathom.[33] And when Sir Mordred felt that he had his death's wound, he thrust himself with the might that he had up to the burr of King Arthur's spear, and right so he smote his father King Arthur with his sword holden in both his hands, upon the side of the head, that the sword pierced the helmet and the casing of the brain. And therewith Sir Mordred dashed down stark dead to the earth.

---

29 **for . . . on-live:** For there are still three of us alive, and Mordred has not one alive.

30 **Now . . . life:** Let either death or life befall me now.

31 **For . . . him:** For I shall never have a better chance against him.

32 **smote:** struck

33 **fathom:** six feet

And noble King Arthur fell in a swough to the earth, and there he **swooned** oftentimes, and Sir Lucan and Sir Bedivere ofttimes heaved him up. And so, weakly betwixt them, they led him to a little chapel not far from the seaside, and when the King was there, him thought him reasonably eased. Then heard the people cry in the field. "Now go thou, Sir Lucan," said the King, "and do me to wit what betokens that noise in the field."[34]

swooned: *fainted, often from extreme emotion*

So Sir Lucan departed, for he was grievously wounded in many places. And so as he walked he saw and harkened by the moonlight how that pillagers and robbers were come into the field to pill and to rob many a full noble knight of brooches and bracelets and of many a good ring and many a rich jewel. And who that were not dead all out there they slew them for their harness[35] and their riches. When Sir Lucan understood this work, he came to the King as soon as he might and told him all what he had heard and seen. "Therefore by my read," said Sir Lucan, "it is best that we bring you to some town."

"I would it were so," said the King, "but I may not stand, my head works so. Ah, Sir Lancelot," said King Arthur, "this day have I sore missed thee. And alas that ever I was against thee, for now have I my death, whereof Sir Gawain me warned in my dream."

Then Sir Lucan took up the King the t'one party and Sir Bedivere the other party; and in the lifting up the King swooned and in the lifting Sir Lucan fell in a swoon that part of his guts fell out of his body, and therewith the noble knight's heart burst. And when the King awoke he beheld Sir Lucan how he lay foaming at the mouth and part of his guts lay at his feet.

"Alas," said the King, "this is to me a full heavy sight to see this noble duke so die for my sake, for he would have helped me that had more need of help than I.[36] Alas that he would not complain him for his heart was so set to help me. Now Jesu have mercy upon his soul."

Then Sir Bedivere wept for the death of his brother.

"Now leave this mourning and weeping gentle knight," said

34 **do . . . field:** Find out for me what that noise in the field means.

35 **harness:** armor

36 **for . . . I:** For he tried to help me, when he needed more help than I.

the King, "for all this will not avail me. For wit thou well, and might I live myself, the death of Sir Lucan would grieve me evermore. But my time passeth on fast," said the King. "Therefore," said King Arthur unto Sir Bedivere, "take thou here Excalibur my good sword and go with it to yonder water's side; and when thou comest there I charge thee throw my sword in that water and come again and tell me what thou sawest there."

"My lord," said Sir Bedivere, "your commandment shall be done, and I shall lightly[37] bring you word again."

So Sir Bedivere departed. And by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss." And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.

"What saw thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waves and winds."

"That is untruly said of thee," said the King. "And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me loved and dear, spare not, but throw it in."

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

"What sawest thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan."[38]

"Ah, traitor unto me and untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened[39] that thou that has been to me so loved and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead."

---

37 **lightly:** quickly

38 **waters wap and waves wan:** the waters lap and the waves grow pale

39 **weened:** thought

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. And there came an arm and an hand above the water and took it and clutched it, and shook it thrice and brandished; and then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.

"Alas," said the King, "help me hence, for I dread me I have tarried overlong."

Then Sir Bedivere took the King upon his back and so went with him to that water's side. And when they were at the water's side, even fast by[40] the bank floated a little barge with many fair ladies in it; and among them all was a queen; and all they had black hoods, and all they wept and shrieked when they saw King Arthur.

"Now put me into that barge," said the King; and so he did softly. And there received him three ladies with great mourning, and so they set them down. And in one of their laps King Arthur laid his head, and then the queen said, "Ah, my dear brother, why have ye tarried so long from me? Alas, this wound on your head hath caught overmuch cold." And anon they rowed fromward the land, and Sir Bedivere beheld all the ladies go froward him.

Then Sir Bedivere cried and said, "Ah, my lord Arthur, what shall become of me, now ye go from me and leave me here alone among mine enemies?"

"Comfort thyself," said the King, "and do as well as thou mayest, for in me is no trust for to trust in.[41] For I must into the vale[42] of Avilion to heal me of my grievous wound. And if thou hear nevermore of me, pray for my soul."

But ever the queen and ladies wept and shrieked, that it was pity to hear. And as soon as Sir Bedivere had lost sight of the barge he wept and wailed, and so took the forest and went all that night.

And in the morning he was ware, betwixt two bare woods, of a chapel and an hermitage. Then was Sir Bedivere glad, and thither he went, and when he came into the chapel he saw where lay an hermit groveling on all fours, close thereby a tomb was new dug.

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40 **even fast by:** nearby

41 **for . . . in:** For you cannot depend upon me now.

42 **vale:** valley

When the hermit saw Sir Bedivere he knew him well, for he was but little tofore Bishop of Canterbury, that Sir Mordred put to flight.

interred: *placed (a corpse) in a grave or tomb*

"Sir," said Sir Bedivere, "what man is there here **interred** that you pray so fast for?"

"Fair son," said the hermit. "I wot not verily but by guessing.[43] But this same night, at midnight, here came a number of ladies and brought here a dead corpse and prayed me to inter him. And here they offered an hundred tapers,[44] and gave me a thousand gold coins."

"Alas," said Sir Bedivere, "that was my lord King Arthur, which lieth here buried in this chapel."

Then Sir Bedivere swooned, and when he awoke he prayed the hermit that he might abide with him still, there to live with fasting and prayers:

"For from hence will I never go," said Sir Bedivere, "by my will, but all the days of my life here to pray for my lord Arthur."

"Sir, ye are welcome to me," said the hermit, "for I know you better than ye think that I do: for ye are Sir Bedivere the Bold, and the full noble duke Sir Lucan the Butler was your brother."

Then Sir Bedivere told the hermit all as you have heard tofore, and so he stayed with the hermit that was beforehand Bishop of Canterbury. And there Sir Bedivere put upon him poor clothes, and served the hermit full lowly[45] in fasting and in prayers.

Thus of Arthur I find no more written in books that been authorized, neither more of the very certainty of his death heard I nor read, but thus was he led away in a ship wherein were three queens; that one was King Arthur's sister, Queen Morgan le Fay, the other was the Queen of North Galis, and the third was the Queen of the Waste Lands.

Now more of the death of King Arthur could I never find, but that these ladies brought him to his grave, and such one was interred there which the hermit bare witness that was once Bishop of Canterbury. But yet the hermit knew not in certain that he was verily the body of King Arthur; for this tale Sir Bedivere, a knight of the Table Round, made it to be written.

Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but carried by the will of our Lord Jesu into another place; and

---

43 **I . . . guessing:** I can only guess.

44 **tapers:** candles

45 **full lowly:** humbly

men say that he shall come again, and he shall win the Holy Cross. Yet I will not say that it shall be so, but rather I would say: here in this world he changed his life. And many men say that there is written upon the tomb this:

HIC IACET ARTHURUS, REX QUONDAM, REXQUE FUTURUS[46]

The Last Sleep of Arthur in Avalon by Sir Edward Burne-Jones (1881–98)

46 **Hic . . . futurus:** Here lies Arthur, who was once king, and will be king again.

After You Read *Le Morte d'Arthur*

Literary Lens: Conflict

What internal and external conflicts do Arthur and his knights face? Make a chart like the one below to list the conflicts. How do the conflicts move the plot forward?

Internal Conflicts	External Conflicts

Explore Context: Arthur and Camelot

Le Morte d'Arthur is about the rise and fall of Arthur and his kingdom. How is Arthur's kingdom ruined and his dreams for it dashed? Write a paragraph describing Arthur and Camelot. Then research Camelot and Arthur and add an additional paragraph using the best of the new information.

Apply and Create: Modern Arthurian Legends

Malory ends his book by saying many people believe King Arthur isn't dead and will come again. Work with a partner to write a legend about the return of King Arthur to Camelot. What will he do when he returns? What conflicts must he overcome? Who and what will he encounter along the way? Use realistic dialogue and inventive images to bring your characters and story to life. Share your legend with the class.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpt from *Le Morte d'Arthur* and answer the questions that follow.

> So Sir Bedivere departed. And by the way he beheld that noble sword, that the pommel and the haft was all precious stones. And then he said to himself, "If I throw this rich sword in the water, thereof shall never come good, but harm and loss." And then Sir Bedivere hid Excalibur under a tree. And so, as soon as he might, he came again unto the King and said he had been at the water and had thrown the sword into the water.
>
> "What saw thou there?" said the King.
>
> "Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waves and winds."
>
> "That is untruly said of thee," said the King. "And therefore go thou lightly again and do my commandment; as thou art to me loved and dear, spare not, but throw it in."

Then Sir Bedivere returned again and took the sword in his hand. And yet him thought sin and shame to throw away that noble sword. And so eft he hid the sword and returned again and told the King that he had been at the water and done his commandment.

"What sawest thou there?" said the King.

"Sir," he said, "I saw nothing but waters wap and waves wan."

"Ah, traitor unto me and untrue," said King Arthur, "now hast thou betrayed me twice. Who would have weened that thou that has been to me so loved and dear, and thou art named a noble knight, and would betray me for the riches of this sword. But now go again lightly, for thy long tarrying putteth me in great jeopardy of my life, for I have taken cold. And but if thou do now as I bid thee, if ever I may see thee I shall slay thee with mine own hands, for thou wouldest for my rich sword see me dead."

Then Sir Bedivere departed and went to the sword and lightly took it up, and so he went to the water's side; and there he bound the girdle about the hilts, and threw the sword as far into the water as he might. And there came an arm and an hand above the water and took it and clutched it, and shook it thrice and brandished; and then vanished away the hand with the sword into the water. So Sir Bedivere came again to the King and told him what he saw.

1. Why do you think Arthur commands Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur into the sea?
2. What causes Sir Bedivere's unwillingness to do what Arthur asks? What effect does this have? What does the fact that he obeyed Arthur on the third request reveal about Sir Bedivere's character?
3. What does Sir Bedivere see when he throws the sword in the sea? How do you interpret this vision?

Connecting Eras: Cause and Effect

In this unit you explored the Middle Ages and the codes that people lived by, including the codes of chivalry and courtly love. Those who lived during this period often suffered hardship and loss, and in the royal court, on the battlefield, and in the villages, people were expected to conduct themselves in certain prescribed ways. Everyone lived by strict rules—from prince to peasant. The cause for these rules—the need for order and solidarity—was probably less obvious than the effect—banishment, punishment, or death. A clear understanding of cause and effect was necessary for those good citizens trying to make their way in the Middle Ages.

Tales of courtly love and chivalry helped Medieval people understand important rules of behavior, and ever since these tales have been extremely popular, particularly the legends

Keira Knightley as Guinevere and Clive Owen as Arthur in the 2004 film *King Arthur*

of King Arthur and the knights of the Round Table. Thousands of books and movies recount the adventures of King Arthur and his magic sword, Excalibur; the passionate Queen Guinevere (also spelled Guenevere); the stalwart Lancelot; Merlin, the magician; and Morgan, Arthur's half-sister.

Medieval beliefs continue to permeate our culture through films, music, books, and even advertising. The hope of accomplishing a feat that will result in impressing a gentleman or lady or of making a friend whose loyalty is unquestioned exists in our often cynical world. The code of honor, so evident in the military, is still seen in men and women who vow to serve others, their country, and the ideals of a nation.

Rosalind Miles is a contemporary novelist who has captured the heart of the Arthurian legends through the person of Queen Guenevere, whom she presents as a strong leader. Like many marriages of the time, the reason for Arthur and Guenevere's union was political—the need for an alliance between his kingdom and hers. Guenevere does come to love Arthur, but when he betrays her, she is hurt and angry and turns to Sir Lancelot. Her position dictates that she remain with the King for the sake of the kingdom, however, so this she does.

In the following excerpt, the effect of Arthur's betrayal is evident. The most pernicious threat to Camelot (here called Caerleon) is Morgan, who has been stripped of her ancestral rights and separated from her family. Morgan now has a child, Mordred, and together they will stop at nothing to destroy Camelot. Arthur has betrayed Guenevere once, and Morgan gives him cause to do it again. Though Arthur vows to destroy Morgan and her son, Guenevere isn't certain he's capable of doing it—even to save Camelot.

As you read, think about the causes for the codes of honor and courtly love that were prevalent at this time. Then consider the effects on the men and women who were striving to maintain them.

from *Guenevere, Queen of the North Country*

by Rosalind Miles

NOT to Arthur, though. The next morning she found him roaming round her chamber when she returned from her early-morning ride. What are you doing in my apartments, she thought coldly. What makes you think you can invite yourself here?

"Lancelot—he's myself, don't you see that, Guenevere?" he began abruptly, running his hand through his hair. With a jolt she noticed strands of gray she'd never seen before. When had she last looked at Arthur with the eyes of a loving wife?

She took a breath. "See what?"

"What they say." Arthur's voice was lifeless, dull, devoid of hope.

"What do they say?" She was already losing interest. Oh, Arthur, tell me if you want to, and if you don't, who cares?

Arthur stood still and clutched his head in his hands. "He's myself come back to reproach me—he's all I was, all I ever used to be."

"Arthur, men of your age often see their former selves in younger men—"

"No, it's more than that!" Arthur groaned. "It's his untainted soul; it shines out of him! And I—oh, God, Guenevere, what am I?"

Yet Arthur shone in Lancelot's eyes too. That evening, for the first time since Amir died, Arthur called for dinner in the Great Hall. As they mounted the dais that night and sat on their golden thrones, as they feasted guests and strangers by the light of a thousand torches, she could see their glory reflected

in Lancelot's gaze. And as he looked at Arthur with eyes of adoration, so Arthur revived, and life crept back into him, inch by painful inch.

In the body of the hall Lancelot moved among the courtiers, bowing shyly to ladies and attending courteously to lords. With men he was as proud as a stag in a glen, yet always civil too. But when he spoke to women, even the oldest matron without a tooth in her head, Guenevere had to turn away and bite her lip in pain. The misty glances that followed him from every female eye, and even from old men and boys not old enough to fight, tortured her with a rage she could not explain.

But not all those in the Great Hall welcomed Lancelot. From her throne on the dais she could see that the loyal Gawain rejoiced in Arthur's joy. But she saw Agravain's stony glare turned on Lancelot in silent calculation, and the flame of his inner darkness seemed to burn higher when Lancelot passed by.

Soon Agravain's harsh cawing voice was disturbing the evening's peace. "The King loves the new knight better than our brother now. So much for loyalty, when a newcomer can blind him to the claims of true and faithful men!"

"Oh, come, brother!"

"Surely not!"

Neither Gaheris nor Gareth wanted to hear such a thing. But their troubled looks showed that the idea had taken hold. Frigid with rage, Guenevere called them up to her throne with a furious wave of her hand. "The King is not a child, to find a new friend and ignore the old," she said icily, staring at Agravain. "He will never forget true and loyal service—nor hesitate to punish the opposite."

Agravain stared her out. "As you say, Majesty."

In the warm summer evening Guenevere's skin crawled. What was it about Agravain? In the black depths of Agravain's cold gaze could she see another loveless scrutiny, another mask of hate?

Morgan.

Yes.

It had to come, she knew it. She had let herself bury Morgan in her mind, because her soul was frantic for respite from the pain. But Morgan was gone, not lost, and sometime she would return.

Nevermore.

In the dead hour before dawn, Sir Kay stood by the gatehouse and watched the long train of horses gallop out. Torches flared on either side of the causeway to light their way.

Nevermore would he be one of that blessed fellowship, feel the exaltation at the start of a campaign, know the love that only men can share.

"Farewell!" He limped forward, one arm upraised in farewell, and found himself weeping, though not from the pain in his leg. He had known he would never ride out adventuring again after the wound he took at the hands of the vengeful dwarf. But that did not make it any easier to bear.

And in place of action, camaraderie, and feats of arms, he could only despise the task that Arthur had given him now. Kay threw a cold glance up

to the battlements, and the worm of bitterness stirred again in his heart. Left behind to mind the Queen now, no better than the castle cripple, or a poor lady's maid. Well, at least his charge was not so taken up with her handsome new young knight that she'd refused to turn out to wave the King farewell. But dancing attendance on Queen Guenevere—was this a fit task for a knight of the King to do?

High above on the battlements, Guenevere caught Kay's malignant glance and sighed, feeling the cold air chill her to the bone. It was not yet dawn, and the air was still thick with the vapors of the night. Arthur had driven his knights like a madman, and Sir Gawain and the Orkney brothers, along with Sir Lucan, Sir Kay, and Sir Bedivere, had worked like demons to rouse all the sleepers and summon as many men as would come to the sound of the horn.

For Arthur needed good men around him now. In the dead hour of night, as Guenevere roamed her chamber sleeplessly and Ina dozed uneasily by the fire, she had heard a scream outside. A moment later Arthur, his face glistening and distorted, burst through the door. He was brandishing Excalibur as he came, wildly slashing the air.

The great sword growled in his hand, roaring for blood. For a moment she thought that he had come to slash her to death. Then the agony in his face put that fear to flight. He came toward her like a man possessed, tears mingling with the sweat on his face. "Tell me it's safe!" he howled.

Her stomach lurched. "What?"

"The scabbard. Your mother's

scabbard, the one you gave to me." He waved the naked blade. "Say that you came and took it away when I betrayed you, to keep it safe!"

She shook her head. There was no need for words.

Arthur swung his body madly, like a goaded bull. "Then Morgan has taken it. That's where it's gone!"

Guenevere closed her eyes and tried to breathe.

My mother's scabbard, with its power of protecting the wearer from loss of blood. The finest thing I had, entrusted to Arthur, and stolen by Morgan now.

"You had it in your chamber when you slept with her," she said dully.

"And now it's gone!"

"But why would she want it, Arthur? She doesn't fight; she never goes to war."

Arthur roamed the chamber, shaking his head in pain. "To hurt you. To take what was yours. Or to punish me. As if she could do much more to me than she has!"

"No." Now it was Guenevere's turn to pace the floor. "No, that's too easy. She must have a reason for this. She has a plan. She means to use it

against us somehow—someday."

"How?" Arthur was gaping like a child.

"Oh, Arthur." All she felt for him festered in her eyes. "However long it takes, we'll find out. And then you'll wish you hadn't."

Arthur looked at her like a man under sentence of death. "I'll get it back!" he screamed, as he ran out.

But she did not believe him. For a long while then, she cursed him in her heart and wished him dead.

She shuddered, and huddled into her cloak against the damp early-morning air. Far below, the red dragon on Arthur's banner flared at the head of his troop, fighting the wind as it flew off through the chill half-light.

What would Arthur do if he found Morgan at Le Val Sans Retour? When he had given her the castle in the valley, he had also equipped it with his knights, and made them swear to die for her. Would he lay siege to it now, and make war on his own men?

And if Morgan's child had survived the shipwreck and was with her as Arthur feared, what would he do then? Kill his own son?

She had told Ina that she would not be disturbed, that no one was to come to her here on the battlements, however long she lingered in the cold. But the footfall behind her now was not Ina's. And there was only one man for whom Ina would disobey.

She could hear the sound of his breathing before he spoke. His light French accent fell like sweet rain on her ear. "The King is leaving Caerleon. You do not accompany him?"

She did not turn her head. "Where the King is going, he must go alone."

"As you say, Majesty," Lancelot moved easily to take his place at her side, gripping the stone wall of the battlements as he leaned forward to look down.

Critical Thinking: Cause and Effect

Ask Yourself

1. What is Arthur's attitude toward Sir Lancelot? What is the primary reason for this? What effect does Arthur's attitude have on others at Camelot?
2. What is the cause of Guenevere's pain at the feast?
3. What reasons do the knights have, particularly Sir Agravain, for their animosity toward Lancelot?
4. What effect does seeing the men riding off to battle have on Sir Kay?
5. What causes Arthur to barge into Guenevere's room? What is the effect?
6. What do Arthur and his knights mean to accomplish at Le Val Sans Retour?

Examine the Writing

As you read on page 92, a cause can have many effects or one effect can have many causes. In the Arthurian legends, knights vowed to defend their king, their church, and their country, and to never recoil before an enemy. These beliefs led to many battles to defend the King's honor.

Read the following passage describing the battle between Sir Lancelot and the Black Knight, and note the cause-and-effect relationships.

> And then he saw it. Far off the body of Arthur lay on the grass, while a black knight on a black horse stood triumphing over him.
>
> Without conscious thought, Lancelot thundered through the knight's enclosure and straight out on to the field, plowing through the figures already running to Arthur's aid. As he passed the viewing gallery he had a brief glimpse of Guenevere's white face, her mouth open in horror for a scream that did not come . . .
>
> A black lust for revenge filled Lancelot's heart. "*A vous!*" he howled. "Have at you, stranger knight! Prepare to defend yourself!"
>
> Ahead of him the black helmeted head shook slowly from side to side, in amusement or in disbelief, he could not tell. Blind fury drove him on. "*A vous! A l'outrance!* To the death, sir knight!"

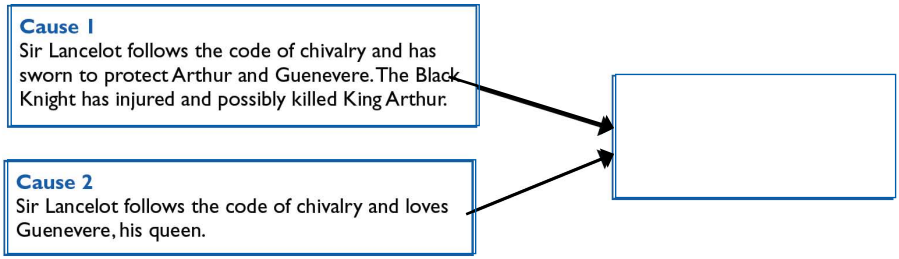
Today, the ideals of loyalty, honor, and patriotism remain strong in the military and in government. When international disputes arise, leaders attempt to resolve them diplomatically. When diplomacy fails, the men and women of the military do not fail to obey commands to protect their nation and their fellow comrades. Ideals of honor, love, friendship, and service live on.

Choose one of the following topics related to the code of chivalry or courtly love. Address the topic by writing an essay or preparing and giving an oral presentation.

1. Compare the causes and effects of a battle during the Middle Ages or in this Arthurian legend with a contemporary war. Briefly explain how they are similar and different.
2. The love between Guenevere and Sir Lancelot is clear in this excerpt. Read more about it. Then explain how their love affects King Arthur, the knights of the Round Table, and Camelot. If they had not fallen in love, how might the legend have been different?
3. Oftentimes, a cause-and-effect relationship is actually a chain of causes and effects. Think of a contemporary movie based on the Arthurian legends or a movie about political events that lead to the brink of disaster. Choose events that represent a chain of causes and effects. Analyze the events and their cause-and-effect relationships.

Organize Your Thoughts

You can use a cause-and-effect chain like the one below to help you determine the relationship between events. If you are comparing causes and effects, make two charts. The example in the chart is based on the passage above.



When your chain is complete, use it to look for relationships in the way the code of chivalry or courtly love causes or effects events. Write a thesis statement or controlling idea for your presentation. Use the information in your chart to support your thesis or main idea.

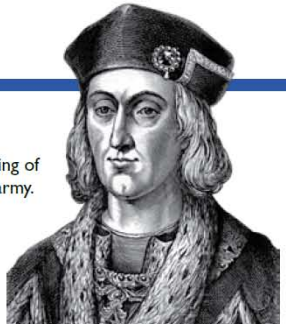
Get Active

With a partner, choose a scene from a contemporary novel or film or a real-life event that has a clear cause-and-effect relationship. Think about how the scene or event would change if the cause or effect were different. Rewrite the scene with the new cause or effect. Then share it with the class.

Unit 3: The Renaissance

1485 to 1660

Eye on an Era



1485
Henry VII becomes the first Tudor king of England after defeating Richard III's army.

1509
Henry VII dies and his son Henry VIII becomes king of England at age seventeen.

By 1485, the War of the Roses had been dragging on for more than thirty years.

Henry Tudor, a young man with ties to the House of Lancaster, finally ended the war by engaging King Richard and his supporters in battle at Bosworth. Richard was killed and Henry claimed the crown as Henry VII. Henry's victory had major long-term effects for his country, primarily due to what his offspring would bring about as monarchs. His son, Henry VIII, who ascended the throne in 1509, broke with the Catholic Church after the pope would not grant him a divorce from his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. He appointed himself "the only Supreme Head in Earth of the Church of England," making it clear that the king did not report to any higher authority other than God. Henry VIII is remembered for his six wives and his predilection for executions; those who stood in his way were often stripped of power and possessions, and many were beheaded. Henry VIII's obsession with producing a male heir to the throne resulted in only one legitimate son, Edward VI, who was a sickly child. Upon Henry VIII's death, Edward inherited the crown at the age of nine. Edward tried to keep the crown from his half-sisters, Mary (Henry's daughter by Catherine of Aragon) and Elizabeth (Henry's daughter by Anne Boleyn), by appointing his cousin Lady Jane Grey as his successor, but this plan failed miserably. Jane Grey served as queen for only nine days; during this time, the British people rallied their support behind Mary, and Parliament declared her the legitimate heir. Mary's five-year reign brought about the restoration of England as a Roman Catholic nation; however, when her half-sister Elizabeth ascended the throne in 1558, this all was reversed and England became solidly and permanently Protestant. Legend has it that when Elizabeth learned she was now England's queen, she said, "It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes." Queen Elizabeth I, intelligent and wise, became one of England's most beloved monarchs.

Queen Elizabeth I

1516

Thomas More publishes *Utopia* in Latin. More, a well-known humanist scholar and lawyer, describes the political, religious, and social system of an "ideal" imaginary island.

1534

Henry VIII issues the Act of Supremacy, declaring himself Supreme Head of the Church of England. Creating a complete break with the Roman Catholic Church, this act legitimizes the impending English Reformation.

1517

Martin Luther nails his *95 Theses* to the doors of the Catholic Church in Wittenberg, Germany, challenging the Church's position on indulgences and other issues. This is seen as the catalyst for the Protestant Reformation.

The English Reformation

While Martin Luther's *95 Theses* had sparked schisms with Rome by many groups across continental Europe, the break with Rome that England experienced was much different. While dissenting groups in Germany, Switzerland, France, and other countries were revolting against the theology of the Catholic Church, Henry VIII's split from the Church was for power and political reasons, not theological. In fact, Henry's split with Rome initially brought about little change in the day-to-day lives of churchgoers. Church services remained the same, and basic dogmas were unaltered under Henry. During his son Edward's reign, however, major changes occurred—monasteries were dissolved, images were removed from churches, priests were allowed to marry, and the *Book of Common Prayer*, which outlined the liturgy in English, was placed in churches for all to read. The printing press increased the availability of Bibles and books written in English, making them readily available to many people. This further hastened the changes in the Church of England. When Elizabeth became queen, she supported the Church of England's Protestant theology while maintaining the traditions of Rome within the liturgy to appease Catholics. Elizabeth's desire to offend neither side of the debate led to growing anger from Protestants who felt the Church had not been reformed enough. These Puritans would eventually control Parliament and attempt to reform both church and state under Oliver Cromwell.

1547 Henry VIII dies. Henry's only legitimate son, Edward VI, becomes king of England at age nine.

1549 Under Edward VI, the Act of Uniformity establishes the *Book of Common Prayer* as the only legal form of worship in England. The book is written in English and contains all forms of daily and Sunday worship in one volume.

1553 Edward VI dies and his half-sister, Mary Tudor, takes the throne. Mary I, a devout Catholic, repeals the Act of Supremacy, restoring Roman practices and papal authority to the Church of England.

1558 Mary I dies and her Protestant half-sister, Elizabeth, becomes queen.

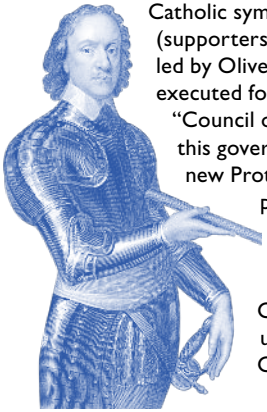
1560 Thomas Tallis, an organist and composer for the Royal Court, is one of the first musicians to compose hymns in English for the Church of England.

1563 The Plague, or Black Death, kills more than 20,000 people in London.

1564 William Shakespeare is born in Stratford-upon-Avon.

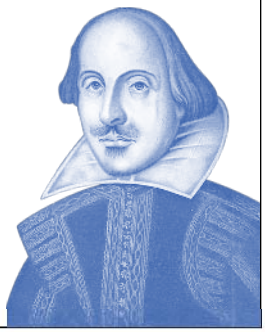
The Commonwealth of England

Charles I, king from 1625 until 1649, was a firm believer in the Divine Right of Kings, the idea that monarchs received their power from God and could not have that power taken away from them. During his reign, Charles made political and religious decisions that upset many of his subjects. Parliament rebelled at the idea of more power being given to the king, and Puritans questioned his religious beliefs, concerned that he was a Catholic sympathizer. These issues led to the English Civil War, a series of conflicts between Royalists (supporters of Charles I) and Parliamentarians (supporters of Parliament and Puritans). Parliament, led by Oliver Cromwell, gained support and became more powerful, and in 1649 they had Charles I executed for treason. Just prior to the king's death, Parliament set up a commonwealth governed by a "Council of State," which was comprised primarily of members of Parliament. Among other things, this governing body repealed the Act of Uniformity of 1549; as a result of this religious freedom, new Protestant factions were formed. During the commonwealth, many moral restrictions were passed, a major one being the closing of the theatres. Cromwell dissolved Parliament by force in 1653 and established the Protectorate, giving himself kinglike power. He was Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland until his death in 1658. His son Richard then took over as Lord Protector but proved to be indecisive and ineffective. After Richard Cromwell resigned in 1659, Parliament attempted to reinstate the Commonwealth but was unsuccessful due to disagreements with the army and between themselves. They invited Charles I's son back to England to rule as Charles II, and the monarchy was reinstated.



A Rebirth

The Renaissance, which means "rebirth" in French, was a cultural and artistic movement that began in Italy in the fourteenth century and swept throughout Europe, flourishing in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The Renaissance in Europe was characterized by a surge of curiosity and creativity in science, art, music, literature, philosophy, and exploration. In England, the Renaissance was primarily literary in nature; a new love affair began with the English language, reflected in a myriad of translated and newly printed works written in English. The market for literature flourished as printed books became available and more people learned how to read and write. The English Renaissance reached its peak during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I from 1558 to 1603. Many of England's greatest writers lived during her reign, including Sir Thomas Wyatt, Edmund Spenser, Christopher Marlowe, Sir Walter Raleigh, and William Shakespeare.



1580
Francis Drake is the first Englishman to sail around the world on his ship the *Golden Hind*.

1588
The English navy defeats the Spanish Armada. The defeat means Spain is no longer the most powerful empire in Europe.

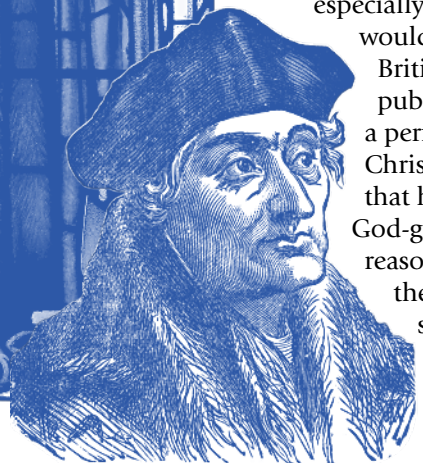
1599
The Globe Theatre opens.

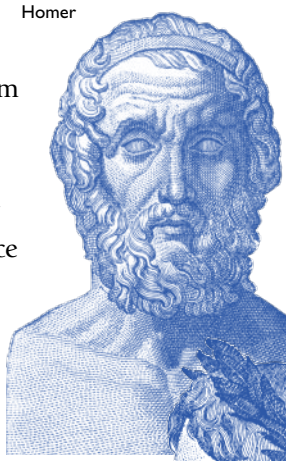
1600
The East India Company is founded. Elizabeth I grants the British company a Royal Charter, hoping to gain a foothold in the East Indies spice trade dominated by the Dutch and Spanish.

Humanism

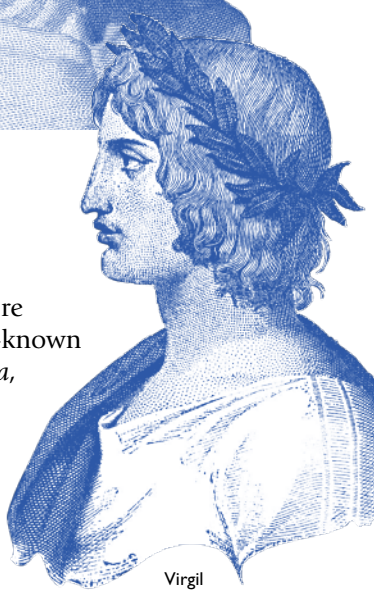
Renaissance literature incorporated a new influence—humanism. Writers, influenced by classic works from Greece and Rome, broadened their focus beyond strictly religious texts and began reflecting on philosophy, beauty in the natural world, the value of individuals, and the importance of history. Humanists during the Renaissance believed that people were not living up to their potential and strove to find answers and meaning by returning to texts from the past. This return to the classics led to several English translations of works previously available only in Greek, such as the epic tales of Virgil and Homer. Erasmus, the Dutch monk whose name is synonymous with Renaissance humanism, was a major influence on other humanists, especially his friend Sir Thomas More. More would become perhaps the most well-known British humanist. More's book *Utopia*, published in 1516, detailed life in a perfect society. More, like many Christian humanists, believed that humans could fulfill their God-given purpose by using the reason and gifts God had given them. English Renaissance writers such as John Milton would be influenced by the humanist ideas set forth by More.

Sir Thomas More





Homer



Virgil

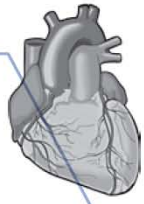
1603
Elizabeth I dies. Per Elizabeth's wishes, James VI of Scotland becomes King James I of England.

1605
Guy Fawkes and co-conspirators plan to kill King James I by blowing up the Houses of Parliament in what has become known as the Gunpowder Plot.

1611
The King James Bible is published.

1625
James I dies. The reign of Charles I begins.

1628
English physician William Harvey publishes his work that correctly explains and details the circulation of blood in the human body.



A Teen of the Time

Sixteen-year-old Anne Smithe closed her eyes tightly against the shafts of light sneaking through the chinks in the timbered roof above her bed. She heard her mother starting the fire in the large fireplace below. Shivering, Anne rolled closer to her younger sister, Mary, sleeping beside her on their low bed filled with straw. Across the loft, her brothers snored softly.

"Anne, get thee up!" called her mother. Anne crept out of bed and put on her long kirtle, or skirt, and then her bodice, a tight jacket with laces. She smoothed her hair, put a small white cap over her dark, unruly tresses, and then climbed down the ladder to the hall that served as the kitchen, dining room, and workroom for the family.

"Good morrow," Anne greeted her mother. As Anne ducked out the door and crossed the fenced yard to the barn, she pondered the long day ahead. After milking the cow, she would strain the milk and then get the younger children up and dressed. Anne's parents, five brothers and sisters, and the hired farmhand would all eat breakfast at the large table. The rest of the day would be filled with chores: feeding the chickens, making bread and cheese, digging potatoes in the garden, and preparing lunch and dinner. Anne's mother often reminded her that someday Anne would have a house of her own, so she needed to learn the skills of a good housewife.

As she sat down beside the cow, Mary realized that in a few weeks harvest would begin. She and her sister would follow behind the harvesters and bind the cut grain into sheaves. At least she could look forward to the harvest home festival once all the crops were brought into the barns. A troupe of actors from London might even perform a play.

As she listened to the steady rhythm of the milk filling the bucket, Anne began to sing. From a ballad seller at the Stratford-on-Avon market, she had purchased new words to an old tune. A merchant had recited the words to her, as Anne did not know how to read. On Sunday after church, she would teach the new song to her friends and perhaps they would even sing it as a madrigal at the harvest festival.

When the pail was full of milk, Anne slowly made her way back to the house, still humming her new song.

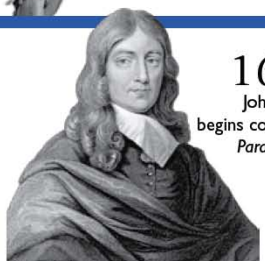
1635
Public mail service is established.

1642 (to 1651)
The English Civil War pits followers of King Charles against followers of Puritan-controlled Parliament.

1642 (to 1660)
Puritans close all public theatres in England.

1649
Charles I is beheaded. Puritan Oliver Cromwell takes power. The English monarchy is replaced first with the Commonwealth of England (to 1653), then with a Protectorate under Cromwell's personal rule (to 1659).

1658
John Milton begins composing *Paradise Lost.*



1660
The monarchy is restored with the ascension of Charles II, son of Charles I, to the throne.

Understanding the Renaissance: Generalize

The English Renaissance experienced its greatest rebirth in the field of literature. Playwright William Shakespeare accosted audiences with tragedies about the worst aspects of human nature—and then made them laugh with comedies full of feuding fairies and mistaken identities. Among notable poets of the time, Edmund Spenser and John Milton rose to prominence, creating masterworks in the form of an allegory of life in Tudor England (Spenser's *The Faerie Queen*) and a lyrical retelling of humankind's fall from Paradise (Milton's *Paradise Lost*).

Historians move from examining these specific works to identifying and defining an era by *generalizing;* in other words, they note patterns of similarities and differences among the works in order to make broader statements or assessments about the era as a whole. The Luminarium Web site (www.luminarium.org/renlit) features an in-depth compendium of English Renaissance literature and background resources. The wealth of information about the writers of the time can help you to understand the period and make generalizations about other eras, including your own.

When you generalize in your research and reading, you weigh evidence provided by the text. You first find the main ideas and make assumptions based on those ideas. Then you are free to consider how the text's ideas and theories might be applied and examined in other, perhaps parallel, situations.

For example, a scholarly study might examine two very specific works of art, Italian Renaissance painter Michelangelo's frescoes on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel and English Renaissance writer Milton's epic *Paradise Lost*, both of which tell the story of humanity's creation and fall from grace, to make generalizations about Renaissance humanism as a whole. Each in its own unique way illuminates humanist concepts of the inherent value of the human experience and the dignity of the human condition. By generalizing, the two works, from two different places and periods, are tied to the ideals of Renaissance humanism as a whole.

Remember that to generalize effectively it is important to stick to the ideas, information, and evidence presented in the reading. When your generalizations stray too far from textual evidence, they can lapse into unfounded opinions or faulty logic.

As you explore the English Renaissance period, make generalizations to link ideas, events, and concepts to past movements as well as to contemporary culture.

Before You Read *"Whoso List to Hunt" and "Sonnet 30"*

Sir Thomas Wyatt (1503–1542) was a skilled soldier, musician, and poet who served on diplomatic missions for the court of King Henry VIII. During his travels, he witnessed the Italian Renaissance and brought its ideas back to England. Wyatt spent time in the Tower of London after he was accused of having a relationship with Anne Boleyn, King Henry VIII's second wife. He died before he was forty from a fever he contracted abroad.

Edmund Spenser (1552–1599) was just sixteen when he published his first poems; by the time of his death, he was considered the most important poet in England. His greatest work was the epic poem *The Faerie Queen*, dedicated to Queen Elizabeth I. "Sonnet 30" is part of a collection of eighty-nine sonnets titled *Amoretti*, Italian for "little love poems." The sonnets describe Spenser's courtship of Elizabeth Boyle, who eventually became his wife.

Literary Lens

Sonnet Wyatt's translations of the Italian Renaissance poet Petrarch's work introduced the sonnet to England. A sonnet is a poem of fourteen lines that follows a strict rhyme scheme and structure. A *Petrarchan sonnet*, also called an *Italian sonnet*, is divided into two parts: eight lines (called an *octave*) and then six lines (called a *sestet*). It is arranged in iambic pentameter, in which a line has five unstressed syllables followed by a stressed syllable. The octave is usually in an *abba abba* rhyme pattern. The sestet often follows a *cde cde* or *cdc dcd* pattern, but this is flexible. In Wyatt's day, these poems were often about love. A Spenserian sonnet, used by Spenser in *Amoretti*, breaks into three quatrains (stanzas of four lines) and a final couplet of two lines, with an interlocking rhyme scheme of *abab bcbc cdcd ee*.

Petrarchan Conceits Petrarchan sonnets typically use conceits, which are elaborate comparisons between two unlike things—love and a hunt, for example.

Wyatt's and Spenser's Language

Both poets wrote toward the beginning of the English Renaissance, when modern English was still evolving. Their vocabulary contains many archaic, or outdated, words and phrases no longer used today or used in different ways. For example, Wyatt uses the archaic phrase "whoso list," meaning "whoever chooses."

Each poem presented here includes parallel text on facing pages to help you understand what you read. As always, read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, try using the context as a clue to meaning before turning to the parallel text.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. In Wyatt's and Spenser's day, love sonnets were as popular as love songs are today. Based on today's love songs, what different emotional states do you expect love sonnets to express?
2. If you were creating a Petrarchan conceit comparing love to something unusual, what would it be? Why?
3. What themes of the Renaissance mentioned in the unit's opening timeline (see pages 242–247) would you expect to find in love sonnets composed in that era?

Whoso List to Hunt

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Whoso list to hunt, I know where is
an hind,[1]
But as for me, alas, I may no more.
The vain travail hath wearied me so sore,
I am of them that farthest cometh behind.
Yet may I, by no means, my wearied mind
Draw from the deer, but as she fleeth afore,
Fainting I follow. I leave off therefore,
Since in a net I seek to hold the wind.

Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
As well as I, may spend his time in vain.
And graven[2] with diamonds in letters plain
There is written, her fair neck round about,
"*Noli me tangere*,[3] for Caesar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame."

1 **hind:** female deer
2 **graven:** archaic form of *engraved*
3 ***Noli me tangere:*** Latin phrase meaning "Touch me not"

Whoso List to Hunt

Sir Thomas Wyatt

Parallel Text

If anyone wishes to hunt, I know where a female deer can
be found.
But I may not hunt anymore, because
I am tired of the useless work of hunting,
and so I am in the group of hunters who follow last.
Even though my tired mind
still weakly pursues the fleeing deer,
I will give up the actual hunt,
which is like trying to hold wind in a net.

I assure anyone that wishes to hunt the deer
that it is useless
because round the deer's neck
hang these words carved with diamonds:
"Touch me not, for I belong to Caesar.
And I am too wild to hold, though I seem tame."

Sonnet 30

Edmund Spenser

entreat: *to ask earnestly*

augmented: *increased*

manifold: *greatly*

congealed: *made solid*

My love is like to ice, and I to fire;
How comes it then that this her cold so great
Is not dissolved through my so hot desire,
But harder grows the more I her **entreat**?
Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
Is not delayed by her heart frozen cold,
But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
And feel my flames **augmented manifold**?
What more miraculous thing may be told
That fire which all thing melts, should harden ice,
And ice which is **congealed** with senseless cold,
Should kindle fire by wonderful device?
Such is the power of love in gentle mind,
That it can alter all the course of kind.

Sonnet 30

Edmund Spenser

Parallel Text

My beloved is like ice; I am like fire.
So why is it that her great coldness
is not melted by my hot desire,
but only grows harder the more I beg for her love?
And why is it that my great heat
is not cooled by her cold, frozen heart?
I only burn much more and boil in my sweat,
and feel my flames increase again and again.
Can anything be more miraculous?
For fire, which melts all things, now hardens ice;
and ice, although thickened with numbing cold,
stirs up fire by some amazing trick.
Such is the power of love over a gentle mind,
that it can change the very ways of nature.

After You Read *"Whoso List to Hunt" and "Sonnet 30"*

Literary Lens: Sonnet

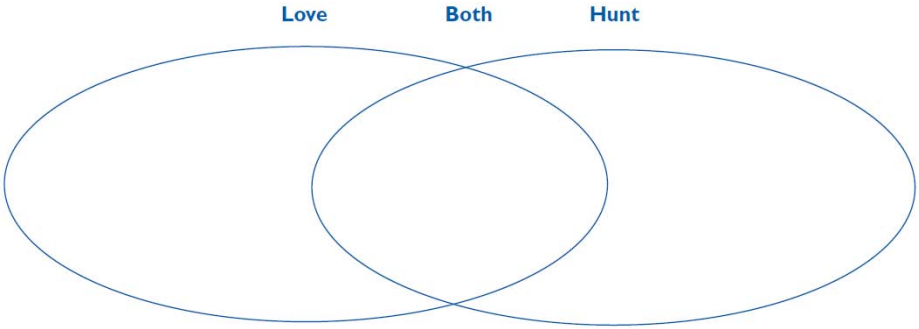
Prove that Wyatt's sonnet is a Petrarchan, or Italian, sonnet, and Spenser's is a Spenserian sonnet by copying each and marking the rhyme scheme. What is the effect of all the repeated rhyming sounds in the two poems? In Wyatt's sonnet, how does the content of the octave and sestet differ? How are they connected? In Spenser's sonnet, how does the final couplet sum up the ideas that the poem expresses?

Explore Context: Hunting in Tudor Society

Wyatt's poem is a translation of a sonnet by Petrarch. What does the poem reveal about hunting in Petrarch's Italy? Research hunting in Tudor England. Was hunting a common way to obtain food? Was it popular as a sport? What lands were hunted, and where was it forbidden for most people to hunt? What kinds of animals were commonly hunted, and which animals, if any, were protected? Write a paragraph describing what you learned.

Apply and Create: Identify Petrarchan Conceit

In a group of five, discuss the conceit in Wyatt's poem. Consider how the comparison of love to a hunt becomes the framework for the whole poem, with more and more details elaborating on the basic comparison. Also examine the validity of the conceit, listing similarities and differences between love and a hunt on a Venn diagram like the one below and discussing other comparisons you have read or heard that suggest love is a pursuit of prey by a predator.



Read Critically

Read these lines from Wyatt's and Spenser's poems. Then answer the questions that follow.

from "Whoso List to Hunt"

Who list her hunt, I put him out of doubt,
10 As well as I, may spend his time in vain.
And graven with diamonds in letters plain
There is written, her fair neck round about,
"*Noli me tangere*, for Caesar's I am,
And wild for to hold, though I seem tame."

from "Sonnet 30"

My love is like to ice, and I to fire;
How comes it then that this her cold so great
Is not dissolved through my so hot desire,
But harder grows the more I her entreat?
5 Or how comes it that my exceeding heat
Is not delayed by her heart frozen cold,
But that I burn much more in boiling sweat,
And feel my flames augmented manifold?

1. To what two elements does the speaker of "Sonnet 30" compare himself and his beloved? What does the comparison suggest about each of their feelings?
2. How are the speaker's situation and feelings in "Sonnet 30" like and unlike those of the speaker in "Whoso List to Hunt"?

Before You Read *"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd"*

Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593) was considered the most important English playwright of his generation among his contemporaries. In verse dramas such as *Dr. Faustus* and *Edward II,* he paved the way for a generation of great playwrights such as William Shakespeare. His incomplete *Hero and Leander* is one of the great narrative poems of its time. Marlowe also served as a spy for the English government. At twenty-nine he was stabbed to death, reportedly in a quarrel over a tavern bill; however, some scholars have come to believe Marlowe's death was a political assassination.

Sir Walter Raleigh (c. 1552–1618) fought as a soldier in France, Ireland, and Spain and explored parts of America. Deeply involved in politics, for a time he was highly favored by Queen Elizabeth I. However, when Raleigh married a lady-in-waiting without the Queen's permission, she had them both imprisoned. After Elizabeth's death, his fortunes grew even shakier. Charged with treason against James I, Raleigh was eventually executed. His poems, which he had privately circulated in handwritten copies, were published some time after his death.

Literary Lens

Lyric Poetry Marlowe's poem and Raleigh's response to it are examples of lyric poetry, in which the main purpose is to express thoughts and feelings. Most lyric poems are short and set to music. Sometimes, the narrator is the poet; at other times, as in Marlowe's and Raleigh's poems, the speaker is a personality the poet adopts.

Pastoral Marlowe's poem is a famous pastoral, which is a work that idealizes rural life. Traditional pastorals tell of the lives of shepherds; in fact, the word comes from the Latin *pastor*, meaning "shepherd." Pastorals are often written by poets who live in town and long to escape to what they see as the simpler joys of country living.

Marlowe's and Raleigh's Language

Marlowe's language is precise and simple, in keeping with the simple rural life his pastoral praises. He uses many of the conventions, or customary elements, of Elizabethan love poetry, describing pleasant fields and valleys, "beds of roses," "melodious birds," and a gown "of the finest wool." In contrast, Raleigh's language, though it draws on Marlowe's, is more complex and sophisticated. He uses unconventional images such as "wanton fields" and "wayward winter" and even describes the usually tuneful Philomel, or nightingale, as "dumb," or silent.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. What are some conventional images that you associate with love poems?
2. What poems or other works have you read that paint a positive picture of rural life? Do you think these poems are an accurate representation of rural life? Explain your answer.
3. Consider what you know about London and larger cities during this time period. Why do you think Londoners might praise rural life?

The Passionate Shepherd to His Love

Christopher Marlowe

Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove[1]
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields.

And we will sit upon the rocks,
Seeing the shepherds feed their flocks
By shallow rivers, to whose falls
Melodious birds sing madrigals.[2]

And I will make thee beds of roses,
And a thousand fragrant posies,
A cap of flowers, and a kirtle,[3]
Embroidered all with leaves of myrtle.[4]

A gown made of the finest wool
Which from our pretty lambs we pull,
Fair linèd slippers for the cold,
With buckles of the purest gold.

A belt of straw and ivy buds,
With coral clasps and amber studs,
And if these pleasures may thee move,
Come live with me, and be my love.

The shepherd swains[5] shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning.
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

---

1 **prove:** try; experience
2 **madrigals:** songs for multiple voices
3 **kirtle:** skirt or dress
4 **myrtle:** shrub with white or pink flowers and berries; in Greek mythology, the myrtle was a symbol of love.
5 **swains:** country youths

The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd

Sir Walter Raleigh

IF all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.

5 But Time drives flocks from field to fold,[1]
When rivers rage and rocks grow cold,
And Philomel[2] becometh dumb;
The rest complains of cares to come.

wanton: *plentiful; luxuriant*

gall: *bold behavior*

The flowers do fade, and **wanton** fields
10 To wayward winter reckoning yields;
A honey tongue, a heart of **gall**
Is fancy's spring, but sorrow's fall.

Thy gowns, thy shoes, thy beds of roses,
Thy cap, thy kirtle, and thy posies.
15 Soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten,
In folly ripe, in reason rotten.

1 **fold:** a pen that holds sheep and other animals
2 **Philomel:** nightingale

Thy belt of straw and ivy buds,
Thy coral clasps and amber studs,
All these in me no means can move
20 To come to thee and be thy love.

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date,[3] nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

3 **date:** end

After You Read *"The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd"*

Literary Lens: Pastoral

What images in Marlowe's poem give a positive impression of rural life? What images in Raleigh's poem give the opposite impression? Use a chart like the one below to gather your evidence from the poems.

Positive Pastoral Images in Marlowe's Poem	Negative Pastoral Images in Raleigh's Poem

Explore Context: A Shepherd's Life

What exactly does a shepherd do? Find out through research, and write a paragraph describing the job. Then consider which of the two poems paints a more accurate portrait of a shepherd's life. Write a second paragraph in which you state your opinion and support it with details from the poems.

Apply and Create: Lyric Poetry

In a small group, discuss the tone and mood of both poems. Recall that lyric poetry is usually set to music. As a group, identify a song that best exemplifies the tone of "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love" and a song that best exemplifies the tone of "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd." The songs can contain lyrics or be instrumental. Play your selections for the class and be prepared to support your choices.

Read Critically

Read these lines from the two poems. Then answer the questions that follow.

from "The Passionate Shepherd to His Love"

Come live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove
That valleys, groves, hills, and fields,
Woods, or steepy mountain yields. . . .

The shepherd swains shall dance and sing
For thy delight each May morning.
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me, and be my love.

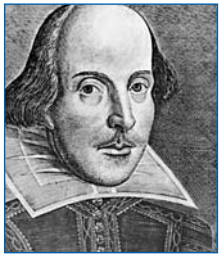
from **"The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd"**

If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love. . . .

But could youth last and love still breed,
Had joys no date, nor age no need,
Then these delights my mind might move
To live with thee and be thy love.

1. What view of love does the first poem convey? What contrasting view of love does the second poem convey?
2. What does the second line of Raleigh's poem imply about Marlowe's shepherd? What evidence do you find in the shepherd's words to support your opinion?
3. What contrasting ways of looking at the world do the two poems represent? What is your own opinion of each of these attitudes?

Before You Read *Shakespeare's Sonnets*



William Shakespeare (1564–1616) is generally regarded as the greatest writer in the English language. He was born in the village of Stratford-upon-Avon, where he married and began a family at age eighteen. After moving to London around 1590, he became active in the theatre, first as an actor and then as a playwright, penning such plays as *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*. A partner in the acting company for which he wrote, Shakespeare earned enough to retire to a fine home back in Stratford, where he died a few years later.

Shakespeare also published two long narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. Oddly, his collection of sonnets may have been published without his permission. Readers often wonder if these poems of friendship and love are autobiographical; some are addressed to a young nobleman and others to a "dark lady." The identities of the gentleman and the lady remain a great literary mystery.

Literary Lens

English Sonnet Shakespeare followed the style of an English sonnet, or what is now referred to as a Shakespearean sonnet. The fourteen lines divide into three quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a couplet (two-line stanza) with the rhyme scheme of *abab cdcd efef gg*. The final couplet usually draws a conclusion or presents a contrast.

Simile and Metaphor A simile uses the word *like* or *as* to compare two unlike things; for example, "Her eyes are like the sun." A metaphor equates two unlike things; for example, "Her eyes are the sun." Both types of comparisons suggest certain shared qualities—the eyes and the sun share brightness. Shakespeare also used negative similes and metaphors to suggest things that do not share certain qualities, such as eyes that "are nothing like the sun."

Shakespeare's Language

Although Shakespeare wrote in modern English, vocabulary and grammar have changed quite a bit since his time. For example, he frequently uses the pronouns *thou*, *thee*, *thy*, and *thine*, now considered archaic, or outdated. His use of verbs and helping verbs is also different than those in use today. For example, instead of "Music has," he writes, "Music hath." Finally, Shakespeare's word order is distinctly from his own time; instead of "Do not let me," he writes, "Let me not."

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. What does the phrase "a marriage of true minds" mean to you?
2. In one of the sonnets, the speaker describes the appearance of the woman he loves. What sorts of comparisons do you expect him to make?

Sonnet 29

William Shakespeare

When, in disgrace with Fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless[1] cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
5 Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him,[2] like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,[3]
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
10 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising[4]
From **sullen** earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

sullen: *gloomy*

1 **bootless:** useless; futile
2 **Featured like him:** handsome like him
3 **this man's . . . scope:** this man's abilities and that man's intelligence
4 **lark at break of day arising:** The English lark is known for singing while flying.

Sonnet 116

William Shakespeare

impediments: *obstacles*

tempests: *violent storms*

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit **impediments**.[1] Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
5 Oh no! It is an ever-fixèd mark[2]
That looks on **tempests** and is never shaken.
It is the star to every wandering bark,[3]
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
10 Within his bending sickle's compass come.[4]
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.[5]
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

1 **marriage of . . . admit impediments:** During a marriage ceremony, the minister or priest asks if anyone has any objections, or sees any "impediments," that would stop the couple from going through with the marriage. Shakespeare is playing on this phrase and responding to it in the first two lines of the sonnet.
2 **mark:** landmark
3 **bark:** ship
4 **Within . . . come:** come within Time's reach
5 **bears . . . edge of doom:** lasts until Judgment Day

Sonnet 130

William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun,
Coral is far more red than her lips' red.
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun,[1]
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.
5 I have seen roses damask'd,[2] red and white,
But no such roses see I in her cheeks.
And in some perfumes is there more delight
Than in the breath that from my mistress reeks.[3]
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
10 That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.[4]

1 **dun:** dull grayish-brown
2 **damask'd:** spotted; streaked with different colors
3 **reeks:** exhales; in Shakespeare's time the word *reeks* did not yet have the negative connotation of an offensive odor.
4 **As any . . . compare:** as any woman described with untrue comparisons

After You Read *Shakespeare's Sonnets*

Literary Lens: Shakespearean Sonnet

Copy one of the sonnets from this lesson, and show that it follows English sonnet form by marking the stanza divisions and indicating the rhyme scheme. Then explain how the final couplet relates to the earlier lines.

Explore Context: Elizabethan Marriage

Think about what you've already read about relationships during the era; then recall movies set in the time period that portray how marriages came about and what relationships were like. How important a role did love play in upper-class marriages in Shakespeare's day? How important a role did society play? Write a letter Shakespeare might have written to a young man, giving his advice on what to look for in marriage. Include quotations from the sonnets to illustrate his views.

Apply and Create: Simile and Metaphor

With a partner, reread the sonnets and identify similes and metaphors, creating charts like those below. Include at least one positive and one negative simile and one positive and one negative metaphor. When you are done, work together to create your own similes and metaphors about a particular experience, idea, or emotion, such as taking a test or jealousy. Include at least one negative simile or metaphor.

Positive Simile	Shared Quality	Positive Metaphor	Shared Quality

Negative Simile	Missing Quality	Negative Metaphor	Missing Quality

Read Critically

Read these lines from Shakespeare's sonnets. Then answer the questions that follow.

from "Sonnet 29"

Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
10 Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings,
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

from "Sonnet 116"

Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
10 Within his bending sickle's compass come.
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.

from "Sonnet 130"

I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
10 That music hath a far more pleasing sound.
I grant I never saw a goddess go,
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the ground.
And yet, by Heaven, I think my love as rare
As any she belied with false compare.

1. What does the speaker in "Sonnet 29" gain from his love? How is his attitude in the final couplet similar to the attitude of the speaker toward his beloved in "Sonnet 130"?
2. What main point does the speaker make about love in the lines from "Sonnet 116"? How is his attitude toward his beloved's appearance over time similar to the speaker's attitude toward his beloved in "Sonnet 130"?
3. How are the descriptions of the speaker's beloved in "Sonnet 130" unlike typical descriptions in love poems? What does Shakespeare seem to think about those typical descriptions?

Macbeth

Shakespeare's London

1564
Shakespeare is baptized at Stratford-upon-Avon.

1558
Elizabeth I becomes queen of England.

1562
Britain begins slave trade in Africa.

The London of Shakespeare's time was noisy, crowded, and bustling with life and commerce.

It was also filthy, as residents and merchants regularly dumped garbage into the street. Raw sewage went directly into the River Thames. As a result, rats were plentiful. The rats carried fleas and fleas carried the deadly bubonic plague.

When the Black Death broke out late in 1592, London's theatres were shut down for more than a year. During that time more than 10,000 Londoners died of the disease. But eventually the city recovered, and the people craved the distraction of entertainment more than ever. The theatres were allowed to reopen, and William Shakespeare joined an acting company known as Lord Chamberlain's Men.

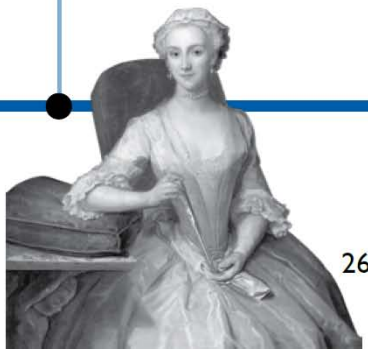
The Globe Theatre

The Lord Chamberlain's Men became the most popular theatre troupe in London. In 1599, they built their own performance space, the Globe Theatre, of which Shakespeare became a co-owner. His job included writing the plays, paying the actors, and keeping up with the theatre's many bills.

The company performed a new play every three weeks. The schedule didn't leave them much time to perfect the shows, but perfect or not, Londoners attended in droves. The day's entertainment began long before the actual play. First there was a very popular "amusement" called *bear baiting*, in which a bear was chained to a stake within a small fenced area. A pack

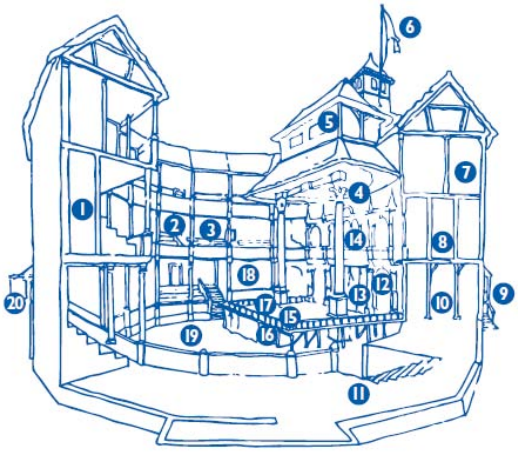
1580
Sir Francis Drake sails around the world.

1582
Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway.



The Globe Theatre

1. **Corridor** A passageway serving the middle gallery.
2. **Entrance** Point leading to the staircase and upper galleries.
3. **Middle Gallery** The seats here were higher priced.
4. **The Heavens** So identified by being painted with the zodiac signs.
5. **Hut** A storage area that also held a winch system for lowering characters to the stage.
6. **Flag** A white flag above the theatre meant a show that day.
7. **Wardrobe** A storage area for costumes and props.
8. **Dressing Rooms** Rooms where actors were "attired" and awaited their cues.
9. **Tiring-House Door** The rear entrance or "stage door" for actors or privileged spectators.
10. **Tiring-House** Backstage area providing space for storage and business.
11. **Stairs** Theatre goers reached the galleries by staircases enclosed by stairwells.
12. **Stage Doors** Doors opening into the Tiring-House.
13. **Inner Stage** A recessed playing area often curtained off except as needed.
14. **Gallery** Area located above the stage to house musicians or spectators.
15. **Trap Door** Leading to the Hell area where a winch elevator was located.
16. **Hell** The area under the stage, used for ghostly comings and goings or for storage.
17. **Stage** Major playing area jutting into the Pit, creating a sense of intimacy.
18. **Lords Rooms** or private galleries. Six pennies let a viewer sit here, or sometimes on stage.
19. **The Pit** Sometimes referred to as "The Yard" where the "groundlings" watched.
20. **Main Entrance** Here the doorkeeper collected admission.



of dogs was then set loose upon the bear. The shrieking audience placed bets as to which of the animals would survive the ensuing battle.

Inside the theatre, standing area called the pit, just in front of the stage, could be purchased for a penny. The denizens of the pit, known as "groundlings," were a rowdy bunch. If they grew bored, they tended to pelt the actors with rotten eggs or vegetables. Shakespeare had good reason to ensure that his plays were exciting crowd-pleasers.

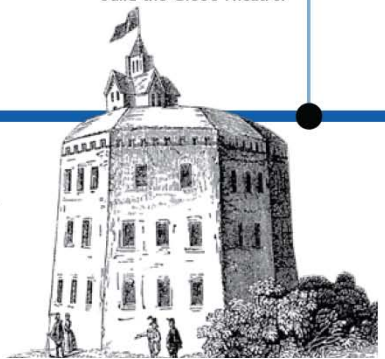
The theatre had walls but was open to the sky, which let in much-needed stage light. The actors were shielded by a roof over part of the playing area, and the wealthiest audience members sat in covered galleries surrounding the pit and the stage. But when it rained or snowed, the rest of the audience found themselves at the mercy of the elements.

At the Globe, as at all English theatres of the time, boys played the women's roles because women were not allowed on the stage. There were no elaborate sets. The bare stage encouraged audiences to create the settings in their minds. With no need for set changes, the play's action could move faster, thus avoiding any chance of displeasing the groundlings.

1588
The British defeat the Spanish Armada.

1592 (to 1594)
The Plague closes London theatres.

1599
Lord Chamberlain's Men build the Globe Theatre.



Royal Patronage

Early in Shakespeare's career, many prominent political and religious leaders were rabidly opposed to the public presentation of plays, believing theatre to be immoral. Fortunately for Shakespeare, Queen Elizabeth I was a theatre fan. When restrictive laws threatened to shut down London's playhouses for good, she granted permission for them to continue performing. The Lord Chamberlain's Men became the queen's particular favorites; they performed for her court thirty-two times as compared to thirty-seven court appearances by all other theatre companies combined. Shakespeare dedicated several of his plays to Elizabeth.

When Queen Elizabeth died in 1603, she was succeeded by her nephew James I, who ruled over Scotland. King James I was not comfortable with crowds, and he was not as popular with the English people as Elizabeth had been. He did, however, continue his aunt's support of the Lord Chamberlain's Men by becoming the company's patron. As a result, Shakespeare and his cohorts immediately changed the name of the company to the King's Men.

Macbeth: Real Life vs. Theatre

Macbeth is loosely based upon the life of an actual eleventh-century Scottish king, but William Shakespeare was not a writer who let facts stand in the way of a good story. His play turned someone who was historically a very decent Scottish king into a monster. The real Macbeth did not kill King Duncan while he slept but rather in open combat during wartime. And Duncan, Macbeth's predecessor, so good and pious in Shakespeare's play, was far from that in reality. Cruel and aggressive, Duncan ruled Scotland poorly for a brief six years; along the way he led his people into a war that caused great suffering. When *Macbeth* killed Duncan and ascended to the throne, the lives of the Scottish people improved. He ruled Scotland wisely and effectively from 1040 to 1057. Among other achievements of his reign, Macbeth ended the bitter, longstanding feud between the Scottish Church and the Pope. He is known as the last Scottish king to devote himself to the language and traditions of the Celts, a people who had periodically dominated the British Isles throughout history. But after Macbeth was killed and a member of Duncan's clan took the throne, the new royal family had good reason to want the world to view Macbeth in a negative light. As a consequence, histories attempting to show the positive aspects of Macbeth's reign were suppressed.

More than five hundred years later, Shakespeare had his own political reasons for making Macbeth out to be a villain. His royal patron, James I, traced his Scottish lineage all the way back to King Duncan. Historians believe Shakespeare penned *Macbeth* as a way of expressing his gratitude for King James's patronage, so it makes sense that the playwright would cast Duncan in a positive light while subjecting the historical Macbeth to a fate he didn't deserve. Along with changing history to be more favorable to the king's ancestors, Shakespeare also included witchcraft in the play, a subject that fascinated King James.

1603
Queen Elizabeth dies; King James VI of Scotland becomes King James I of England.

1606
Macbeth is performed for the first time at court.

1610
Shakespeare retires to Stratford-upon-Avon.

1616
Shakespeare dies at age fifty-two.

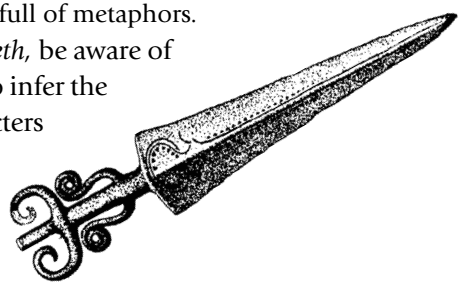
Understanding *Macbeth*: Infer

Shakespeare Online (www.shakespeare-online.com) is a Web site that provides comprehensive information on William Shakespeare's life and times, offering literary criticism of his plays and sonnets, and much more. The site allows visitors to chat online about Shakespeare or to send emails asking Shakespeare-related questions. The detailed menu helps route visitors directly to specific information about *Macbeth*. Consider using this Web site as you read the play. The more background you have, the better equipped you will be to make well-reasoned inferences about the action and themes of the play.

When you infer, you draw conclusions or make assumptions based on evidence you gather. This skill is particularly important when it comes to understanding works of drama. The play you read is like the tip of an iceberg—the rest of the "iceberg" is everything the playwright knows about the characters that he or she doesn't tell you directly. Instead, the playwright offers carefully placed clues. The reader must become a collaborator in the creation of meaning. Much of any play depends on *subtext*, the unspoken thoughts and motives of the characters underlying the dialogue and action. For example, when a character tells a lie, he is not likely to admit, "Hey, I'm about to tell a lie here." Instead, readers must add up the hints and plot points to interpret whether the character is lying—and why. This understanding can then lead readers to a deeper understanding of what is taking place in the play.

Shakespeare sometimes forgoes subtext in favor of a more direct approach, the *soliloquy*, a speech that spells out the inner thoughts of the speaker. Soliloquies are rare in contemporary plays, but they were standard theatrical fare in Shakespeare's time, and *Macbeth* contains a number of famous examples. Even within a soliloquy, however, Shakespeare's characters don't usually baldly state their motives. Soliloquies are often full of metaphors.

As you explore the tragedy of *Macbeth*, be aware of the clues and hints that will lead you to infer the deeper meanings of the play's characters and themes.



Before You Read *Macbeth: Act I*

William Shakespeare (1564–1616) was born in the English town of Stratford-upon-Avon, where he spent his formative years. Later he relocated to London and embarked on a career as an actor and playwright. Over the next two decades, acclaim for his plays grew. In fact, he became so successful that his works were published and sold widely to the public. This was a first; no other playwright in history was successful enough to see his plays sold as popular literature during his lifetime.

Though his education remains a mystery to historians, Shakespeare's plays attest to his deep understanding of all that is good and bad in human nature. His take on the brutality inherent in blind ambition gave us one of dramatic literature's greatest tragedies, *Macbeth*. The shortest of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* is a tale of magic and mayhem that reveals some of the darkest aspects of human psychology.

Literary Lens

Soliloquies and Monologues Both soliloquies and monologues are long speeches delivered by a single actor. The difference between them is that while a monologue can be delivered to other characters, a soliloquy expresses a character's private thoughts, even if there are other characters onstage. Although Shakespeare did not invent the technique, he used soliloquies brilliantly. *Macbeth* contains some of the most famous soliloquies ever written.

Tragic Hero Shakespeare's rendering of the power-hungry Macbeth is an excellent example of a classic tragic hero. The course of a tragic hero's life is determined by four main elements: fate, a personal weakness, a major error in judgment, and a realization of problems combined with an inability to prevent a disastrous outcome. Pay close attention as you read and watch for these four elements in Macbeth's life.

Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare often used an apostrophe to shorten words so that they would fit into the rhythm pattern of a line. This is especially true for verbs ending in *-ed*. Note that in Shakespeare's plays, when *-ed* comes at the end of a verb, it is pronounced as a separate syllable. Therefore, *walked* would be pronounced as two syllables, walk-ed, while *walk'd* would be only one syllable.

There are many other idiosyncrasies in Shakespeare's writing style, and some of them can make for challenging reading. To facilitate reading comprehension, the edition of *Macbeth* you are about to read offers a parallel text version for the first two acts, along with summaries for Acts III and IV. If you are already comfortable reading Shakespeare's language, simply read the original text on the left-hand page. If you come to a confusing passage or term, check the parallel text on the right-hand page for clarification. As you continue to read, you should become more familiar with Shakespeare's language and need the parallel text less and less.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Think of other tragedies you have read or seen on film. Based on these, what elements would you expect to find in this tragedy?
2. Do you believe in the concept of fate? Or do you think each person creates a destiny based on the choices he or she makes along the way? Explain your point of view.

MACBETH

William Shakespeare

ACT I, SCENE I

[*An open place.*] *Thunder and lightning.*
Enter three WITCHES.

FIRST WITCH
When shall we three meet again
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH
When the hurlyburly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH
5 That will be ere the set of sun.

FIRST WITCH
Where the place?

SECOND WITCH
Upon the **heath**.

heath: *barren, open country covered with small shrubs*

THIRD WITCH
There to meet with Macbeth.

MACBETH

William Shakespeare
Parallel Text

ACT 1, SCENE 1

Scotland. An open place. Thunder and lightning.
Three WITCHES *enter.*

FIRST WITCH
When shall we three meet again?
In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH
When the uproar is all over,
and the battle's been lost and won.

THIRD WITCH
That will be before sunset. *5*

FIRST WITCH
Where will we meet?

SECOND WITCH
Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH
There we will meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH

I come, Graymalkin![1]

SECOND WITCH

10 Paddock[2] calls.

THIRD WITCH

Anon.

ALL

Fair is foul, and foul is fair.
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

Exeunt.

1 **Graymalkin:** gray cat; this is the "familiar," or attendant spirit, of the First Witch.
2 **Paddock:** a toad; the familiar of the Second Witch

FIRST WITCH
I come, Graymalkin!

SECOND WITCH
Paddock calls for me. *10*

THIRD WITCH
Quickly!

ALL
Pleasant is foul, and foul is pleasant;
Let's hover through the fog and filthy air.

They exit.

ACT I, SCENE II

[*A military camp.*] *Alarum within. Enter* DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, *with* ATTENDANTS, *meeting a bleeding* CAPTAIN.

DUNCAN

What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his **plight**, of the revolt
The newest state.

plight: *unfortunate situation*

MALCOLM

This is the sergeant[3]
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
'Gainst my captivity. Hail, brave friend!
Say to the King the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it.

CAPTAIN

Doubtful it stood,
As two spent swimmers, that do cling together
And choke their art. The merciless Macdonwald—
Worthy to be a rebel, for to that
The multiplying villainies of nature
Do swarm upon him—from the Western Isles
Of kerns and gallowglasses is supplied;
And Fortune,[4] on his damned quarrel smiling,
Show'd like a rebel's whore: but all's too weak:
For brave Macbeth—well he deserves that name—
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,
Which smoked with bloody execution,
Like **valor**'s minion carved out his passage
Till he faced the slave;
Which ne'er shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,
And fix'd his head upon our battlements.

valor: *courage in the face of danger*

3 **sergeant:** This is a much higher rank than a modern sergeant. He was probably a knight or squire and thus could be called "Captain" in the stage directions.

4 **Fortune:** the personified power that determines human success, distributing happiness and unhappiness according to her own whims, showing some favor to all men but being constant to none

ACT 1, SCENE 2

A camp near Forres. Trumpet call offstage. DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, LENNOX, *and* SERVANTS *enter. They meet a bleeding* CAPTAIN.

DUNCAN

Who is that bloody man? Judging from his troubles,
he can report to us the latest news
of the revolt.

MALCOLM

This is the sergeant
who fought like a good and hardy soldier *5*
to save me from captivity. Greetings, brave friend!
Tell the King all you know of the fighting
when you left it.

CAPTAIN

The outcome was hard to guess,
just as when two tired swimmers cling together *10*
and pull each other down. The merciless Macdonwald
is worthy to be a rebel; and for that reason,
countless villains from all over the world
swarm around him like insects. He's aided
by kerns and gallowglasses from the Hebrides, *15*
and Fortune smiled on his cursed cause—
falsely, like a rebel's whore. But all was in vain,
for brave Macbeth (he deserves that name well)
scorned Fortune with his swinging sword,
which steamed with the blood of the slain. *20*
Like valor's favorite, he slashed his way
until he faced the villain.
Without bothering to shake hands with him, or to say farewell,
he ripped him open from his navel to his jaws
and stuck his head on our battlements. *25*

DUNCAN

O valiant cousin! Worthy gentleman!

CAPTAIN

As whence the sun 'gins his reflection
Shipwracking storms and direful thunders break,
So from that spring whence comfort seemed to come
30 Discomfort swells. Mark, King of Scotland,
mark:
No sooner justice had, with valour arm'd
Compell'd these skipping kerns to trust their heels,
But the Norweyan lord, surveying vantage,
With furbish'd arms and new supplies of men,
35 Began a fresh assault.

DUNCAN

Dismayed not this
Our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

CAPTAIN

Yes,
As sparrows eagles, or the hare the lion.
40 If I say sooth, I must report they were
As cannons overcharged with double cracks,
So they doubly redoubled strokes upon the foe.
Except they meant to bathe in reeking wounds,
Or memorise another Golgotha,[5]
45 I cannot tell—
But I am faint, my gashes cry for help.

DUNCAN

So well thy words become thee as thy wounds;
They smack of honour both. Go get him surgeons.

[*Exit* CAPTAIN, *attended.*]

Enter ROSS *and* ANGUS.

Who comes here?

5 **Golgotha:** Calvary, "the place of the skulls," where Christ was crucified

DUNCAN

Oh valiant cousin, worthy gentleman!

CAPTAIN

Shipwrecking storms and grim thunderbolts often come
from the east, where the sun rises;
in just such a way, new disasters fell upon us
from what had seemed the source of our comfort. Listen, King *30*
of Scotland, listen:
No sooner had justice, armed with valor,
forced these nimble kerns to take to their heels,
but the King of Norway saw a new opportunity.
With brightly polished arms and new supplies of men,
he started a fresh attack. *35*

DUNCAN

Didn't this disturb
our captains, Macbeth and Banquo?

CAPTAIN

Yes,
like sparrows disturb eagles, or the hare the lion.
To tell the truth, I must report that they were *40*
like cannons overloaded with two cannonballs each;
they doubled, then doubled again, their strokes against the foe.
Whether they meant to bathe in bloody wounds,
or cause the battlefield to be remembered like another Golgotha,
I cannot say — *45*
But I am faint; my wounds cry out for help.

DUNCAN

Your words suit you well, just like your wounds:
they both taste like honor. Go get him doctors.

The CAPTAIN *is led away.*

ROSS *and* ANGUS *enter.*

Who comes here?

MALCOLM

The worthy Thane of Ross.

LENNOX

What a haste looks through his eyes! So should he look
That seems to speak things strange.

ROSS

God save the King!

DUNCAN

Whence cam'st thou, worthy thane?

ROSS

From Fife, great King;
Where the Norweyan banners flout the sky
And fan our people cold.
Norway himself, with terrible numbers,
Assisted by that most disloyal traitor
The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict;
Till that Bellona's[6] bridegroom, lapped
in proof,
Confronted him with self-comparisons,
Point against point, rebellious arm 'gainst arm,
Curbing his lavish spirit; and, to conclude,
The victory fell on us.

DUNCAN

Great happiness!

ROSS

That now, Sweno,
The Norways' king, craves composition;
Nor would we deign him burial of his men
Till he disbursed at Saint Colme's Inch[7]
Ten thousand dollars[8] to our general use.

---

6 **Bellona:** the sister of the god of war, Mars, in Roman mythology

7 **Saint Colme's Inch:** St. Columba's Island, Inchcolm, near Edinburgh

8 **dollars:** English for the German thaler, a coin well-known to the Elizabethans; it is an anachronism here, as the coin was first minted in the 16th century and *Macbeth* takes place in the 11th century.

MALCOLM

The worthy Thane of Ross. *50*

LENNOX

What haste can be seen in his eyes! That's how a man would look
if he were about to say strange things.

ROSS

God save the King.

DUNCAN

Where did you come from, worthy thane?

ROSS

From Fife, great King, *55*
where the Norwegian banners defy the sky
and chill our people with fear.
The King of Norway himself started a fearful battle
with a huge number of soldiers—helped out
by that most disloyal traitor, the Thane of Cawdor. *60*
But then came Macbeth, the war-goddess's husband,
dressed in mighty armor,
he faced the king with equal skill and courage—
sword against sword, arm against rebellious arm,
taming his undisciplined spirit. To conclude, the
victory fell to us. *65*

DUNCAN

Great happiness!

ROSS

And now
Sweno, Norway's king, wants to make peace.
We wouldn't allow him to bury his men
until he gave ten thousand dollars for our general use *70*
at Saint Colme's Inch.

DUNCAN

No more that Thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom interest. Go pronounce his present death,
And with his former title greet Macbeth.

ROSS

75 I'll see it done.

DUNCAN

What he hath lost, noble Macbeth hath won.

Exeunt.

DUNCAN

Never again will that Thane of Cawdor deceive
my trusting heart. Go command his immediate execution,
and greet Macbeth with his former title.

ROSS

I'll take care of it. *75*

DUNCAN

What he has lost, noble Macbeth has won.

They exit.

ACT I, SCENE III

[*A heath.*] *Thunder. Enter the three* WITCHES.

FIRST WITCH
Where hast thou been, sister?

SECOND WITCH
Killing swine.

THIRD WITCH
Sister, where thou?

FIRST WITCH
A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
5 And mounched, and mounched, and mounched.
"Give me," quoth I.
"Aroint thee, witch!" the rump-fed ronyon[9] cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' *Tiger*:[10]
But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
10 And, like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do.

SECOND WITCH
I'll give thee a wind.

FIRST WITCH
Th' art kind.

THIRD WITCH
And I another.

FIRST WITCH
15 I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I' th' shipman's card.
I'll drain him dry as hay:

9 **ronyon:** mangy or scabby creature; used as a general term of contempt
10 ***Tiger*:** name of the ship making the journey to Aleppo, a city in northern Syria

ACT 1, SCENE 3

A heath near Forres. Thunder. The three WITCHES *enter.*

FIRST WITCH
Where have you been, sister?

SECOND WITCH
Killing swine.

THIRD WITCH
Sister, where were you?

FIRST WITCH
A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
and munched, and munched, and munched. *5*
"Give me some," I said.
"Begone, witch!" the fat-rumped, scabby woman cried.
Her husband has gone to Aleppo—the master of the *Tiger*.
But I'll sail there in a sieve,
and in the shape of a tailless rat, *10*
I'll do him in, I'll do him in, I'll do him in.

SECOND WITCH
I'll give you a wind.

FIRST WITCH
You are kind.

THIRD WITCH
And I'll give another.

FIRST WITCH
I myself have all the other winds; *15*
they blow away from every port,
and they know all the directions
in the navigator's compass.
I will drain him as dry as hay:

Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid;
He shall live a man forbid:
Weary sev'nnights nine times nine
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine.
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tost.
Look what I have.

SECOND WITCH
Show me, show me.

FIRST WITCH
Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wrack'd as homeward he did come.

Drum within.

THIRD WITCH
A drum, a drum!
Macbeth doth come.

ALL [*dancing in a circle*]
The Weïrd[11] Sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the sea and land,
Thus do go about, about:
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine
And thrice again, to make up nine.
Peace! The charm's wound up.

Enter MACBETH *and* BANQUO.

MACBETH
So foul and fair a day I have not seen.

BANQUO
How far is 't called to Forres?[12] What are these
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth,
And yet are on 't? Live you, or are you aught

11 **Weïrd:** from the Old English *wyrd*, meaning "fate" or "destiny"
12 **Forres:** town in northern Scotland, to the south of Moray Firth, between Elgin and Nairn

sleep will hang upon his eyelids *20*
neither night nor day;
he will live a cursed man.
For nine times nine weary weeks,
he will dwindle, hunger, and waste away.
Though his ship cannot be lost, *25*
it will still be tossed by tempests.
Look at what I have.

SECOND WITCH
Show me, show me.

FIRST WITCH
Here I have the thumb of a pilot
wrecked when he was coming home. *30*

Drum offstage.

THIRD WITCH
A drum, a drum!
Macbeth is coming.

ALL (*dancing in a circle*)
The Weïrd Sisters, hand in hand,
swift travelers over the sea and land,
this way go around and around— *35*
three times for you, three times for me
and three times again, to make up nine.
Now be quiet! The spell is ready.

MACBETH *and* BANQUO *enter.*

MACBETH
I've never seen a day both so foul and pleasant.

BANQUO
How far do you think it is to Forres? Who are these creatures, *40*
so withered and wild in their clothing
that they don't look like inhabitants of the earth,
even though they are on it? Are you alive? Are you anything

That man may question? You seem to understand me,
45 By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so.

MACBETH

Speak, if you can. What are you?

FIRST WITCH

50 All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis![13]

SECOND WITCH

All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor![14]

THIRD WITCH

All hail, Macbeth, that shalt be King hereafter!

BANQUO

Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?—I' th' name of truth,
55 Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show? My noble partner
You greet with present grace and great prediction
Of noble having and of royal hope,
That he seems rapt withal: to me you
speak not.
60 If you can look into the seeds of time,
And say which grain will grow and which will not,
Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear
Your favors nor your hate.

FIRST WITCH

Hail!

SECOND WITCH

65 Hail!

THIRD WITCH

Hail!

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13 **Glamis:** a castle and village north of Dundee, near the modern town of Forfar

14 **Cawdor:** located in northwestern Nairnshire, between Inverness and Forres

that a man can put questions to? You seem to understand me,
because each of you puts a chapped finger *45*
against her skinny lips. You must surely be women,
and yet your beards will not allow me
to call you women.

MACBETH
Speak if you can. Who are you?

FIRST WITCH
All hail, Macbeth! Hail to you, Thane of Glamis! *50*

SECOND WITCH
All hail, Macbeth! Hail to you, Thane of Cawdor!

THIRD WITCH
All hail, Macbeth, who will be King later on!

BANQUO (*to* MACBETH*)*
Good sir, why are you so startled, seeming to fear
things that sound so pleasant? (*to the* WITCHES) In the name
of truth, are you imaginary, or are you really *55*
what you outwardly appear to be? You greet
my noble partner with both his present title and a prediction
of further greatness—
of a nobleman's possessions and the hope of becoming a king;
he seems completely entranced. But to me, you say nothing.
If you can look into the seeds of time *60*
and say which grain will grow and which will not,
then speak to me, for I neither beg
your favors nor fear your hate.

FIRST WITCH
Hail!

SECOND WITCH
Hail! *65*

THIRD WITCH
Hail!

FIRST WITCH

Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH

Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH

Thou shalt get kings, though thou
be none.
70 So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo!

FIRST WITCH

Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

MACBETH

Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more.
By Sinel's death I know I am Thane of Glamis;
But how of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives,
75 A prosperous gentleman; and to be King
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor. Say from whence
You owe this strange intelligence? Or why
Upon this blasted heath you stop our way
80 With such **prophetic** greeting? Speak, I charge you.

prophetic: *accurately predicting what will happen in the future*

WITCHES *vanish.*

BANQUO

The earth hath bubbles as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they
vanished?

MACBETH

Into the air; and what seemed **corporal** melted
As breath into the wind. Would they had stay'd!

corporal: *related to the human body*

BANQUO

85 Were such things here as we do speak about?
Or have we eaten on the insane root[15]
That takes the reason prisoner?

15 **insane root:** herb or root causing insanity; Shakespeare may have had in mind such plants as hemlock, henbane, or deadly nightshade.

FIRST WITCH
Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH
Not so happy, and yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH
You will be a father to kings, even though you won't be a
king yourself.
So all hail, Macbeth and Banquo! *70*

FIRST WITCH
Banquo and Macbeth, all hail!

MACBETH
Stay, you incomplete speakers, and tell me more.
By Sinel's death, I know I am Thane of Glamis;
but how can I be Thane of Cawdor? The Thane of Cawdor lives—
a prosperous gentleman. And to be King *75*
is no more to be believed
than to be Thane of Cawdor. Tell me—where
did you get this strange information? And why
do you stop us on our way across this barren heath
with such a prophetic greeting? Speak, I command you. *80*

The WITCHES *vanish.*

BANQUO
The earth has bubbles, just like water has—
and these creatures are made of them. Where have they vanished?

MACBETH
Into the air—and what seemed solid has melted,
like breath into the wind. I wish they had stayed!

BANQUO
Were these things we speak about really here? *85*
Or have we eaten from a root that causes insanity
and takes the reason prisoner?

MACBETH

Your children shall be kings.

BANQUO

You shall be King.

MACBETH

90 And Thane of Cawdor too. Went it not so?

BANQUO

To th' selfsame tune and words.—Who's here?

Enter ROSS *and* ANGUS.

ROSS

The King hath happily received, Macbeth,
The news of thy success; and when he reads
Thy personal venture in the rebels' fight,
95 His wonders and his praises do contend
Which should be thine or his.
Silenced with that,
In viewing o'er the rest o' th' selfsame day,
He finds thee in the stout Norweyan ranks,
Nothing afeard of what thyself didst make,
100 Strange images of death. As thick as hail
Came post with post; and every one did bear
Thy praises in his kingdom's great defence,
And pour'd them down before him.

ANGUS

We are sent
105 To give thee, from our royal master, thanks;
Only to herald thee into his sight,
Not pay thee.

ROSS

And for an earnest of a greater honour,
He bade me, from him, call thee Thane of Cawdor,
110 In which addition, hail, most worthy Thane!
For it is thine.

BANQUO

What, can the devil speak true?

MACBETH
Your children will be kings.

BANQUO
You will be king.

MACBETH
And Thane of Cawdor, too. Isn't that how it went? *90*

BANQUO
To the very same tune and words.—Who's here?

ROSS *and* ANGUS *enter.*

ROSS
Macbeth, the King has happily received
the news of your successes; when he considered
your personal boldness while fighting against the rebels,
his astonishment and his praises struggled with one another, *95*
and he didn't know whether to express his feelings or keep
them to himself. He viewed
your deeds for the rest of the day in silence,
and found you in the strong Norwegian ranks,
not at all frightened by what you made yourself—
strange pictures of death. As thick as hail *100*
came messenger after messenger, and every one brought
praises for your great defense of his kingdom,
and poured those praises down before him.

ANGUS
We've been sent
by our royal master to give you thanks— *105*
but only to announce you into his presence,
and not to pay you.

ROSS
And as a pledge of a greater honor,
he asked me, on his behalf, to call you Thane of Cawdor.
So by that title I say—Hail, most worthy Thane! *110*
For that rank is yours.

BANQUO
What, can the devil tell the truth?

MACBETH

The Thane of Cawdor lives: why do you dress me
In borrow'd robes?

ANGUS

Who was the Thane lives yet,
But under heavy judgment bears that life
Which he deserves to lose. Whether he was combined
With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
With hidden help and vantage, or that with both
He laboured in his country's wrack, I know not;
But treasons capital, confessed and proved,
Have overthrown him.

MACBETH [*aside*]

Glamis and Thane of Cawdor!
The greatest is behind. [*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS] Thanks
for your pains. [*aside to* BANQUO] Do you not hope your children shall be kings,
When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me
Promised no less to them?

BANQUO [*aside to* MACBETH]

That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange:
And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence.—
Cousins, a word, I pray you.

MACBETH [*aside*]

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.—I thank you,
gentlemen.—
[*aside*] This supernatural **soliciting**
Cannot be ill, cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion

soliciting: *invitation or request made of someone*

MACBETH
The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me
in borrowed robes?

ANGUS
The man who was the Thane still lives— *115*
but under a heavy judgment, he holds onto a life
that he deserves to lose. I do not know
whether he was allied with the Norwegians,
or supported the rebels with secret help and advantages,
or tried to wreck his country by serving them both. *120*
But he has overthrown himself by capital treasons
that are confessed and proven.

MACBETH (*aside*)
Glamis, and Thane of Cawdor—
the greatest prophecy is to follow. (*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS)
Thanks for your trouble. (*to* BANQUO) Don't you hope your *125*
children will be kings, since those that gave me the title of
Thane of Cawdor promised no less to them?

BANQUO (*to* MACBETH)
If you trust to that completely,
you might start yearning for the crown, *130*
besides being Thane of Cawdor. But this is strange.
And oftentimes, to catch us in our own trap,
the instruments of darkness tell us true things,
gaining our confidence with honest trifles, only to betray us
in matters of serious importance.— *135*
(*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS) Fellow noblemen, I'd like a word with you.

MACBETH (*aside*)
Two fortunate prophecies have proven true
in the beginning to a splendid play
on the theme of kingly power. (*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS) I thank
you, gentlemen.
(*aside*) This invitation by supernatural beings *140*
cannot be bad, and yet it cannot be good. If it is bad,
why has it given me a promise of success,
beginning with something true? I am Thane of Cawdor.
But if it is good, why am I ready to yield to that temptation—

145 Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.
My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
150 Shakes so my single state of man
That function is smothered in **surmise**,
And nothing is but what is not.

surmise: *belief that something might be true even though it cannot be confirmed*

rapt: *completely fascinated*

BANQUO
Look, how our partner's **rapt**.

MACBETH [*aside*]
If chance will have me King, why, chance may crown me,
155 Without my stir.

BANQUO
New honors come upon him,
Like our strange garments, cleave not to their mold
But with the aid of use.

MACBETH [*aside*]
Come what come may,
160 Time and the hour runs through the roughest day.

BANQUO
Worthy Macbeth, we stay upon your leisure.

MACBETH
Give me your favour. My dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten. Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are registered where every day I turn
165 The leaf to read them. Let us toward the King.
[*aside to* BANQUO] Think upon what hath chanced,
and at more time,
The interim having weighed it, let us speak
Our free hearts each to other.

BANQUO
170 Very gladly.

MACBETH
Till then, enough.—Come, friends.

Exeunt.

the horrid image of which makes my hair stand on end, *145*
and causes my well-fastened heart to beat against my ribs
in such an unnatural way? Frightful things that are actually present
affect one less than imagined horrors.
My murderous thought is still only imaginary,
but it shakes my entire manhood so deeply *150*
that my power to act is smothered by expectation,
and nothing seems real except what I imagine.

BANQUO (*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS)
Look at how entranced our companion is.

MACBETH (*aside*)
If chance would make me a king, why, chance might crown me
without my doing a thing. *155*

BANQUO (*to* ROSS *and* ANGUS)
These new honors that have come upon him
are like our new clothes; they will not fit the body's shape
until they've been worn awhile.

MACBETH *(aside)*
Whatever should happen,
time will see even the stormiest day to its end. *160*

BANQUO
Worthy Macbeth, we're waiting until you're ready.

MACBETH
I beg your pardon. My dull brain is trying to recall
something I've forgotten. Kind gentlemen, I've written down
your courtesies in my mind, and I'll turn
to that page daily to read about them. Let us go to the King. *165*
(*aside to* BANQUO) Think about what has happened, and
when we have more time,
and have thought it over awhile, let us speak
our hearts freely to each other.

BANQUO
Very gladly. *170*

MACBETH
That's enough until then.—Come on, friends.

They exit.

ACT I, SCENE IV

[*Forres. The castle.*] *Flourish. Enter* DUNCAN, LENNOX, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, *and* ATTENDANTS.

DUNCAN

Is execution done on Cawdor? Are not
Those in commission yet returned?

MALCOLM

My liege,
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die: who did report
That very frankly he confessed his treasons,
Implored your Highness's pardon and set forth
A deep repentance. Nothing in his life
Became him like the leaving it. He died
As one that had been studied in his death
To throw away the dearest thing he owed,
As 'twere a careless trifle.

DUNCAN

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face.
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust.

Enter MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, *and* ANGUS.

O worthiest cousin!
The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me. Thou art so
far before
That swiftest wing of **recompense** is slow
To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks and payment
Might have been mine! Only I have left to say,
More is thy due than more than all can pay.

recompense: *compensation given or restitution made as repayment for harm done*

ACT 1, SCENE 4

Forres. A room in the palace. Fanfare. DUNCAN, LENNOX, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, *and* SERVANTS *enter.*

DUNCAN

Has the Thane of Cawdor been executed? Haven't
the men assigned to oversee the execution returned yet?

MALCOLM

My lord,
they have not yet come back. But I have spoken
with someone who saw him die, who reported
that he confessed his treasons very openly,
begged your Highness' pardon, and spoke
with deep repentance. Nothing he did in his life
suited him better than how he left it. He died
like someone who had rehearsed his death,
so he could throw away the dearest thing he owned—his life—
as if it were a thing of no importance.

DUNCAN

There's no way
to read a person's mind by his face.
He was a gentleman I had learned
to trust completely.

MACBETH, BANQUO, ROSS, *and* ANGUS *enter.*

(*to* MACBETH) Oh worthiest cousin!
I was just now feeling guilty
for my sinful ingratitude. Your achievements come so quickly that,
no matter how quickly I try to pay you back,
I can't overtake you. I wish you weren't so deserving,
so you might be in debt to me, instead,
for my payment and thanks! All I can say is
that everything I have to give is not enough to repay you.

MACBETH

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself. Your Highness's part
Is to receive our duties; and our duties
Are to your throne and state children and servants;
Which do but what they should, by doing every thing
Safe toward your love and honour.

DUNCAN

Welcome hither.
I have begun to plant thee and will labour
To make thee full of growing.—Noble Banquo,
That hast no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so, let me enfold thee
And hold thee to my heart.

BANQUO

There if I grow,
The harvest is your own.

DUNCAN

My plenteous joys,
Wanton in fullness, seek to hide themselves
In drops of sorrow.—Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest, Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland;[16] which honour must
Not unaccompanied invest him only,
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers.—From hence to Inverness,[17]
And bind us further to you.

MACBETH

The rest is labour which is not used for you.
I'll be myself the **harbinger** and make joyful

harbinger: *messenger*

16 **Prince of Cumberland:** At the time of Duncan's reign, the throne of Scotland was not hereditary. If the king's successor was designated during the monarch's lifetime, he received the title "Prince of Cumberland" as a sign of his future succession.

17 **Inverness:** a Scottish town; this reference is specifically to Macbeth's castle there.

MACBETH

Just giving the service and loyalty that I owe you
is its own reward. It is Your Highness's role
to receive what we owe you; our duties
are like children and servants to your throne and nation;
in doing all they can to safeguard you with love and honor,
they only do what they should.

DUNCAN

You are welcome here.
I have planted you, and will do all I can
to make sure that you grow well.—Noble Banquo,
you are no less deserving, and it must not be
thought that you have done less; so let me embrace you
and hold you to my heart.

BANQUO

If I grow there,
the harvest will belong to you.

DUNCAN

My countless joys
are unrestrained, and try to hide themselves
in teardrops.—Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
and those among you nearest to me: Learn
that we will leave the throne to
our oldest son, Malcolm, whom we shall call the Prince of Cumberland
from now on. He will not be the only one honored in such a way,
for gifts of nobility will shine like stars
on all who deserve them. (*to* MACBETH) Let's leave here for Inverness,
where you'll make me even more indebted to you.

MACBETH

Anything is really labor if it isn't used in your service.
I'll be the messenger myself, and make my wife

The hearing of my wife with your approach;
So humbly take my leave.

DUNCAN
My worthy Cawdor!

MACBETH [*aside*]
55 The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires;
Let not light see my black and deep desires!
The eye wink at the hand; yet let that be
60 Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see.

Exit.

DUNCAN
True, worthy Banquo; he is full so valiant,
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. Let's after him,
Whose care is gone before to bid us welcome.
65 It is a **peerless** kinsman.

peerless: *unequaled; unrivaled*

Flourish. Exeunt.

joyful to hear that you are coming;
I humbly leave you now.

DUNCAN
My worthy Cawdor.

MACBETH (*aside*)
The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step *55*
I must either fall down from or else leap over,
for it lies in my way. Stars, hide your fires;
let not my black and deep desires be revealed by the light.
Let my eye not notice what my hand does—yet let my eye
see the deed it fears to see when it is done. *60*

He exits.

DUNCAN
That's true, worthy Banquo. He is full of valor,
and I feel fed by the praises he receives;
it's like a banquet to me. Let's follow him,
since he's gone on ahead to make ready our welcome.
He is an unrivaled relative. *65*

Fanfare. They exit.

ACT I, SCENE V

[*Inverness. Macbeth's castle.*] *Enter* MACBETH'S *wife, alone, with a letter.*

LADY MACBETH [*Reads.*]
"They met me in the day of success; and I have learned by
the perfect'st report, they have more in them than mortal
knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them
further, they made themselves air, into which they
5 vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came
missives from the King, who all-hailed me 'Thane of
Cawdor'; by which title, before, these Weïrd Sisters saluted
me, and referred me to the coming on of time, with 'Hail,
King that shalt be!' This have I thought good to deliver
10 thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst
not lose the dues of rejoicing, by being ignorant of what
greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart, and farewell."
Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, and shalt be
What thou art promised. Yet do I fear thy nature;
15 It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
Art not without ambition, but without
The illness[18] should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
20 And yet wouldst wrongly win. Thou'd'st have,
great Glamis,
That which cries "Thus thou must do," if thou
have it;
And that which rather thou dost fear to do
Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
That I may pour my spirits in thine ear;
25 And **chastise** with the valour of my tongue
All that **impedes** thee from the golden round,
Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
To have thee crown'd withal.

Enter MESSENGER.

What is your tidings?

chastise: *to rebuke or scold*

impedes: *prevents or delays something from occurring*

18 **illness:** the evil quality—ruthlessness—that should accompany ambition

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Inverness. Macbeth's castle. LADY MACBETH *enters, reading a letter.*

LADY MACBETH

The Witches met me in the day of victory, and I have learned
from reliable sources they know more than mortals do. When I
burned with desire to question them more, they made themselves
like the air and vanished into it. While I stood there, entranced 5
with wonder about all this, a messenger came from the King
and hailed me as Thane of Cawdor. Those Weïrd Sisters had
saluted me
by that same title; referring to the future, they also said, 'Hail, King
that will be!' I thought it good to tell you all this, my dearest
partner in future greatness; you mustn't miss the rejoicing you 10
deserve by being ignorant of the greatness promised to you.
Hold it close to your heart, and farewell.
You are the Thane of Glamis, and also of Cawdor; and you will be
what has been promised. But I'm worried about your character;
it is too full of the milk of human kindness 15
to take the quickest way. You want to be great;
you're not without ambition; but you lack
the necessary wickedness. The thing you want most to do,
you want to do in a holy way; you don't want to do wrong
even to win something you can only get wrongly. Great Glamis, 20
you want something
which cries out to you, "You have to do this," or else you can't
have it;
and you're more likely to fear doing a thing now
than to wish it were undone later. Hurry here quickly,
so I can pour my thoughts in your ear
and scold away with my bold tongue 25
everything that stands between you and the crown,
for fate and supernatural aid seem
to have given you that crown.

A MESSENGER *enters.*

What is your news?

MESSENGER

30 The King comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH

Thou'rt mad to say it!
Is not thy master with him, who, were 't so,
Would have inform'd for preparation?

MESSENGER

So please you, it is true. Our thane is coming.
35 One of my fellows had the speed of him,
Who, almost dead for breath, had scarcely more
Than would make up his message.

LADY MACBETH

Give him tending;
He brings great news.

Exit MESSENGER.

40 The raven[19] himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,[20]
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
45 Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood.
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's
breasts,
50 And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
55 Nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry "Hold, hold!"

Enter MACBETH.

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19 **raven:** bird of ill omen and fateful powers

20 **unsex me here:** Lady Macbeth is asking to be free of mercy and gentleness, qualities traditionally associated with the female sex.

MESSENGER

The King is coming here tonight. *30*

LADY MACBETH

You are mad to say so.
Isn't your master with him? And if this were so,
wouldn't he have sent word for us to prepare?

MESSENGER

May it please you, it is true. Our thane is coming.
One of my fellows outran him on his way; *35*
almost dead for lack of breath, he had barely enough breath
left to deliver his message.

LADY MACBETH

Go and assist him.
He brings great news.

MESSENGER *exits.*

The raven himself is hoarse *40*
from croaking the news of Duncan's fatal entrance
under my battlements. Come, you spirits
that watch over deadly thoughts; take away my womanliness
and fill me to the brim, from head to toe,
with the most dreadful cruelty! Make my blood thick; *45*
make my feelings numb and incapable of pity,
so that no natural pangs of remorse should come
and shake my deadly purpose, nor stand in the way
of the achievement of that purpose. Come to my woman's
breasts
and replace my milk with gall, you spirits that urge to murder, *50*
wherever your invisible forms
are aiding the destructive forces of nature! Come, thick night,
and enshroud yourself in the darkest smoke of hell,
so that my sharp knife can't see the wound it makes,
nor heaven peep through the blanket of the dark *55*
to cry, "Stop, stop!"

MACBETH *enters.*

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
Thy letters have transported me beyond
60 This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.

MACBETH

My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH

And when goes hence?

MACBETH

65 Tomorrow, as he purposes.

LADY MACBETH

O, never
Shall sun that morrow see!
Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters. To beguile the time,
70 Look like the time. Bear welcome in
your eye,
Your hand, your tongue. Look like th' innocent flower,
But be the serpent under 't. He that's coming
Must be provided for: and you shall put
This night's great business into my dispatch;
75 Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom.

MACBETH

We will speak further.

LADY MACBETH

Only look up clear.
To alter favour ever is to fear.
80 Leave all the rest to me.

Exeunt.

Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor—
and greater than both by a promise of future kingship!
Your letter has carried me beyond
the ignorance of the present, and I can now sense *60*
the future in this very moment.

MACBETH
My dearest love,
Duncan comes here tonight.

LADY MACBETH
And when will he leave?

MACBETH
He intends to leave tomorrow. *65*

LADY MACBETH
Oh, the sun
will never look upon that tomorrow!
Your face, my thane, is like a book where men
can read strange things. To deceive people,
you must suit your looks to the occasion. Show welcome into *70*
your eye,
hand, and tongue. Look like the innocent flower,
but be the serpent under it. He who is coming
must be provided for; so you will put
me in charge of this night's great business,
which will bring royal power and mastery to us alone *75*
for all the rest of our nights and days.

MACBETH
We will speak further.

LADY MACBETH
Just keep an innocent look about you;
to change your expression will be dangerous.
Leave all the rest to me. *80*

They exit.

ACT I, SCENE VI

[*Before Macbeth's castle.*] *Hautboys and torches. Enter* DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, BANQUO, LENNOX, MACDUFF, ROSS, ANGUS, *and* ATTENDANTS.

DUNCAN

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses.

BANQUO

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet,[21] does approve,
By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here. No jutty, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendant bed and procreant cradle.
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observed,
The air is delicate.

Enter LADY MACBETH.

DUNCAN

See, see, our honoured hostess!
The love that follows us sometime is our trouble,
Which still we thank as love.[22] Herein I teach you
How you shall bid God 'ild us for your pains
And thank us for your trouble.

LADY MACBETH

All our service
In every point twice done and then done double
Were poor and single business to contend
Against those honours deep and broad wherewith
Your Majesty loads our house. For those of old,

21 **martlet:** the house martin, a small European bird of the swallow family

22 **love:** Duncan is speaking of the love of a subject for his monarch, that is, loyalty, a sense of duty to one's feudal lord.

ACT 1, SCENE 6

Before Macbeth's castle. Oboes and torches.
DUNCAN, MALCOLM, DONALBAIN, BANQUO,
LENNOX, MACDUFF, ROSS, ANGUS, *and*
SERVANTS *enter.*

DUNCAN

This castle is on a pleasant site. The air
comes forth lightly and sweetly
to soothe our senses.

BANQUO

This summer visitor,
the church-dwelling martin, proves *5*
that heaven's wind breathes delightfully here
by making this his favorite home. I see no projection, decoration,
buttress, or available corner where this bird
hasn't made his hanging nest, his cradle for breeding his young.
In places where these birds breed and visit most, I have
observed *10*
that the air is delicate.

LADY MACBETH *enters.*

DUNCAN

Look, look, our honored hostess!
Though the love we receive is sometimes troublesome,
we must still be grateful for it. In saying this, I teach you
to ask God to reward us for all your inconvenience *15*
and thank us for troubling you.

LADY MACBETH

All the service we can do for you—
even if it were all done twice, then doubled again—
must be a poor, slight offering when weighed
against those deep, broad honors *20*
that Your Majesty loads upon our house. Because of
past honors,

And the late dignities heaped up to them,
We rest your hermits.

DUNCAN

Where's the Thane of Cawdor?
We coursed him at the heels and had a purpose
To be his purveyor; but he rides well,
And his great love, sharp as his spur, hath holp him
To his home before us. Fair and noble hostess,
We are your guest tonight.

LADY MACBETH

Your servants ever
Have theirs, themselves, and what is theirs,
in compt,
To make their audit at your Highness's pleasure,
Still to return your own.

DUNCAN

Give me your hand.
Conduct me to mine host: we love him highly,
And shall continue our graces towards him.
By your leave, hostess.

Exeunt.

and the recent ones heaped upon them,
we're obliged to pray for you.

DUNCAN

Where is the Thane of Cawdor?
We pursued him at his heels and had intended *25*
to arrive before him. But he rides well,
and his great love for you, as sharp as his spur, has helped him
to reach home ahead of us. Fair and noble hostess,
we are your guest tonight.

LADY MACBETH

As your servants, we always *30*
keep our people, ourselves, and all that is ours ready to be
accounted for,
so that you can inspect them whenever you wish,
and always receive what's yours.

DUNCAN

Give me your hand. (*taking her hand*)
Lead me to my host. We love him highly, *35*
and will continue to grant favors to him.
With your permission, hostess.

They exit.

ACT I, SCENE VII

[*Macbeth's castle.*] *Hautboys and torches. Enter a* SEWER *and divers* SERVANTS *with dishes and service over the stage. Then enter* MACBETH.

MACBETH

If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly. If the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease, success; that but this blow
5 Might be the be-all and the end-all—here,
But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
We'd jump the life to come. But in these cases
We still have judgment here; that we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
10 To plague th' inventor: this even-handed justice
Commends th' ingredients of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as
his host,
15 Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against
20 The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked newborn babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubin horsed
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
25 That tears shall drown the wind. I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other—

Enter LADY MACBETH.

How now, what news?

ACT 1, SCENE 7

A room in Macbeth's castle. Oboes and torches. A chief BUTLER *and several* SERVANTS *enter with dishes and utensils and pass across the stage. Then* MACBETH *enters.*

MACBETH

If it's over with once it's been done, then it would be best
to do it quickly. If the murder
could gather up the consequences in a net, achieving
success through his death, and if this deed
could prove sufficient all by itself—then here, *5*
right here, upon time's riverbank,
I'd risk my eternal life. But in a case like this,
I still might be judged in this life; I might also teach others
to do bloody deeds—and once those lessons are taught,
they might be turned against me. This impartial justice *10*
offers the poisonous ingredients of my cup to my own lips.
He has two reasons to trust me while he's here:
First, I am his relative and his subject—
and as both, I have strong reasons not to do the deed.
Second, I am his host,
who should shut the door to keep out his murderer, *15*
not hold the knife myself. Besides, this Duncan
has wielded power so mildly, and his reign
has been so blameless, that his virtues
will plead like trumpet-voiced angels to protest
the damnable crime of his murder; *20*
and pity will be like a naked, newborn infant
straddling the wind, or like heaven's cherubim riding
the invisible horses of the air—
for pity will blow the horrid deed into every eye
so that tears will drown the wind. I have nothing *25*
to spur me on toward my intended deed
except ambition, which leaps over itself
and falls on the other side—

LADY MACBETH *enters.*

Well, then—what is your news?

LADY MACBETH

He has almost supped. Why have you left the chamber?

MACBETH

Hath he asked for me?

LADY MACBETH

Know you not he has?

MACBETH

We will proceed no further in this business.
He hath honour'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH

Was the hope drunk
Wherein you dressed yourself? Hath it slept since?
And wakes it now, to look so green and pale
At what it did so freely? From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?[23]

MACBETH

Prithee, peace!
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.

LADY MACBETH

What beast was 't then,
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;

23 **poor cat i' th' adage:** a familiar saying about a cat that wanted fish but was unwilling to wet her feet to catch them

LADY MACBETH

He has almost eaten. Why did you leave the chamber? *30*

MACBETH

Has he asked for me?

LADY MACBETH

Don't you know that he has?

MACBETH

We will go no further in this business.
He has honored me lately, and I have gained
the golden respect of all sorts of people— *35*
and this respect should be worn while it is shiny and new,
not cast aside so soon.

LADY MACBETH

Was it only a drunken hope
that you wore before? Has it been sleeping since?
Is it waking up now, looking sickly and pale *40*
at what it meant to do so freely? From now on,
I'll value your love as equally fickle. Are you afraid
to show the boldness and action needed
to become what you want to be? Would you be content to have
the crown you value so highly, *45*
and yet live, in your own opinion, a coward's life?
Are you willing to let the words "I don't dare" come after the
words "I want to,"
like the poor cat in the proverb?

MACBETH

I implore you, be quiet.
I dare do all that's worthy of a man. *50*
Whoever dares to do more is not a man.

LADY MACBETH

So what kind of beast was it
that first made you tell me about this scheme?
When you dared to do it, you were a man;

55 And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time nor
place
Did then adhere, and yet you would make
both.
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. I have given suck,
and know
60 How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me.
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this.

MACBETH

65 If we should fail?

LADY MACBETH

We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking-place,[24]
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—
Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
70 Soundly invite him—his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince
That memory, the warder of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck[25] only: when in swinish sleep
75 Their drenched natures lie as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon
Th' unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell?

MACBETH

80 Bring forth men-children only
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. Will it not be received,

---

24 **screw your courage to the sticking-place:** This most likely refers to the tightening of the cord on a crossbow to the "sticking-place" (i.e., making it as taut as possible and ready to be shot).

25 **limbeck:** *alembic*, a word derived from the Moorish alchemists of Spain; an instrument used for distillation

and to be more than what you were then 55
would make you even more of a man. Neither the time nor the place
were then ready, and yet you were willing to make them both ready.
Now they have made themselves ready, and their readiness
makes you unsure of yourself. I have nursed a child, and I know
how sweet it is to love the baby that sucks milk from me. 60
And yet, while he was smiling in my face,
I would have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
and dashed his brains out, if I had sworn
to do this as you have sworn.

MACBETH

If we should fail— 65

LADY MACBETH

We fail?
Just fasten your courage to the notch,
and we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep—
and after his day's hard journey,
he'll soon sleep soundly—I'll overpower 70
his two chamber servants with wine and revelry
until memory, the guard of the brain,
is smoky, and the container that catches reason
is nothing but an alembic. When they are sleeping like pigs,
lying there drenched in alcohol as if they were dead, 75
what won't you and I be able to do
to the unguarded Duncan? What won't be blamed upon
his drunken officers, who will bear the guilt
of our great murder?

MACBETH

Give birth only to but men-children, 80
for your bold spirit should create
nothing but males. When we have smeared

When we have marked with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber and used their very daggers,
85 That they have done 't?

LADY MACBETH

Who dares receive it other,
As we shall make our griefs and clamour roar
Upon his death?

MACBETH

I am settled and bend up
90 Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.

Exeunt.

his two sleepy chamber guards with his blood
and used their own daggers, won't everyone believe
that they have done it? *85*

LADY MACBETH

Who'll dare believe anything else,
since we shall roar and howl with grief
upon his death?

MACBETH

I am determined, and strain
every muscle to ready myself for this terrible feat. *90*
Let's go, and trick the world with our pleasant looks.
Our false faces must hide what we know in our false hearts.

They exit.

After You Read *Macbeth: Act I*

Literary Lens: Tragic Hero

Macbeth, like any tragic hero, is ruled by fate, a personal flaw, an error in judgment, and an inability to prevent a disastrous outcome once he sees the problem. On another piece of paper, make a chart like the one below. In the first column, fill in three events from Act I that reveal Macbeth as a tragic hero. In the second column, write the element that corresponds to the event.

Event	Tragic Element

Explore Context: Influence of Royal Patrons

How is King Duncan portrayed in this act? What type of king do you think he is? What personality traits does he reveal? Knowing that Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in honor of his patron King James, what aspects of Duncan's character might have proven most flattering? Write a paragraph using specific details from the text to support your answer.

Apply and Create: Modern Soliloquy

For more than four hundred years, the universality of Shakespeare's works have cut across ethnic, gender, and generational lines. Reread Macbeth's soliloquy that opens Scene VII. Think about what it reveals about human nature. Then write your own version using modern language. Feel free to use informal expressions and slang. Make sure you translate every idea expressed in the soliloquy. You can use the parallel text to help you with the meaning, but the version you come up with should be uniquely your own.

Read Critically

Read the following passage from Act I, Scene V, and answer the questions that follow.

LADY MACBETH

40 The raven himself is hoarse
That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan
Under my battlements. Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full

Of direst cruelty! Make thick my blood.
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come, thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell,
That my keen knife see not the wound it makes,
Now heaven peep through the blanket of the dark,
To cry "Hold, hold!"

Enter MACBETH.

Great Glamis! Worthy Cawdor!
Greater than both, by the all-hail hereafter!
The letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant.

1. Some critics have suggested that Lady Macbeth is a "fourth witch." In what ways does the soliloquy support this idea?
2. Compare and contrast what you find out about Lady Macbeth from this soliloquy with what you have already learned about Macbeth so far in the play. What personality traits do they seem to share? In what ways are they different?
3. How does Lady Macbeth's tone shift when her husband enters the scene? What does this tell you about their relationship? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Before You Read *Macbeth: Act II*

Act II of *Macbeth* contains one of the most famous soliloquies of all time, which begins with the words "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?" In an 1882 production of the play, the actor playing Macbeth decided it would be effective to take a long, dramatic pause before beginning the dagger soliloquy. During that pause, a stray cat happened to wander across the stage, apparently in search of mice. The effect of the dramatic pause was spoiled, but the actor no doubt learned a valuable lesson about the perils of overacting.

Literary Lens

Conflict An effective work of dramatic literature features a number of basic elements including plot, characters, and theme. Plot is the sequence of events or incidents that comprise the story. A good plot must contain a strong conflict, which is the opposition of characters or forces that drives the action of the play. An internal conflict is one that takes place within the mind of a character. An external conflict happens between two or more characters. *Macbeth* features both types of conflict. There is the overall conflict between good and evil, the conflict between Macbeth and his conscience, and the conflict between Macbeth and all who would oppose him.

Comic Relief In Act II of *Macbeth*, the flow of tragic events is suddenly interrupted by the appearance of a witty drunken porter answering a knock at the door of Macbeth's castle. It is the only funny scene in the play, and the playwright makes the most of it. William Shakespeare was a master of this type of comic relief; he used it frequently in his tragedies to give the audience a short break from the terrible events being depicted. This break allows the audience to catch its collective breath before being emotionally wrenched by the even darker events to come.

Shakespeare's Language

A pun is a humorous play on words, such as the phrase "very punny" in which the expected word *funny* is replaced by the word *punny*. The most common types of puns make use of words with multiple meanings (*lie*, *case*, *pop*) or words with different spellings that sound alike (*soul*/*sole*, *great*/*grate*, *pare*/*pair*). Shakespeare's comedies are stuffed with puns, but even his tragedies tend to contain this type of witty wordplay. For example, in *Macbeth*'s only comic scene, Act II, Scene 3, Shakespeare seizes his opportunity to have fun with the double meaning of the word *lie*.

Another form of wordplay Shakespeare uses frequently is hyperbole, which is an exaggeration or overstatement not intended to be taken literally. His characters often try to top one another in various ways. You'll find a good example at the top of Act II, Scene 4, in the exchange between Ross and the Old Man. Each tries to one-up the other with visions of the fantastic things that took place the night before. In the end the reader doesn't know quite what to believe—did the two men actually see these things, or are they simply trying to outdo each other?

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Comic relief is common in film and television dramas. List an example you have seen, and describe its effect on the rest of the action.
2. Have you ever been conflicted about an action you took or a goal you tried to reach? What emotions accompanied your inner conflict?
3. What does the word *evil* mean to you? Are the Macbeths evil according to your definition? Why or why not?

ACT II, SCENE I

[*Inverness. Court of Macbeth's castle.*] *Enter* BANQUO *and* FLEANCE, *with a torch before him.*

BANQUO
How goes the night, boy?

FLEANCE
The moon is down; I have not heard the clock.

BANQUO
And she goes down at twelve.

FLEANCE
I take 't, 'tis later, sir.

BANQUO
Hold, take my sword. There's husbandry in heaven;
Their candles are all out. Take thee that too.
A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose!

Enter MACBETH *and a* SERVANT *with a torch.*

Give me my sword.
Who's there?

MACBETH
A friend.

BANQUO
What, sir, not yet at rest? The King's a-bed:
He hath been in unusual pleasure, and
Sent forth great **largess** to your offices.
This diamond he greets your wife withal,
By the name of most kind hostess,
and shut up
In measureless content.

largess: *generosity or charity*

ACT 2, SCENE I

Court of Macbeth's castle. BANQUO *and* FLEANCE *enter;* FLEANCE *carries a torch.*

BANQUO
What time of night is it, boy?

FLEANCE
The moon is down. I haven't heard the clock strike.

BANQUO
The moon goes down at midnight.

FLEANCE
I believe it is later, sir.

BANQUO
Wait, take my sword. There's thrift in heaven; *5*
its candles are all out. Take that, too.
An urgent need to sleep lies upon me like lead,
and yet I do not wish to sleep. Merciful God,
keep away from me those cursed thoughts
that come to me whenever I rest! *10*

MACBETH *and a* SERVANT *enter, the* SERVANT *with a torch.*

Give me my sword.
Who's there?

MACBETH
A friend.

BANQUO
What's this, sir! Aren't you asleep yet? The King's in bed.
He has been enjoying himself more than usual, *15*
and gave enormous tips to your servants.
He sent this diamond to your wife,
greeting her by the name of most kind hostess. Now his day has ended
in perfect happiness.

He gives MACBETH *a diamond.*

MACBETH

20 Being unprepared,
Our will became the servant to defect,
Which else should free have wrought.

BANQUO

All's well.
I dreamt last night of the three Weïrd Sisters:
25 To you they have show'd some truth.

MACBETH

I think not of them.
Yet, when we can entreat an hour to serve,
We would spend it in some words upon that business,
If you would grant the time.

BANQUO

30 At your kind'st leisure.

MACBETH

If you shall cleave to my consent, when 'tis,
It shall make honour for you.

BANQUO

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
35 My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
I shall be counseled.

MACBETH

repose: *rest; relaxation*

Good **repose** the while!

BANQUO

Thanks, sir. The like to you!

Exit BANQUO [*with* FLEANCE].

MACBETH

Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
40 She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed.

Exit [SERVANT].

MACBETH
Since we were unprepared for his visit, *20*
our desire to serve him was greater than our ability to do so;
otherwise, we would have been more generous.

BANQUO
It's all right.
I dreamed last night of the three Witches.
To you, they have shown some truth. *25*

MACBETH
I don't think about them.
And yet, whenever we get an hour to ourselves,
we should spend it talking some about that business—
if you'll allow the time.

BANQUO
Whenever you wish. *30*

MACBETH
If you'll ally yourself with me at the proper moment,
you'll gain honors by it.

BANQUO
As long as I lose no honor
in seeking to add to what I already have—always keeping
my heart free from evil and my loyalties spotless— *35*
I'll hear what you have to say.

MACBETH
Meanwhile, sleep well.

BANQUO
Thanks, sir. The same to you.

BANQUO *and* FLEANCE *exit.*

MACBETH (*to a* SERVANT)
Go tell your mistress to ring the bell
when my drink is ready. Go on to bed. *40*

SERVANT *exits.*

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? Come, let me clutch thee!
I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.
Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible
45 To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but
A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?
I see thee yet, in form as **palpable**
As this which now I draw.

palpable: *touchable; tangible*

50 Thou marshal'st me the way that I was going;
And such an instrument I was to use.
Mine eyes are made the fools o' th' other senses,
Or else worth all the rest. I see thee still;
And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood,
55 Which was not so before. There's no such thing.
It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes. Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtained sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
60 Pale Hecate's[1] off'rings, and withered murder,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace.
With Tarquin's[2] ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. Thou sure and firm-set earth,
65 Hear not my steps, which way they walk, for fear
Thy very stones prate of my whereabout,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it. Whiles I threat, he lives.
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives.

A bell rings.

70 I go, and it is done. The bell invites me.
Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven or to hell.

Exit.

1 **Hecate**: the classical goddess of magic and witchcraft
2 **Tarquin:** Sextus Tarquinius, noted for his tyranny and arrogance; when the Roman people (6th century B.C.) saw the virtuous Lucrece stab herself after being ravished by Tarquin, they rose and expelled the Tarquin family from Rome.

Is this a dagger that I see before me,
its handle pointed toward my hand? Come here—let me grab you.
I can't hold you, and yet I still see you.
Fearful vision, can't you be felt by my touch
as well as seen? Or are you nothing but *45*
a dagger of my imagination, a false creation
that comes from my feverish brain?
I still see you, looking just as solid
as this dagger I now draw.

He draws his dagger.

You lead me the way I was going, *50*
and just such a weapon I am supposed to use.
Either my eyes are more foolish than my other senses,
or they are worth all the rest together. I still see you—
and on your blade and handle, I see large drops of blood
that weren't there before. There's no such thing as this dagger. *55*
My bloody business causes it to take shape
before my eyes in this way. Now over this half of the world,
nature seems dead, and wicked dreams deceive
those who are hidden in sleep. Witchcraft celebrates
the ceremonies of pale Hecate; and withered murder *60*
is awakened by his guard, the wolf,
whose howl is his cry of warning; and so, at a stealthy pace,
murder moves with Tarquin's lustful footsteps toward his goal
like a ghost. You solid and firmly set earth,
don't hear my steps or which way they walk, for I fear *65*
that even your stones might tell where I am,
breaking the horrible silence
that suits this moment well. While I threaten to act, he lives.
Words cool hot deeds too much with their cold breath.

A bell rings.

I go, and the murder will be done. The bell calls for me to do it. *70*
Do not hear it, Duncan, for this ringing
summons you to heaven or to hell.

Exit.

ACT II, SCENE II

[*Macbeth's castle.*] *Enter* LADY [MACBETH].

LADY MACBETH

That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold;
What hath quench'd them hath given me fire. Hark!
Peace!
It was the owl that shriek'd, the fatal bellman,
Which gives the stern'st good-night.[3] He is about it.
The doors are open, and the surfeited grooms
Do mock their charge with snores: I have drugged
their possets,
That death and nature do contend about them,
Whether they live or die.

MACBETH [*within*]

Who's there? What, ho?

LADY MACBETH

Alack, I am afraid they have awaked,
And 'tis not done. Th' attempt and not the deed
Confounds us. Hark! I laid their daggers
ready;
He could not miss 'em. Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done 't.

Enter MACBETH.

My husband?

MACBETH

I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?

LADY MACBETH

I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Did not you speak?

3 **the owl . . . good-night:** According to superstition, the owl's hoot foretells death. In this image the owl is seen as a bellman, or town crier, visiting the condemned prisoner on the night before his execution.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

Court of Macbeth's castle. LADY MACBETH *enters.*

LADY MACBETH

The wine that has made them drunk has made me bold;
it has put them to sleep, but has inflamed my courage. Listen!
    Hush!
It was the owl that shrieked—the fatal crier,
who calls out a stern good night. My husband is doing it.
The doors are open, and the drunken guards
mock their duties with snores. I have drugged
    their nighttime
drink so that death and life argue with one another
as to whether the men are alive or dead.

MACBETH (*offstage*)

Who's there? What's this?

LADY MACBETH

Oh, no! I'm afraid they have awakened,
and it's not been done. We are ruined by the attempt,
not by the deed. Listen! I laid out their daggers so they'd be
    ready;
Macbeth couldn't miss them. If the king hadn't looked
like my father while he slept, I would have done it myself.

MACBETH *enters with bloody daggers.*

My husband?

MACBETH

I have done the deed. Didn't you hear a noise?

LADY MACBETH

I heard the owl scream and the crickets cry.
Didn't you speak?

MACBETH

When?

LADY MACBETH

Now.

MACBETH

As I descended?

LADY MACBETH

Ay.

MACBETH

Hark!
Who lies i' the second chamber?

LADY MACBETH

Donalbain.

MACBETH

This is a sorry sight.

LADY MACBETH

A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.

MACBETH

There's one did laugh in 's sleep, and one cried "Murder!"
That they did wake each other. I stood and heard them.
But they did say their prayers, and addressed them
Again to sleep.

LADY MACBETH

There are two lodged together.

MACBETH

One cried "God bless us!" and "Amen" the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands,
List'ning their fear, I could not say "Amen,"
When they did say "God bless us!"

LADY MACBETH

Consider it not so
deeply.

MACBETH
When? *20*

LADY MACBETH
Just now.

MACBETH
While I was coming down?

LADY MACBETH
Yes.

MACBETH
Listen!
Who's sleeping in the second room? *25*

LADY MACBETH
Donalbain.

MACBETH *(looking at his bloody hands)*
This is a miserable sight.

LADY MACBETH
How foolish—to call it a miserable sight.

MACBETH
One of them laughed in his sleep, and the other cried, "Murder!"
And so they woke each other up. I stood and listened to them. *30*
But they said their prayers, and then they settled down
to go back to sleep.

LADY MACBETH
Two of them are in that room together.

MACBETH
One cried, "God bless us!" And the other cried, "Amen!"
It was as if they had seen me with these executioner's hands, *35*
listening in on their fear. I could not say "Amen"
when they said "God bless us."

LADY MACBETH
Don't think about it too
deeply.

MACBETH

But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH

These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

MACBETH

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep"—the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast—

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean?

MACBETH

Still it cried "Sleep no more!" to all the house:
"Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more."

LADY MACBETH

Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

MACBETH

I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on 't again I dare not.

MACBETH

But why couldn't I say the word "Amen"?
I was in great need of a blessing, but "Amen" *40*
stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH

Such deeds must not be thought about
in such a way; otherwise, they will drive us mad.

MACBETH

I thought I heard a voice cry, "Sleep no more!
Macbeth murders sleep"—the innocent sleep, *45*
sleep that straightens out the tangled skein of worry;
the death of each day's life; a soothing bath after hard labor;
an ointment for hurt minds; the second course of great
nature's meal;
the most nutritious part of life's feast.

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean? *50*

MACBETH

It kept crying, "Sleep no more!" to everyone in the house.
"The Thane of Glamis has murdered sleep—and so the
Thane of Cawdor
will sleep no more. Macbeth will sleep no more."

LADY MACBETH

Who was it that cried in such a way? Why, worthy Thane,
you slacken your noble strength in thinking *55*
so squeamishly about things. Go, get some water,
and wash this filthy evidence off your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must stay there. Go—carry them back, and smear
the sleeping guards with blood. *60*

MACBETH

I won't go anymore.
I'm afraid to even think about what I've done;
I don't dare look at it again.

LADY MACBETH

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures. 'Tis the eye of childhood
That fears a painted devil. If he do bleed,
I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal,
For it must seem their guilt.

Exit. Knock within.

MACBETH

Whence is that knocking?
How is 't with me, when every noise appalls me?
What hands are here? Ha! They pluck
out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean[4] wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The **multitudinous** seas in incarnadine,
Making the green one red.

multitudinous: *plentiful; ample*

Enter LADY [MACBETH].

LADY MACBETH

My hands are of your colour; but I shame
To wear a heart so white. [*knocking*] I hear a knocking
At the south entry. Retire we to our chamber;
A little water clears us of this deed:
How easy is it, then! Your constancy
Hath left you unattended. [*knocking*] Hark!
More knocking.
Get on your nightgown, lest occasion call us,
And show us to be watchers. Be not lost
So poorly in your thoughts.

MACBETH

To know my deed, 'twere best not
know myself. [*knocking*]
Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!

Exeunt.

4 **Neptune's ocean:** Neptune was a Roman god believed to rule the seas.

LADY MACBETH

How indecisive you are!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead *65*
are like pictures, nothing more. Only the eye of a child
fears a painted devil. If Duncan is bleeding,
I'll paint the faces of the servants with his blood,
for they must seem guilty of the murder.

LADY MACBETH *exits. Knocking offstage.*

MACBETH

Where is that knocking coming from? *70*
What's wrong with me, that every noise terrifies me?
(looking at his hands) Whose hands are these? Ha! They'll pluck
out my eyes.
Could all of great Neptune's ocean wash my hand
clean of this blood? No; instead, my hand
would drench the enormous seas a crimson color, *75*
making their green waters wholly red.

LADY MACBETH *reenters.*

LADY MACBETH

My hands are red like yours, but I'd be ashamed
to wear a heart so white. (*knocking offstage*) I hear a knocking
at the south entry. Let's go to our bedroom.
A little water will wash all signs of this deed off us: *80*
how easy it will all be, then! Your self-assurance
has deserted you. (*knocking within*) Listen,
more knocking.
Put on your dressing gown, or someone may call on us
and realize that we've been awake. Don't be so weak *85*
and lost in thought.

MACBETH

To know what I have done—it would be better to lose
consciousness altogether. (*knocking offstage*)
Wake up Duncan with your knocking! I wish you could!

They exit.

ACT II, SCENE III

[*Macbeth's castle.*] *Enter a* PORTER. *Knocking within.*

PORTER

Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the key. [*knocking*] Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, i' th' name of Beelzebub?[5] Here's a farmer, that hanged himself on the expectation of plenty.[6] Come in time! Have napkins enow about you; here you'll sweat for 't. [*knocking*] Knock, knock! Who's there, in th' other devil's name. Faith, here's an equivocator[7] that could swear in both the scales against either scale; who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven. O, come in, equivocator. [*knocking*] Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither for stealing out of a French hose:[8] come in, tailor. Here you may roast your goose.[9] [*knocking*] Knock, knock; never at quiet! What are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further. I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire. [*knocking*] Anon, anon! [*Opens an entrance.*] I pray you, remember the porter.

Enter MACDUFF *and* LENNOX.

MACDUFF

Was it so late, friend, ere you went to bed,
That you do lie so late?

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5 **Beelzebub:** the devil; in Matthew 12:24, Beelzebub is spoken of as "prince of the devils."

6 **a farmer . . . expectation of plenty:** The farmer expected to sell hoarded grain at high prices, but abundant crops caused the supply to exceed the demand, and he lost his investment.

7 **equivocator:** one who uses double-meanings to confuse his listeners; Shakespeare may have had in mind the Jesuit, Henry Garnet, Superior of the Society of Jesus in England. He stood trial on March 28, 1606, for participating in the Gunpowder Plot. He later confessed to equivocating at the trial—to perjury, his enemies said—and was hanged.

8 **an English tailor . . . French hose:** Certain types of French trousers fitted so tightly that even a dishonest tailor had trouble stealing surplus material while making them.

9 **goose:** tailor's pressing iron

ACT 2, SCENE 3

Court of Macbeth's castle. Knocking offstage. A PORTER *enters.*

PORTER

Here's a knocking, indeed! If a man were the porter of the gate of hell, he'd have to turn the key a whole lot. *(knocking offstage)* Knock, knock, knock! Who's there, in the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer who hanged himself because he'd hoped for higher prices. Welcome to you! Bring plenty of handkerchiefs to keep yourself dry; you'll do some sweating here. *(knocking offstage)* Knock, knock! Who's there, in some other devil's name? Why here's an equivocator who could swear different things in each of the scales of justice; he committed treason in the name of God, but couldn't equivocate his way to heaven. Oh, come in, equivocator. *(knocking offstage)* Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? Why, here's an English tailor who's come here because he stole fabric out of tight-fitting pants. Come in, tailor. Here you can heat up your pressing iron. *(knocking offstage)* Knock, knock! Never any quiet. Who are you? But this place is too cold for hell. I'll stop playing the devil-porter. I'd planned to let in folks from all the professions that go the wide and easy path to eternal damnation. (*knocking offstage*) Right away! (*Opens a door.*) I ask you to remember to tip the porter.

MACDUFF *and* LENNOX *enter.*

MACDUFF

Friend, is it because you went to bed so late
that you arise so late?

PORTER

Faith, sir, we were carousing till the second cock:[10]
and drink, sir, is a great provoker of three things.

MACDUFF

What three things does drink especially provoke?

PORTER

25 Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes, and unprovokes; it provokes the desire, but it takes away the performance: therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery. It makes him, and it mars him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it
30 persuades him and disheartens him; makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep, and giving him the lie, leaves him.

MACDUFF

I believe drink gave thee the lie last night.

PORTER

That it did, sir, i' th' very throat on me; but I requited
35 him for his lie; and, I think, being too strong for him, though he took up my legs sometime, yet I made a shift to cast him.

MACDUFF

Is thy master stirring?

Enter MACBETH.

Our knocking has awaked him; here he comes.

[PORTER *exits.*]

LENNOX

40 Good morrow, noble sir.

MACBETH

Good morrow, both.

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10 **second cock:** second cockcrow, or about 3 A.M.

PORTER

Why, sir, we were partying till 3 o'clock A.M., and drink, sir, is a great cause of three things.

MACDUFF

What three things does drink cause most?

PORTER

Goodness sir, red noses, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it *25* causes and uncauses. It causes the desire, but it makes it difficult to perform. And so, heavy drinking might be called an equivocator as far as lechery is concerned. It helps him, and it hurts him; it turns him on, and it turns him off; it encourages him, and discourages him; it makes him stand, *30* and not stand. To conclude, drink tricks him right to sleep—then lays him out and leaves him.

MACDUFF

I believe that drink laid you out last night.

PORTER

That it did, sir—it had me right by the throat. But I paid him back for his trick, and I think I was too strong for him; *35* for even though he lifted me up by my legs, I still managed to throw him up.

MACDUFF

Is your master awake?

MACBETH *enters.*

Our knocking has awakened him. Here he comes.

PORTER *exits.*

LENNOX

Good morning, noble sir. *40*

MACBETH

Good morning to you both.

MACDUFF
Is the King stirring, worthy Thane?

MACBETH
Not yet.

MACDUFF
He did command me to call timely on him:
45 I have almost slipped the hour.

MACBETH
I'll bring you to him.

MACDUFF
I know this is a joyful trouble to you;
But yet 'tis one.

MACBETH
The labour we delight in physics pain.
50 This is the door.

MACDUFF
I'll make so bold to call,
For 'tis my limited service.

Exit MACDUFF.

LENNOX
Goes the King hence today?

MACBETH
He does: he did appoint so.

LENNOX
55 The night has been unruly. Where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' th' air, strange screams
of death,
And prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion and confused events
60 New hatch'd to th' woeful time. The obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night. Some say, the earth
Was feverous and did shake.

clamored: *made a lot of noise*

MACDUFF
Is the King awake, worthy Thane?

MACBETH
Not yet.

MACDUFF
He commanded me to call on him early:
I've almost missed the time. *45*

MACBETH
I'll show you to him.

MACDUFF
I know this is a joyful trouble to you—
and yet it's still trouble.

MACBETH
The work we enjoy is a remedy for pain.
The door to Duncan's room is that way. *50*

MACDUFF
I'll boldly call on him,
for it's my appointed duty.

MACDUFF *exits.*

LENNOX
Is the King going away today?

MACBETH
Yes. He made commands for it.

LENNOX
The night was unruly. Where we slept, *55*
chimneys were blown down; and it's said that
wailing was heard in the air—strange screams, like
people dying.
And there were prophecies in terrible voices,
telling of dreadful uproars and troubling events,
about to make these days sorrowful. The owl *60*
cried out the whole night through. Some say the earth
was feverish and shook.

MACBETH

'Twas a rough night.

LENNOX

My young remembrance cannot parallel
65 A fellow to it.

Enter MACDUFF.

MACDUFF

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive nor name thee!

MACBETH AND LENNOX

What's the matter?

MACDUFF

Confusion now hath made his masterpiece.
70 Most sacrilegious murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed temple and stole thence
The life o' th' building!

MACBETH

What is 't you say? The life?

LENNOX

Mean you his Majesty?

MACDUFF

75 Approach the chamber and destroy your sight
With a new Gorgon:[11] do not bid me speak;
See, and then speak yourselves. Awake, awake!

Exeunt MACBETH *and* LENNOX.

Ring the alarum bell. Murder and treason!
Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! Awake!
80 Shake off this downy sleep, death's counterfeit,
And look on death itself! Up, up, and see
The great doom's image! Malcolm! Banquo!
As from your graves rise up, and walk like sprites,

11 **Gorgon:** a monster, according to Greek mythology, that could turn anyone who looked upon it to stone

MACBETH
It was a rough night.

LENNOX
In my young years, I can't remember one
to match it. *65*

MACDUFF *reenters.*

MACDUFF
Oh, horror, horror, horror! Neither my tongue nor my heart
can imagine or name you!

MACBETH AND LENNOX
What's the matter?

MACDUFF
Destruction has now made its masterpiece.
Most godless murder has broken open *70*
the Lord's holy temple and stolen from it
the life that was inside!

MACBETH
What are you saying? The life?

LENNOX
Do you mean his Majesty?

MACDUFF
Go to his bedroom and be blinded by the sight *75*
of a new Gorgon. Do not ask me to speak.
Look—and then speak yourselves. Awake! Awake!

MACBETH *and* LENNOX *exit.*

Ring the alarm bell. Murder and treason!
Banquo and Donalbain! Malcolm! Wake up!
Shake off your pleasant sleep, death's imitation, *80*
and look at death itself! Get up, get up, and see
the Day of Judgment's likeness! Malcolm, Banquo,
rise up, as if from your graves, and walk like spirits,

To countenance this horror. Ring the bell!

Bell rings.

Enter LADY [MACBETH].

LADY MACBETH

85 What's the business,
That such a hideous trumpet calls to parley
The sleepers of the house? Speak, speak!

MACDUFF

O gentle lady,
'Tis not for you to hear what I can speak:
90 The repetition, in a woman's ear,
Would murder as it fell.

Enter BANQUO.

O Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master's murdered!

LADY MACBETH

Woe, alas!
95 What, in our house?

BANQUO

Too cruel anywhere.
Dear Duff, I prithee, contradict thyself,
And say it is not so.

Enter MACBETH, LENNOX, *and* ROSS.

MACBETH

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
100 I had lived a blessed time; for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality:
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead,
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.

Enter MALCOLM *and* DONALBAIN.

DONALBAIN

105 What is amiss?

in keeping with this horror. Ring the bell!

Bell rings.

LADY MACBETH *enters.*

LADY MACBETH

What's going on,
that such a hideous trumpet summons together
the people who sleep in this house? Tell me, tell me!

MACDUFF

Oh, gentle lady,
it's not right for you to hear what I have to tell.
To repeat it in a woman's ear
would murder her as soon as she heard it.

BANQUO *enters.*

Oh, Banquo, Banquo,
Our royal master has been murdered!

LADY MACBETH

Woe, sorrow!
What, in our house?

BANQUO

Too cruel a thing to happen anywhere.
Dear Macduff, I beg you to contradict yourself
and say it isn't so.

MACBETH *and* LENNOX *reenter, with* ROSS.

MACBETH

If I had only died an hour before this happened,
I'd have lived a happy life; for after this moment,
there's nothing serious in human life.
All things are mere trifles. Fame and honor are dead.
The wine of life has been emptied, and only the dregs
are left for this world to brag about.

MALCOLM *and* DONALBAIN *enter.*

DONALBAIN

What's wrong?

MACBETH

You are, and do not know 't.
The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood
Is stopp'd; the very source of it is stopp'd.

MACDUFF

Your royal father's murdered.

MALCOLM

O, by whom?

LENNOX

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd, had done 't:
Their hands and faces were all badged with blood;
So were their daggers, which unwiped we found
Upon their pillows. They stared and were distracted.
No man's life was to be trusted with them.

MACBETH

O, yet I do repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.

MACDUFF

Wherefore did you so?

MACBETH

Who can be wise, amazed, **temp'rate** and furious,
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.
The expedition of my violent love
Outrun the pauser, reason. Here lay Duncan,
His silver skin laced with his golden blood,
And his gashed stabs looked like a breach in nature
For ruin's wasteful entrance: there, the murderers,
Steeped in the colors of their trade, their daggers
Unmannerly breeched with gore. Who could refrain,
That had a heart to love, and in that heart
Courage to make's love known?

temperate: *moderate; calm*

LADY MACBETH

Help me hence, ho!

MACBETH
You are, and do not know it.
The spring, the origin, the fountain of your blood
has been stopped; the very source of it has been stopped.

MACDUFF
Your royal father has been murdered.

MALCOLM
Oh, by whom? *110*

LENNOX
It seems that the men in his chamber did it.
Their hands and faces were marked with blood.
So were their daggers, which we found unwiped
upon their pillows. They stared and seemed bewildered.
No man's life was to be trusted with them. *115*

MACBETH
Oh, and yet I regret that I killed them
in my fury.

MACDUFF
Why did you do so?

MACBETH
Who can be wise and bewildered, calm and furious,
loyal and neutral, all at the same time? No man. *120*
The haste of my intense love
outran my more cautious rationality. Here lay Duncan,
his silver skin streaked with his golden blood;
and his gaping wounds looked like an opening in the world
to let in wasteful destruction. There were the murderers, *125*
drenched in the color of their trade, their daggers
improperly clothed in gore. Who could stop himself
if he had a loving heart—and if he had courage
in that heart to act on his love?

LADY MACBETH (*fainting*)
Help me away, oh! *130*

MACDUFF
Look to the lady.

MALCOLM [*aside to* DONALBAIN]
Why do we hold our tongues,
That most may claim this argument for ours?

DONALBAIN [*aside to* MALCOLM]
What should be spoken here, where our fate,
135 Hid in an auger-hole, may rush and seize us?
Let's away. Our tears are not
yet brewed.

MALCOLM [*aside to* DONALBAIN]
Nor our strong sorrow upon the foot
of motion.

BANQUO
Look to the lady.

[LADY MACBETH *is carried out.*]

And when we have our naked frailties hid,
140 That suffer in exposure, let us meet
And question this most bloody piece of work,
To know it further. Fears and scruples
shake us.
In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
Against the undivulged **pretense** I fight
145 Of treasonous **malice**.

pretense: *excuse; evasion*
malice: *hatred; hostility*

MACDUFF
And so do I.

ALL
So all.

MACBETH
Let's briefly put on manly readiness,
And meet i' th' hall together.

ALL
150 Well contented.

MACDUFF
Help the lady.

MALCOLM (*aside to* DONALBAIN)
Why do we keep quiet,
since we're the ones most concerned with this topic?

DONALBAIN (*aside to* MALCOLM)
What can we say here,
where our doom might rush out *135*
from the smallest hiding place to seize us? Let's go away;
our tears are not ready yet.

MALCOLM *(aside to* DONALBAIN*)*
Nor is our deep sorrow
ready to be expressed in action.

BANQUO
Help the lady.

LADY MACBETH *is carried out.*

And after we have clothed our half-naked bodies,
which now are at risk from the cold, let us meet *140*
and examine this bloody piece of work,
and try to understand it better. We are shaken by fears and doubts.
I place myself in the hands of God; relying on Him,
I shall fight against this treasonous cruelty,
the purpose of which is still unknown. *145*

MACDUFF
And so shall I.

ALL
So shall we all.

MACBETH
Let's quickly put on our armor
and meet together in the hall.

ALL
We all agree. *150*

Exeunt [*all but* MALCOLM *and* DONALBAIN].

MALCOLM

What will you do? Let's not **consort** with them.
To show an unfelt sorrow is an office
Which the false man does easy. I'll to England.

consort: *associate or partner with*

DONALBAIN

To Ireland, I; our separated fortune
155 Shall keep us both the safer. Where we are,
There's daggers in men's smiles. The near in blood,
The nearer bloody.

MALCOLM

This murderous shaft that's shot
Hath not yet lighted, and our safest way
160 Is to avoid the aim. Therefore, to horse!
And let us not be dainty of leave-taking,
But shift away. There's warrant in that theft
Which steals itself when there's no mercy left.

Exeunt.

All but MALCOLM *and* DONALBAIN *exit.*

MALCOLM

What will you do? Let's not meet with them.
To show an unfelt sorrow is a duty
that comes easily to false-faced men. I'll go to England.

DONALBAIN

I'll go to Ireland. By going our separate ways
we'll both be safer. Wherever we are, *155*
men's smiles have daggers in them. The closer the relation,
the more likely we are to be killed.

MALCOLM

This murderous arrow that's been shot
has not yet struck, and it's safest for us
to stay out of its path. So let's mount our horses, *160*
and let's not be fussy about farewells,
but sneak away. It's justifiable theft
to steal oneself away from such a dangerous situation.

They exit.

ACT II, SCENE IV

[*Outside Macbeth's castle.*] *Enter* ROSS *with an* OLD MAN.

OLD MAN

Threescore and ten I can remember well:
Within the volume of which time I have seen
Hours dreadful and things strange, but this sore night
Hath trifled former knowings.

ROSS

5 Ha, good father,
Thou seest the heavens, as troubled with man's act,
Threatens his bloody stage. By th' clock, 'tis day,
And yet dark night strangles the traveling lamp:
Is 't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
10 That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?

OLD MAN

'Tis unnatural,
Even like the deed that's done. On Tuesday last
A falcon,[12] tow'ring in her pride of place,
15 Was by a mousing owl hawked at
and killed.

ROSS

And Duncan's horses—a thing most strange
and certain—
Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,
Turn'd wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,
Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would make
20 War with mankind.

OLD MAN

'Tis said they ate each other.

12 **falcon:** any of various hawks used for hunting in the sport of hawking, or falconry, in which birds were trained to pursue and attack wild fowl or game

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Outside Macbeth's castle. ROSS *and an* OLD MAN *enter.*

OLD MAN

I can remember seventy years well,
and in all that time I have seen
dreadful hours and strange things; but this terrible night
makes all I've seen seem trivial by comparison.

ROSS

Ah, good father, *5*
you see how the heavens, as if troubled by man's deeds,
threaten his world. It's day according to the clock,
and yet the dark night keeps out the sun.
Is it because the night is strong, or because the day is ashamed,
that darkness entombs the face of the earth *10*
when living light should kiss it?

OLD MAN

It's unnatural,
just like the deed that's been done. Last Tuesday
a falcon, while soaring at her greatest height,
was attacked and killed by an owl that normally hunts
only mice. *15*

ROSS

And here's something strange but true: Duncan's beautiful,
swift horses—
the finest of their breed—
went completely wild, broke out of their stalls and ran loose,
defying all attempts to control them; it was as if they wanted
to make war with mankind. *20*

OLD MAN

It's said that they ate each other.

ROSS

They did so, to th' amazement of mine eyes
That look'd upon 't.

Enter MACDUFF.

Here comes the good Macduff.
25 How goes the world, sir, now?

MACDUFF

Why, see you not?

ROSS

Is 't known who did this more than bloody deed?

MACDUFF

Those that Macbeth hath slain.

ROSS

Alas, the day!
30 What good could they pretend?

MACDUFF

They were **suborned**:
Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled, which puts upon them
Suspicion of the deed.

suborned: *bribed; urged secretly to do something illegal*

ROSS

35 'Gainst nature still!
Thriftless ambition, that wilt ravin up
Thine own life's means! Then 'tis most like
The sovereignty will fall upon Macbeth.

MACDUFF

He is already named, and gone to Scone[13]
40 To be invested.

ROSS

Where is Duncan's body?

13 **Scone:** ancient capital, near Perth, where the kings of Scotland were crowned

ROSS
They did, and my eyes were bewildered to see it.

MACDUFF *enters.*

Here comes the good Macduff.
How's the world going now, sir? *25*

MACDUFF
Why, can't you see?

ROSS
Is it known who did this more than bloody deed?

MACDUFF
The men that Macbeth has killed.

ROSS
Sorrowful day!
What could they expect to gain from it? *30*

MACDUFF
They were bribed.
Malcolm and Donalbain, the King's two sons,
have sneaked away and fled; this puts suspicion of the deed
against them.

ROSS
Even more unnatural! *35*
What wasteful ambition, to greedily devour
the source of their own lives! Then it's very likely
that royal power will go to Macbeth.

MACDUFF
He's already been chosen, and has gone to Scone
to be made King. *40*

ROSS
Where is Duncan's body?

MACDUFF

Carried to Colmekill,[14]
The sacred storehouse of his predecessors
And guardian of their bones.

ROSS

45 Will you to Scone?

MACDUFF

No, cousin, I'll to Fife.[15]

ROSS

Well, I will thither.

MACDUFF

Well, may you see things well done there. Adieu,
Lest our old robes sit easier than our new!

ROSS

50 Farewell, father.

OLD MAN

God's benison go with you, and with those
That would make good of bad and friends of foes.

Exeunt omnes.

The parallel text of Macbeth *ends here. In Acts III and IV, brief summaries are provided at the beginning of each scene to help you comprehend the text.*

14 **Colmekill:** island cell of St. Columba, now known as Iona, where Scottish kings were buried

15 **Fife:** in eastern Scotland; Macduff chooses to go to his own castle rather than to Scone and the coronation.

MACDUFF

It's been taken to Colmekill,
the sacred tomb of past kings,
and the protector of their bones.

ROSS

Will you go to Scone? *45*

MACDUFF

No, cousin, I'll go to Fife.

ROSS

Well, I'll go there.

MACDUFF

Well, I hope you'll see things well done there—
or else we'll long for the days of Duncan's rule! Good-bye!

ROSS

Good-bye, father. *50*

OLD MAN

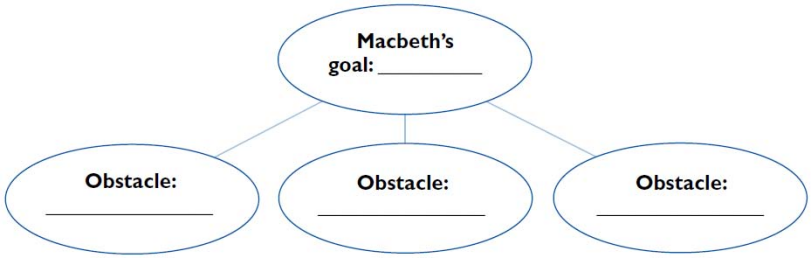
May God's blessing go with you—and with all others
that seek to make good out of bad and friends out of foes.

They exit.

After You Read *Macbeth: Act II*

Literary Lens: Conflict

A conflict involves a character encountering one or more obstacles that stand in the way of his or her attaining a specific goal. Make a web diagram like the one below. In the top circle, identify Macbeth's goal. In the bottom circles, identify obstacles Macbeth has encountered so far in the play.



Explore Context: Scottish Castles

Although William Shakespeare was fascinated by history, he was, first and foremost, a storyteller. As a result, he often played around with historical facts, transposing actual events and people from one epoch to another—the better to suit his plot. His plays were often inaccurate as to the day-to-day living conditions. For example, the castles in eleventh-century Scotland, where *Macbeth* is set, were in reality nothing more than rough forts built on hilltops. For *Macbeth*, Shakespeare visualized a castle built much later, in the Middle Ages, whose most important part was the keep, a tower where the noble family lived. Find out more about medieval Scottish castles on the Internet. Then create a labeled drawing of a typical example.

Apply and Create: Comic Relief

The Porter's speech and his ensuing dialogue with Macduff are some of the finest examples of comic relief in all of Shakespeare's canon. Working with a partner, create your own interpretation of this speech. You can rewrite the scene and update the language, or perform it using Shakespeare's original dialogue. Hone your comic timing and delivery to create as polished and funny a rendition as possible. Give constructive feedback on each other's performance before performing for the class.

Read Critically

Reread the following excerpt from Act II, Scene II, and answer the questions that follow.

MACBETH

But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
40 I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

LADY MACBETH

These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make us mad.

MACBETH

Methought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep"— the innocent sleep,
Sleep that knits up the ravell'd sleave of care,
The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath,
Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course,
Chief nourisher in life's feast—

LADY MACBETH

What do you mean?

MACBETH

Still it cried "Sleep no more!" to all the house:
"Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor
Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more."

LADY MACBETH

Who was it that thus cried? Why, worthy thane,
You do unbend your noble strength, to think
So brainsickly of things. Go get some water,
And wash this filthy witness from your hand.
Why did you bring these daggers from the place?
They must lie there. Go carry them, and smear
The sleepy grooms with blood.

MACBETH

I'll go no more:
I am afraid to think what I have done;
Look on 't again I dare not.

LADY MACBETH

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers. The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures. . . .

1. Macbeth seems very upset over the fact that he cannot say "Amen." What do you think this inability signals to him?
2. Why do you think Macbeth is so obsessed by the idea of sleep?
3. Macbeth's fearful musings in this passage aside, which character do you think is controlling the Macbeths' destiny—Macbeth or his wife? Give examples from the play thus far that support your opinion.

Before You Read *Macbeth: Act III*

Darkness, death, and evil pervade *Macbeth*. Perhaps because of these dark themes, a longtime theatrical superstition holds that one must never utter the name "Macbeth," especially inside a theatre. To avoid saying the dreaded name, theatre people refer to *Macbeth* as "The Scottish Play." The origins of this superstition are unclear. Over the years, many productions have been plagued with accidents—often fatal ones. It's also true that the play features quite a few stage combat scenes that increase the possibility of injury. No matter what the origin, many theatre professionals take the superstition very seriously. If someone inadvertently says "Macbeth" while offstage inside the theatre, the most popular course of action is to leave the theatre, turn around three times, spit over the left shoulder, and swear before going back inside.

Literary Lens

Dramatic Structure Dramatic structure is similar to plot: the *exposition* introduces the play's characters and basic situation. It sets up the *inciting incident,* which sends the story on its course. During the *rising action*, complications are piled on until the story reaches a *climax*, or point of no return for the main character. After the climax, a course of *falling action* leads to a *resolution* of the central problem.

In *Macbeth*, the exposition in Act I reveals that Macbeth is fighting an opposing army, a battle from which he emerges the heroic victor. The inciting incident is Macbeth's Act I encounter with the three witches. This event sets Macbeth on his course to become king of Scotland. The rising action takes Macbeth through Act II as he achieves his objective by murdering King Duncan. As you read Act III, see if you can identify the climax of the play.

Shakespeare's Language

Shakespeare uses sleep as a metaphor in many of his plays. Whether comedies or tragedies, his works are full of references to sleeping, dreaming, and having nightmares. You may have noticed the frequent references to sleep and insomnia in the first two acts of *Macbeth*. For example, after Macbeth has murdered Duncan in Act II, he tells his wife: "Methought I heard a voice cry 'Sleep no more! Macbeth does murder sleep.' "

Sometimes Shakespeare uses the metaphor of sleep to refer to simple peace of mind and well-being; at other times it is meant to portend or describe death. During the play, Macbeth comes to see sleep as something he will never again attain. His guilt and fear rob him of healthful rest, peace of mind, and confidence. In Act III, he claims that he will tear the world apart rather than "eat our meal in fear and sleep in the affliction of these terrible dreams that shake us nightly." He even feels envy for poor dead King Duncan who, "after life's fitful fever," sleeps well. Throughout the play, note and analyze the characters' references to sleep.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. *Macbeth* is part action-adventure and part psychological drama. Think of examples of films you have seen from these genres. Compare and contrast these with *Macbeth*.
2. Have you ever slept poorly? What was the cause of your insomnia? What were its effects on your daily interactions with others?
3. From what you know about the Macbeths so far, make a list of their character traits. Based on these traits, predict how the Macbeths will act now that they are king and queen of Scotland.

Orson Welles as Macbeth (1948)

ACT III, SCENE I

Macbeth is troubled. He rightly guesses that Banquo suspects him of the murder. Moreover, the Witches predicted that Banquo's descendants would become kings. So Macbeth decides to do away with both Banquo and his son, Fleance. Macbeth persuades some men to meet Banquo and Fleance on a road and murwthem both.

[*Forres. The palace.*] *Enter BANQUO.*

BANQUO

Thou hast it now—King, Cawdor, Glamis, all,
As the Weïrd Women promised, and, I fear,
Thou play'dst most foully for 't. Yet it was said
It should not stand in thy **posterity**,
But that myself should be the root and father
Of many kings. If there come truth from them—
As upon thee, Macbeth, their speeches shine—
Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well
And set me up in hope? But hush, no more!

posterity: *future generations*

Sennet sounded. Enter MACBETH, *as King,* LADY [MACBETH], LENNOX, ROSS, LORDS, *and* ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH

Here's our chief guest.

LADY MACBETH

If he had been forgotten,
It had been as a gap in our great feast,
And all-thing unbecoming.

MACBETH

Tonight we hold a solemn supper, sir,
And I'll request your presence.

BANQUO

Let your Highness
Command upon me, to the which my duties
Are with a most **indissoluble** tie
Forever knit.

indissoluble: *unbreakable*

MACBETH

Ride you this afternoon?

BANQUO

Ay, my good lord.

MACBETH

We should have else desired your good advice,

Which still hath been both grave and prosperous,
In this day's council; but we'll take tomorrow.
Is 't far you ride?

BANQUO

As far, my lord, as will fill up the time
'Twixt this and supper. Go not my horse the better,
I must become a borrower of the night
For a dark hour or twain.

MACBETH

Fail not our feast.

BANQUO

My lord, I will not.

MACBETH

We hear our bloody cousins are bestowed
In England and in Ireland, not confessing
Their cruel parricide, filling their hearers
With strange invention. But of that tomorrow,
When therewithal we shall have cause of state
Craving us jointly. Hie you to horse. Adieu,
Till you return at night. Goes Fleance with you?

BANQUO

Ay, my good lord. Our time does call upon's.

MACBETH

I wish your horses swift and sure of foot;
And so I do commend you to their backs.
Farewell.

Exit BANQUO.

Let every man be master of this time
Till seven at night. To make society
The sweeter welcome, we will keep ourself
Till supper-time alone. While then, God be with you!

Exeunt LORDS [*and all but* MACBETH *and a* SERVANT].

Sirrah, a word with you: attend those men
Our pleasure?

SERVANT

They are, my lord, without the palace gate.

MACBETH

Bring them before us.

Exit SERVANT.

To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be feared. 'Tis much he dares;
And, to that **dauntless** temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; and under him,
My genius is **rebuked**, as it is said
Mark Antony's was by Caesar. He chid the Sisters
When first they put the name of King upon me,
And bade them speak to him. Then prophet-like
They hailed him father to a line of kings.
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
And put a barren scepter[1] in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If 't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered;
Put rancors in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seed of Banquo kings!
Rather than so, come fate into the list.
And champion me to th' utterance![2]—Who's there!

Enter SERVANT *and two* MURDERERS.

[*to* SERVANT] Now go to the door, and stay there till we call.

Exit SERVANT.

dauntless: *fearless*

rebuked: *reprimanded*

1 **scepter:** staff or baton carried by a sovereign that signals royal authority

2 **champion . . . utterance:** fight to the utmost or extremity; *utterance* derives from the French "a l'outrance," a chivalric term meaning "combat to the death."

Was it not yesterday we spoke together?

FIRST MURDERER

It was, so please your Highness.

MACBETH

Well then, now
Have you considered of my speeches? Know
That it was he in the times past, which held you
So under fortune, which you thought had been
Our innocent self. This I made good to you
In our last conference, passed in probation with you,
How you were borne in hand, how cross'd, the instruments,
Who wrought with them, and all things else that might
To half a soul and to a notion crazed
Say "Thus did Banquo."

FIRST MURDERER

You made it known to us.

MACBETH

I did so, and went further, which is now
Our point of second meeting. Do you find
Your patience so predominant in your nature
That you can let this go? Are you so gospeled,
To pray for this good man and for his issue,
Whose heavy hand hath bowed you to the grave
And beggared yours forever?

FIRST MURDERER

We are men, my liege.

MACBETH

Ay, in the catalogue ye go for men,
As hounds and greyhounds, mongrels, spaniels, curs,
Shoughs, water-rugs and demi-wolves are clept
All by the name of dogs. The valued file
Distinguishes the swift, the slow, the subtle,
The housekeeper, the hunter, every one
According to the gift which bounteous nature

Hath in him closed, whereby he does receive
Particular addition, from the bill
That writes them all alike: and so of men.
Now, if you have a station in the file,
110 Not i' th' worst rank of manhood, say 't,
And I will put that business in your bosoms,
Whose execution takes your enemy off,
Grapples you to the heart and love of us,
Who wear our health but sickly in his life,
115 Which in his death were perfect.

SECOND MURDERER

I am one, my liege,
Whom the vile blows and buffets of the world
Have so **incensed** that I am reckless what
I do to spite the world.

incensed: *infuriated*

FIRST MURDERER

120 And I another
So weary with disasters, tugged with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on 't.

MACBETH

Both of you
125 Know Banquo was your enemy.

BOTH MURDERERS

True, my lord.

MACBETH

So is he mine, and in such bloody distance
That every minute of his being thrusts
Against my near'st of life. And though I could
130 With barefaced power sweep him from my sight
And bid my will avouch it, yet I must not,
For certain friends that are both his and mine,
Whose loves I may not drop, but wail his fall
Who I myself struck down. And thence it is,
135 That I to your assistance do make love,
Masking the business from the common eye

For sundry weighty reasons.

SECOND MURDERER

We shall, my lord,
Perform what you command us.

FIRST MURDERER

140 Though our lives—

MACBETH

Your spirits shine through you. Within this hour at most
I will advise you where to plant yourselves,
Acquaint you with the perfect spy o' th' time,[3]
The moment on 't; for 't must be done tonight,
145 And something from the palace; always thought
That I require a clearness. And with him—
To leave no rubs nor botches in the work—
Fleance his son, that keeps him company,
Whose absence is no less material to me
150 Than is his father's, must embrace the fate
Of that dark hour. Resolve yourselves apart:
I'll come to you anon.

MURDERERS

We are resolved, my lord.

MACBETH

I'll call upon you straight. Abide within.

Exeunt MURDERERS.

155 It is concluded: Banquo, thy soul's flight,
If it find heaven, must find it out tonight.

Exit.

3 **perfect . . . time:** the very moment when you should do it

ACT III, SCENE II

Lady Macbeth encourages her husband to move on and begin enjoying his reign. Macbeth shares his concerns about Banquo and warns his wife that some other horrible deed is going to happen before the end of the night.

[*The palace.*] *Enter* LADY MACBETH *and a* SERVANT.

LADY MACBETH
Is Banquo gone from court?

SERVANT
Ay, madam, but returns again tonight.

LADY MACBETH
Say to the King, I would attend his leisure
For a few words.

SERVANT
5 Madam, I will.

Exit.

LADY MACBETH
Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content:
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy.

Enter MACBETH.

10 How now, my lord! Why do you keep alone,
Of sorriest fancies your companions making,
Using those thoughts which should indeed have died
With them they think on? Things without all remedy
Should be without regard: what's done is done.

MACBETH
15 We have scorched the snake, not kill'd it:
She'll close and be herself, whilst our poor malice
Remains in danger of her former tooth.

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly. Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well.
Treason has done his worst. Nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further.

LADY MACBETH

Come on.
Gentle my lord, sleek o'er your rugged looks;
Be bright and jovial among your guests tonight.

MACBETH

So shall I, love; and so, I pray, be you.
Let your remembrance apply to Banquo;
Present him eminence, both with eye and tongue:
Unsafe the while, that we must lave
Our honours in these flattering streams,
And make our faces vizards to our hearts,
Disguising what they are.

LADY MACBETH

You must leave this.

MACBETH

O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance, lives.

LADY MACBETH

But in them nature's copy's not eterne.

MACBETH

There's comfort yet; they are **assailable**.
Then be thou **jocund**. Ere the bat hath flown

assailable: *vulnerable; open to attack*

jocund: *cheerful*

His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-borne[4] beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.

LADY MACBETH

What's to be done?

MACBETH

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed. Come, seeling[5] night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day,
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond[6]
Which keeps me pale! Light thickens, and the crow
Makes wing to th' rooky wood.[7]
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse,
While night's black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marvel'st at my words, but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.
So, prithee, go with me.

Exeunt.

4 **shard-borne:** carried aloft on scaly wings that resemble shards of pottery

5 **seeling:** In falconry, to *seel* is to sew up the eyelids of a hawk to help in taming it.

6 **Cancel . . . bond:** cancel the obligations of loyalty and love that a king has to his subjects; more generally, the obligations that human beings have to one another

7 **rooky wood:** a wood full of rooks, blackbirds about the size of crows

ACT III, SCENE III

The murderers kill Banquo, but Fleance escapes.

[*Near the palace.*] *Enter three* MURDERERS.

FIRST MURDERER
But who did bid thee join with us?

THIRD MURDERER
Macbeth.

SECOND MURDERER
He needs not our mistrust, since he delivers
Our offices and what we have to do
To the direction just.

FIRST MURDERER
Then stand with us.
The west yet glimmers with some streaks of day.
Now spurs the lated traveler apace
To gain the timely inn, and near approaches
The subject of our watch.

THIRD MURDERER
Hark! I hear horses.

BANQUO [*within*]
Give us a light there, ho!

SECOND MURDERER
Then 'tis he. The rest
That are within the note of expectation
Already are i' th' court.

FIRST MURDERER
His horses go about.

THIRD MURDERER
Almost a mile; but he does usually—
So all men do—from hence to th' palace gate
Make it their walk.

SECOND MURDERER

20 A light, a light!

Enter BANQUO *and* FLEANCE, *with a torch.*

THIRD MURDERER

'Tis he.

FIRST MURDERER

Stand to 't.

BANQUO

It will be rain tonight.

FIRST MURDERER

Let it come down.

[*They set upon* BANQUO.]

BANQUO

25 O, treachery! Fly, good Fleance, fly, fly, fly!

[*Exit* FLEANCE.]

Thou mayst revenge. [*to* MURDERER] O slave!

[*Dies.*]

THIRD MURDERER

Who did strike out the light?

FIRST MURDERER

Was 't not the way?

THIRD MURDERER

There's but one down; the son is fled.

SECOND MURDERER

30 We have lost best half of our affair.

FIRST MURDERER

Well, let's away, and say how much is done.

Exeunt.

ACT III, SCENE IV

Macbeth receives word at the banquet that Banquo is dead and Fleance has fled. When Macbeth returns from receiving the news, the ghost of Banquo is sitting in his chair. Lady Macbeth tries to cover for her husband's ravings and, after the guests leave, encourages him to sleep before he does anything else.

[*The castle.*] *Banquet prepared. Enter* MACBETH, LADY [MACBETH], ROSS, LENNOX, LORDS, *and* ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH

You know your own degrees; sit down.
At first and last, the hearty welcome.

LORDS

Thanks to your majesty.

MACBETH

Ourself will mingle with society
And play the humble host.
Our hostess keeps her state, but in best time
We will require her welcome.

LADY MACBETH

Pronounce it for me, sir, to all our friends,
For my heart speaks they are welcome.

Enter FIRST MURDERER.

MACBETH

See, they encounter thee with their hearts' thanks.
Both sides are even. Here I'll sit i' th' midst.
Be large in mirth; anon we'll drink a measure
The table round. [*Goes to* FIRST MURDERER.] There's blood upon thy face.

FIRST MURDERER

'Tis Banquo's then.

MACBETH
'Tis better thee without than he within.
Is he dispatch'd?

FIRST MURDERER
My lord, his throat is cut; that I did for him.

MACBETH
Thou art the best o' th' cutthroats.
20 Yet he's good that did the like for Fleance;
If thou didst it, thou art the nonpareil.

FIRST MURDERER
Most royal sir, Fleance is 'scaped.

MACBETH [*aside*]
Then comes my fit again. I had else been perfect,
Whole as the marble, founded as the rock,
25 As broad and general as the casing air.
But now I am cabin'd, cribb'd, confined, bound in
To saucy doubts and fears.—But Banquo's safe?

FIRST MURDERER
Ay, my good lord: safe in a ditch he bides,
With twenty trenched gashes on his head,
30 The least a death to nature.

MACBETH
Thanks for that.
[*aside*] There the grown serpent lies; the worm that's fled
Hath nature that in time will venom breed,
No teeth for th' present.—Get thee gone. Tomorrow
35 We'll hear ourselves again.

Exit FIRST MURDERER.

LADY MACBETH
My royal lord,
You do not give the cheer. The feast is sold
That is not often vouch'd, while 'tis a-making,
'Tis given with welcome. To feed were best at home;

From thence, the sauce to meat is ceremony;
Meeting were bare without it.

Enter the GHOST OF BANQUO, *and sits in Macbeth's place.*

MACBETH

Sweet remembrancer!
Now, good digestion wait on appetite,
And health on both!

LENNOX

May 't please your Highness sit.

MACBETH

Here had we now our country's honour roofed,
Were the graced person of our Banquo present,
Who may I rather challenge for unkindness
Than pity for mischance!

ROSS

His absence, sir,
Lays blame upon his promise. Please 't your Highness
To grace us with your royal company.

MACBETH

The table's full.

LENNOX

Here is a place reserved, sir.

MACBETH

Where?

LENNOX

Here, my good lord. What is 't that moves your Highness?

MACBETH

Which of you have done this?

LORDS

What, my good lord?

MACBETH [*to the* GHOST]
Thou canst not say I did it. Never shake
60 Thy gory locks at me.

ROSS
Gentlemen, rise: his Highness is not well.

LADY MACBETH
Sit, worthy friends. My lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth. Pray you, keep seat.
The fit is momentary; upon a thought
65 He will again be well. If much you note him,
You shall offend him and extend his passion.
Feed, and regard him not.—Are you a man?

MACBETH
Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appall the devil.

LADY MACBETH
70 O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear.
This is the air-drawn dagger which, you said,
Led you to Duncan. O, these flaws and starts,
Impostors to true fear, would well become
75 A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authorized by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool.

MACBETH
Prithee, see there! Behold! Look! [*to the* GHOST] Lo!
80 How say you?
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.
If charnel-houses[8] and our graves must send
Those that we bury back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites.

Exit GHOST OF BANQUO.

8 **charnel-houses:** houses or vaults, usually associated with a church, where dead bodies or the bones of the dead were deposited or piled up; sometimes, because of lack of space, bones were taken from the graveyard and put in a charnel-house.

LADY MACBETH

85 What, quite unmanned in folly?

MACBETH

If I stand here, I saw him.

LADY MACBETH

Fie, for shame!

MACBETH

Blood hath been shed ere now, i' th' olden time,
Ere human statute **purged** the gentle weal;
90 Ay, and since too, murders have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear. The time has been
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now they rise again,
With twenty mortal murders on their crowns,
95 And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murder is.

purged: *cleansed*

LADY MACBETH

My worthy lord,
Your noble friends do lack you.

MACBETH

I do forget.
100 Do not muse at me, my most worthy friends,
I have a strange **infirmity**, which is nothing
To those that know me. Come, love and health to all.
Then I'll sit down.—Give me some wine; fill full.

infirmity: *illness*

Enter GHOST OF BANQUO.

I drink to the general joy o' th' whole table,
105 And to our dear friend Banquo, whom we miss.
Would he were here! To all and him we thirst,
And all to all.

LORDS

Our duties, and the pledge.

MACBETH

Avaunt! And quit my sight! Let the earth hide thee!

110 Thy bones are marrowless, thy blood is cold;
Thou hast no speculation in those eyes
Which thou dost glare with!

LADY MACBETH

Think of this, good peers,
But as a thing of custom, 'tis no other.
115 Only it spoils the pleasure of the time.

MACBETH

What man dare, I dare.
Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear,
The armed rhinoceros, or the Hyrcan[9] tiger;
Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves
120 Shall never tremble. Or be alive again,
And dare me to the desert with thy sword.
If trembling I inhabit then, protest me
The baby of a girl. Hence, horrible shadow!
Unreal mock'ry, hence!

Exit GHOST OF BANQUO.

125 Why, so: being gone,
I am a man again.—Pray you, sit still.

LADY MACBETH

mirth: *happiness and amusement, usually expressed with laughter*

You have displaced the **mirth**, broke the good meeting,
With most admired disorder.

MACBETH

Can such things be,
130 And overcome us like a summer's cloud,
Without our special wonder? You make me strange
Even to the **disposition** that I owe,
When now I think you can behold such sights,
And keep the natural ruby of your cheeks,
135 When mine is blanched with fear.

disposition: *person's personality or character*

9 **Hyrcan:** from Hyrcania, an ancient region south of the Caspian Sea and reported by Pliny to be a place where tigers were bred

ROSS

What sights, my lord?

LADY MACBETH

I pray you, speak not; he grows worse and worse;
Question enrages him. At once, good night:
Stand not upon the order of your going,
140 But go at once.

LENNOX

Good night, and better health
Attend his Majesty!

LADY MACBETH

A kind good night to all!

[*Exeunt* LORDS.]

MACBETH

It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood.
145 Stones have been known to move and trees to speak;
Augurs and understood relations have
By maggot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth
The secret'st man of blood. What is the night?

LADY MACBETH

Almost at odds with morning, which is which.

MACBETH

150 How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person
At our great bidding?

LADY MACBETH

Did you send to him, sir?

MACBETH

I hear it by the way; but I will send.
There's not a one of them but in his house
155 I keep a servant fee'd. I will tomorrow,
And betimes I will, to the Weïrd Sisters:
More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know
By the worst means, the worst. For mine own good

All causes shall give way. I am in blood
160 Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
Strange things I have in head, that will to hand,
Which must be acted ere they may be scanned.

LADY MACBETH
You lack the season of all natures, sleep.

MACBETH
165 Come, we'll to sleep. My strange and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard use.
We are yet but young in deed.

Exeunt.

ACT III, SCENE V

Hecate, the witches' teacher and goddess of witchcraft, is angry with the three witches for not including her in their dealings with Macbeth. Hecate says that she will create a disastrous spell for Macbeth.

[*A Witches' haunt.*] *Thunder. Enter the three* WITCHES, *meeting* HECATE.

FIRST WITCH

Why, how now, Hecate! You look angerly.

HECATE

Have I not reason, beldams as you are,
Saucy and overbold? How did you dare
To trade and traffic with Macbeth
5 In riddles and affairs of death;
And I, the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never call'd to bear my part,
Or show the glory of our art?
10 And, which is worse, all you have done
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you.
But make amends now: get you gone,
15 And at the pit of Acheron[10]
Meet me i' th' morning. Thither he
Will come to know his destiny.
Your vessels and your spells provide,
Your charms and everything beside.
20 I am for th' air; this night I'll spend
Unto a dismal and a fatal end.
Great business must be wrought ere noon.
Upon the corner of the moon
There hangs a vap'rous drop profound;

10 **pit of Acheron:** may refer to the Scottish cavern where the witches assemble in Act IV, Scene I; Acheron is the name of a river in Hades.

I'll catch it ere it come to ground.
And that distill'd by magic sleights
Shall raise such artificial sprites
As by the strength of their illusion
Shall draw him on to his confusion.
He shall spurn fate, scorn death, and bear
He hopes 'bove wisdom, grace, and fear.
And you all know, security
Is mortals' chiefest enemy.

Music and song.

Hark! I am called; my little spirit, see,
Sits in a foggy cloud and stays for me.

Exit.

FIRST WITCH

Come, let's make haste. She'll soon be back again.

Exeunt.

ACT III, SCENE VI

Lennox and another lord are beginning to suspect that Macbeth is not as innocent as he claims to be. The Lord explains that Macduff has gone to England, where Malcolm has sought refuge, to ask the king of England and Siward, the earl of Northumberland, to attack and overthrow Macbeth.

[*The palace.*] *Enter* LENNOX *and another* LORD.

LENNOX

My former speeches have but hit your thoughts,
Which can interpret farther. Only I say
Things have been strangely borne. The gracious Duncan
Was pitied of Macbeth; marry, he was dead.
5 And the right-valiant Banquo walked too late;
Whom, you may say, if 't please you, Fleance killed,
For Fleance fled. Men must not walk too late.
Who cannot want the thought, how monstrous
It was for Malcolm and for Donalbain
10 To kill their gracious father? Damned fact!
How it did grieve Macbeth! Did he not straight
In pious rage, the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep?
Was not that nobly done? Ay, and wisely too;
15 For 'twould have angered any heart alive
To hear the men deny 't. So that I say
He has borne all things well. And I do think
That had he Duncan's sons under his key—
As, an 't please heaven, he shall not—they should find
20 What 'twere to kill a father. So should Fleance.
But, peace! For from broad words and 'cause he failed
His presence at the tyrant's feast, I hear,
Macduff lives in disgrace. Sir, can you tell
Where he bestows himself?

malevolence: *ill will*

LORD

The son of Duncan,
From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
Lives in the English court and is received
Of the most pious Edward[11] with such grace
That the **malevolence** of fortune nothing
Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy King upon his aid
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward,[12]
That, by the help of these, with Him above
To ratify the work, we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful homage and receive free honours:
All which we pine for now. And this report
Hath so exasperate the king that he
Prepares for some attempt of war.

LENNOX

Sent he to Macduff?

LORD

He did, and with an absolute "Sir, not I,"
The cloudy messenger turns me his back
And hums, as who should say "You'll rue the time
That clogs me with this answer."

LENNOX

And that well might
Advise him to a caution, t' hold what distance
His wisdom can provide. Some holy angel
Fly to the court of England and unfold
His message ere he come, that a swift blessing
May soon return to this our suffering country
Under a hand accursed!

LORD

I'll send my prayers with him.

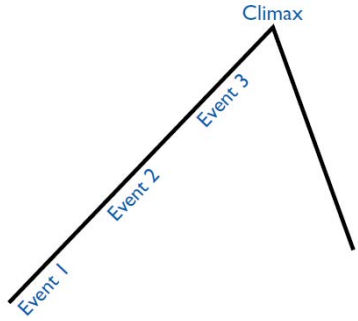
Exeunt.

11 **Edward:** Edward the Confessor, king of England from 1042–1066
12 **Siward:** earl of Northumberland

After You Read *Macbeth: Act III*

Literary Lens: Dramatic Structure

The rising action is where most of the play's plot complications take place. For a character struggling to achieve a goal, the rising action is where most of the obstacles will be thrown into his or her path. Create a diagram like the one below in which you chart the events of Act III's rising action, culminating with the climax, the point at which there is no going back for Macbeth.



Explore Context: Who Was Banquo?

According to Shakespeare's source for *Macbeth*, Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Banquo actually took part in the killing of Duncan. So why did Shakespeare go out of his way to portray Banquo as innocent? Rumor had it that James I, the royal patron of Shakespeare's theatre company, was not only Duncan's descendant but Banquo's as well. Shakespeare had no desire to portray either of James's ancestors (real or imagined) as murderers. In reality, Banquo may not have existed at all. Many historians believe Banquo is a mythical figure whose story was told so often he became "real."

Apply and Create: Banquet Dialogue

The banquet in Act III, Scene IV, in which Macbeth sees an apparition of the murdered Banquo, is one of the most intense scenes in the play. Create a one-page dialogue between two characters who attended this banquet. You might choose two anonymous guests, a pair of servants, or Lennox and Ross. Are your characters allies or potential enemies of Macbeth? What do they make of his outburst? What, if anything, do they plan to do about it? Create language and wording appropriate to the world of the play.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from Act III, Scene VI, and answer the questions that follow.

LORD

The son of Duncan,
From whom this tyrant holds the due of birth,
Lives in the English court and is received
Of the most pious Edward with such grace
That the malevolence of fortune nothing
Takes from his high respect. Thither Macduff
Is gone to pray the holy King upon his aid
To wake Northumberland and warlike Siward,
That, by the help of these, with Him above
To ratify the work, we may again
Give to our tables meat, sleep to our nights,
Free from our feasts and banquets bloody knives,
Do faithful homage and receive free honours:
All which we pine for now. And this report
Hath so exasperate the king that he
Prepares for some attempt of war.

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Sent he to Macduff?

LORD

He did, and with an absolute "Sir, not I,"
The cloudy messenger turns me his back
And hums, as who should say "You'll rue the time
That clogs me with this answer."

LENNOX

And that well might
Advise him to a caution, t' hold what distance
His wisdom can provide. Some holy angel
Fly to the court of England and unfold
His message ere he come, that a swift blessing
May soon return to this our suffering country
Under a hand accursed!

1. From this exchange, what inferences can you draw about Scottish life under Macbeth's rule?
2. In the banquet scene, Macbeth insists he can see the ghost of Banquo, though no one else can. What conclusions do you draw about Macbeth's state of mind by the end of Act III?
3. What do you predict might happen in Act IV? Support your prediction with details from this excerpt.

Before You Read *Macbeth: Act IV*

Many scholars believe that Shakespeare may have had some help writing certain key scenes in *Macbeth*. Specifically, there is a widely held theory that the witches' scenes, including the ones you will read in Act IV, were most likely penned by Thomas Middleton, one of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The witches' scenes are very similar to scenes in Middleton's play *The Witch*. Some lines from that play are even quoted directly in Shakespeare's. Also, the language and the writing of the witches' scenes differ greatly from all the other scenes in the play. It seems uncharacteristic of Shakespeare's other works that he would switch styles so dramatically within a single play.

Literary Lens

Foreshadowing Authors use foreshadowing to provide subtle hints as to what might happen later in the plot. The witches' prophesy in Act I foreshadows some of the events that come to pass in Acts II and III. The witches return in Act IV and foreshadow more events in the play. See if you can identify them as you read.

Rhyming Couplets In poetry, a rhyming couplet is a pair of lines that rhyme and have the same meter or rhythm structure. Act IV opens with a scene in which the witches conjure up even greater trouble for Macbeth by chanting a demonic curse over their bubbling cauldron. An eerie, hypnotic effect is created as the witches cackle out their incantation in rhyming couplets with the immortal refrain spoken in unison:

> "Double, double toil and trouble;
> Fire burn and cauldron bubble."

Shakespeare's Language

Like most dramatists of his time, Shakespeare frequently used blank verse in his plays. In blank verse, the text plays out in carefully measured lines that do not rhyme. You can see that the two lines below are approximately equal in length. They are, in fact, unrhymed verse in which each line contains ten or eleven syllables. The ten syllables can be divided into five sections, called *iambs*, or feet. Each iamb contains one stressed and one unstressed syllable: The lines below are divided into iambs using the / and show stressed (´) and unstressed (˘) syllables.

> Thĕn livé, /Mačdúff. /whăt neéd/ I ˇfear´/ŏf théé?
> Bŭt yét/ I'll máke/ assŭr/ănce dou/blĕ súre . . .

The length of a line of verse is measured by counting the stresses. This length is called the poem's *meter*, and when there are five stresses and the rhythm follows an unstressed/stressed pattern, it is called *iambic pentameter*. Shakespeare wrote much of his work in iambic pentameter.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Macbeth has done a number of terrible things since he first met the witches. Predict what the future holds for Macbeth.
2. Why might a person's own actions make him or her unable to trust others?
3. What examples of foreshadowing have you come across in films or television shows you have seen? What purpose does foreshadowing serve in those stories?

ACT IV, SCENE I

When Macbeth goes to consult the Witches, they make three predictions: no man born of a woman can kill him; he will never be defeated until Birnam Wood moves toward his castle; and Banquo's offspring will someday rule Scotland. The scene ends with Macbeth deciding to attack Macduff's castle and kill his wife and family.

[A Witches' haunt.] Thunder. Enter the three WITCHES.

FIRST WITCH

Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed.

SECOND WITCH

Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.

THIRD WITCH

Harpier[1] cries, "'tis time, 'tis time!"

FIRST WITCH

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poisoned entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Sweltered venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' th' charmed pot.

ALL

Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

SECOND WITCH

Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake;
Eye of newt and toe of frog,
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,

1 **Harpier:** a demon attending the Third Witch having the form of a harpy, a monster with the head of a woman and a bird's wings and claws

Adder's fork and blindworm's[2] sting,
Lizard's leg and howlet's wing,
For a charm of pow'rful trouble,
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.

ALL

20 Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

THIRD WITCH

Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf,
Witches' mummy, maw and gulf
Of the ravined salt-sea shark,
25 Root of hemlock digged i' th' dark,
Liver of blaspheming Jew,
Gall of goat, and slips of yew
Silvered in the moon's eclipse,
Nose of Turk and Tartar's lips,
30 Finger of birth-strangled babe
Ditch-delivered by a drab,
Make the gruel thick and slab.
Add thereto a tiger's chaudron,
For th' ingredients of our cauldron.

ALL

35 Double, double toil and trouble;
Fire burn and cauldron bubble.

SECOND WITCH

Cool it with a baboon's blood,
Then the charm is firm and good.

Enter HECATE *to the other three* WITCHES.

HECATE

O, well done! I commend your pains;
40 And every one shall share i' th' gains.
And now about the cauldron sing,
Like elves and fairies in a ring,
Enchanting all that you put in.

2 **blindworm:** a harmless kind of legless lizard thought poisonous by Elizabethans

Music and a song: "Black spirits," etc.[3]

[*Exit* HECATE.]

SECOND WITCH

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes:
[*knocking*] Open, locks,
Whoever knocks!

Enter MACBETH.

MACBETH

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
What is 't you do?

ALL

A deed without a name.

MACBETH

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yeasty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germens[4] tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you.

FIRST WITCH

Speak.

SECOND WITCH

Demand.

---

3 ***"Black spirits," etc.:*** Text of a song beginning in this way appears in Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, but there it is sung by the son of Hecate. This song is irrelevant to Shakespeare's play and may have been added for entertainment.

4 **nature's germens:** the accumulated store of the elemental seeds or germs from which everything in the future is to spring

THIRD WITCH

65 We'll answer.

FIRST WITCH

Say, if th' rather hear it from our mouths,
Or from our masters?

MACBETH

Call 'em, let me see 'em.

FIRST WITCH

Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten
70 Her nine farrow; grease that's sweaten
From the murderer's gibbet throw
Into the flame.

ALL

Come, high or low,
Thyself and office deftly show!

Thunder. FIRST APPARITION*: An Armed Head.*

MACBETH

75 Tell me, thou unknown power—

FIRST WITCH

He knows thy thought:
Hear his speech, but say thou nought.

FIRST APPARITION

Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth! Beware Macduff!
Beware the Thane of Fife. Dismiss me. Enough.

He descends.

MACBETH

80 Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution thanks:
Thou hast harped my fear aright. But one word more—

FIRST WITCH

He will not be commanded. Here's another,
More potent than the first.

Thunder. SECOND APPARITION: *A Bloody Child.*

SECOND APPARITION

Macbeth! Macbeth! Macbeth!

MACBETH

85 Had I three ears, I'd hear thee.

SECOND APPARITION

Be bloody, bold, and resolute! Laugh to scorn
The power of man, for none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth.

Descends.

MACBETH

Then live, Macduff: what need I fear of thee?
90 But yet I'll make assurance double sure,
And take a bond of fate. Thou shalt not live,
That I may tell pale-hearted fear it lies,
And sleep in spite of thunder.

Thunder. THIRD APPARITION: *A Child Crowned, with a tree in his hand.*

What is this
95 That rises like the issue of a king,
And wears upon his baby-brow the round
And top of sovereignty?

ALL

Listen, but speak not to 't.

THIRD APPARITION

Be lion-mettled, proud, and take no care
100 Who chafes, who frets, or where conspirers are.
Macbeth shall never vanquish'd be until
Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill
Shall come against him.

Descends.

MACBETH

That will never be

105 Who can impress the forest, bid the tree
Unfix his earth-bound root? Sweet bodements, good!
Rebellion's head, rise never till the Wood
Of Birnam rise, and our high-placed Macbeth
Shall live the lease of nature, pay his breath
110 To time and mortal custom. Yet my heart
Throbs to know one thing. Tell me, if your art
Can tell so much: shall Banquo's issue ever
Reign in this kingdom?

ALL

Seek to know no more.

MACBETH

115 I will be satisfied. Deny me this,
And an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know.
Why sinks that cauldron? And what noise is this?

Hautboys.

FIRST WITCH

Show!

SECOND WITCH

Show!

THIRD WITCH

120 Show!

ALL

Show his eyes, and grieve his heart;
Come like shadows, so depart!

A show of eight kings, [the eighth king] with a glass in his hand, and BANQUO *last.*

MACBETH

Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo. Down!
Thy crown does sear mine eyeballs. And thy hair,
125 Thou other gold-bound brow, is like the first.
A third is like the former.—Filthy hags!
Why do you show me this?—A fourth! Start, eyes!

What, will the line stretch out to th' crack of doom?
Another yet! A seventh! I'll see no more.
130 And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass
Which shows me many more, and some I see
That twofold balls and treble scepters[5] carry:
Horrible sight! Now, I see, 'tis true;
For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,
135 And points at them for his. What, is this so?

FIRST WITCH

Ay, sir, all this is so. But why
Stands Macbeth thus amazedly?
Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites,
And show the best of our delights:
140 I'll charm the air to give a sound,
While you perform your antic round,
That this great King may kindly say
Our duties did his welcome pay.

Music. The WITCHES *dance, and vanish.*

MACBETH

Where are they? Gone? Let this pernicious hour
145 Stand aye accursed in the calendar!
Come in, without there!

Enter LENNOX.

LENNOX

What's your Grace's will?

MACBETH

Saw you the Weïrd Sisters?

LENNOX

No, my lord.

5 **twofold . . . scepters:** The balls may refer to the double coronation of James I in Scotland and in England; the treble scepters are the two used for investment in the English coronation and the one used in the Scottish coronation. This passage is a tribute to James I and the union of Great Britain under him.

MACBETH

150 Came they not by you?

LENNOX

No, indeed, my lord.

MACBETH

Infected be the air whereon they ride,
And damn'd all those that trust them! I did hear
The galloping of horse. Who was 't came by?

LENNOX

155 'Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word
Macduff is fled to England.

MACBETH

Fled to England?

LENNOX

Ay, my good lord.

MACBETH [*aside*]

Time, thou anticipat'st my dread exploits.
160 The flighty purpose never is o'ertook
Unless the deed go with it. From this moment
The very firstlings of my heart shall be
The firstlings of my hand. And even now,
To crown my thoughts with acts, be it thought and done:
165 The castle of Macduff I will surprise,
Seize upon Fife; give to the edge o' th' sword
His wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls
That trace him in his line. No boasting like a fool;
This deed I'll do before this purpose cool.
170 But no more sights!—Where are these gentlemen?
Come, bring me where they are.

Exeunt.

ACT IV, SCENE II

Ross counsels Lady Macduff to believe her husband has acted in her best interest by fleeing the country. However, Lady Macduff tells her son that his father is dead and a traitor. A messenger arrives to warn them of danger, and murderers arrive fast on the messenger's heels. Macduff's son is killed and his wife flees, pursued by the murderers.

Fife. [*Macduff's castle.*] *Enter* MACDUFF'S *wife* [LADY MACDUFF], *her* SON, *and* ROSS.

LADY MACDUFF
What had he done, to make him fly the land?

ROSS
You must have patience, madam.

LADY MACDUFF
He had none:
His flight was madness. When our actions do not,
5 Our fears do make us traitors.

ROSS
You know not
Whether it was his wisdom or his fear.

LADY MACDUFF
Wisdom! To leave his wife, to leave his babes,
His mansion and his titles in a place
10 From whence himself does fly? He loves us not;
He wants the natural touch: for the poor wren,
The most **diminutive** of birds, will fight,
Her young ones in her nest, against the owl.
All is the fear and nothing is the love;
15 As little is the wisdom, where the flight
So runs against all reason.

diminutive: *tiny*

ROSS
My dearest coz,
I pray you, school yourself. But for your husband,

He is noble, wise, **judicious**, and best knows
The fits o' th' season. I dare not speak much further;
But cruel are the times, when we are traitors
And do not know ourselves; when we hold rumour
From what we fear yet know not what we fear,
But float upon a wild and violent sea
Each way and move. I take my leave of you.
Shall not be long but I'll be here again.
Things at the worst will cease, or else climb upward
To what they were before.—My pretty cousin,
Blessing upon you!

judicious: *thoughtful; wise*

LADY MACDUFF

Fathered he is, and yet he's fatherless.

ROSS

I am so much a fool, should I stay longer,
It would be my disgrace and your discomfort:
I take my leave at once.

Exit ROSS.

LADY MACDUFF

Sirrah, your father's dead;
And what will you do now? How will you live?

SON

As birds do, Mother.

LADY MACDUFF

What, with worms and flies?

SON

With what I get, I mean; and so do they.

LADY MACDUFF

Poor bird! Thou'dst never fear the net nor lime,[6]
The pitfall nor the gin.

SON

Why should I, Mother? Poor birds they are not set for.

6 **lime:** birdlime, a sticky substance smeared on tree branches to catch small birds

My father is not dead, for all your saying.

LADY MACDUFF
Yes, he is dead. How wilt thou do for a father?

SON
Nay, how will you do for a husband?

LADY MACDUFF
45 Why, I can buy me twenty at any market.

SON
Then you'll buy 'em to sell again.

LADY MACDUFF
Thou speak'st with all thy wit, and yet, i' faith,
With wit enough for thee.

SON
Was my father a traitor, Mother?

LADY MACDUFF
50 Ay, that he was.

SON
What is a traitor?

LADY MACDUFF
Why, one that swears and lies.

SON
And be all traitors that do so?

LADY MACDUFF
Every one that does so is a traitor, and must be hanged.

SON
55 And must they all be hanged that swear and lie?

LADY MACDUFF
Every one.

SON
Who must hang them?

LADY MACDUFF

Why, the honest men.

SON

Then the liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and
60 swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them.

LADY MACDUFF

Now, God help thee, poor monkey!
But how wilt thou do for a father?

SON

If he were dead, you'd weep for him. If you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a
65 new father.

LADY MACDUFF

Poor prattler, how thou talk'st!

Enter a MESSENGER.

MESSENGER

Bless you, fair dame! I am not to you known,
Though in your state of honour I am perfect.
I doubt some danger does approach you nearly.
70 If you will take a homely man's advice,
Be not found here. Hence, with your little ones!
To fright you thus, methinks I am too savage;
To do worse to you were fell cruelty,
Which is too nigh your person. Heaven preserve you!
75 I dare abide no longer.

Exit MESSENGER.

LADY MACDUFF

Whither should I fly?
I have done no harm. But I remember now
I am in this earthly world, where to do harm
Is often **laudable**, to do good sometime
80 Accounted dangerous folly. Why then, alas,
Do I put up that womanly defence,

laudable: *praiseworthy*

To say I have done no harm?

Enter MURDERERS.

What are these faces?

FIRST MURDERER

Where is your husband?

LADY MACDUFF

I hope, in no place so unsanctified
Where such as thou mayst find him.

FIRST MURDERER

He's a traitor.

SON

Thou liest, thou shag-haired villain!

FIRST MURDERER

What, you egg!

[*Stabbing him.*]

Young fry of treachery!

SON

He has killed me, Mother:
Run away, I pray you!

[*Dies.*]

Exit [LADY MACDUFF], *crying "Murder!"* [*followed by* MURDERERS].

ACT IV, SCENE III

Malcolm and Macduff discuss the state of Scotland. Malcolm tests Macduff by describing himself as a worse tyrant than Macbeth. Ross arrives with the news that Macduff's family has been murdered. As the scene ends, they prepare to fight against Macbeth.

[*England. Before the King's palace.*] *Enter* MALCOLM *and* MACDUFF.

MALCOLM

Let us seek out some **desolate** shade, and there
Weep our sad bosoms empty.

desolate: *abandoned*

MACDUFF

Let us rather
Hold fast the mortal sword, and like good men
Bestride our down-fall'n birthdom. Each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike heaven on the face, that it resounds
As if it felt with Scotland and yelled out
Like syllable of dolor.

MALCOLM

What I believe, I'll wail;
What know, believe; and what I can **redress**,
As I shall find the time to friend, I will.
What you have spoke, it may be so perchance.
This tyrant, whose sole name blisters our tongues,
Was once thought honest; you have loved him well.
He hath not touch'd you yet. I am young; but something
You may deserve of him through me, and wisdom
To offer up a weak, poor, innocent lamb
T' **appease** an angry god.

redress: *atone for*

appease: *to soothe or reassure*

MACDUFF

I am not treacherous.

MALCOLM

But Macbeth is.
A good and virtuous nature may recoil
In an imperial charge. But I shall crave your pardon;
That which you are, my thoughts cannot transpose:
25 Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.
Though all things foul would wear the brows of grace,
Yet grace must still look so.

MACDUFF

I have lost my hopes.

MALCOLM

Perchance even there where I did find my doubts.
30 Why in that rawness left you wife and child,
Those precious motives, those strong knots of love,
Without leave-taking? I pray you,
Let not my jealousies be your dishonours,
But mine own safeties. You may be rightly just,
35 Whatever I shall think.

MACDUFF

Bleed, bleed, poor country!
Great tyranny, lay thou thy basis sure,
For goodness dare not check thee. Wear thou thy wrongs;
The title is affeered.—Fare thee well, lord.
40 I would not be the villain that thou think'st
For the whole space that's in the tyrant's grasp,
And the rich East to boot.

MALCOLM

Be not offended;
I speak not as in absolute fear of you.
45 I think our country sinks beneath the yoke;
It weeps, it bleeds, and each new day a gash
Is added to her wounds. I think withal
There would be hands uplifted in my right;
And here from gracious England have I offer
50 Of goodly thousands. But, for all this,
When I shall tread upon the tyrant's head,
Or wear it on my sword, yet my poor country

Shall have more vices than it had before,
More suffer and more sundry ways than ever,
55 By him that shall succeed.

MACDUFF

What should he be?

MALCOLM

It is myself I mean, in whom I know
All the particulars of vice so grafted
That, when they shall be opened, black Macbeth
60 Will seem as pure as snow, and the poor state
Esteem him as a lamb, being compared
With my confineless harms.

MACDUFF

Not in the legions
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned
65 In evils to top Macbeth.

MALCOLM

I grant him bloody,
Luxurious, **avaricious**, false, deceitful,
Sudden, malicious, smacking of every sin
That has a name. But there's no bottom, none,
70 In my **voluptuousness**. Your wives, your daughters,
Your matrons and your maids, could not fill up
The cistern of my lust, and my desire
All continent impediments would o'erbear
That did oppose my will. Better Macbeth
75 Than such a one to reign.

avaricious: *greedy*

voluptuousness: *desire for pleasure*

MACDUFF

Boundless intemperance
In nature is a tyranny; it hath been
Th' untimely emptying of the happy throne,
And fall of many kings. But fear not yet
80 To take upon you what is yours. You may
Convey your pleasures in a spacious plenty,
And yet seem cold, the time you may so hoodwink.
We have willing dames enough. There cannot be

That vulture in you, to devour so many
85 As will to greatness dedicate themselves,
Finding it so inclined.

MALCOLM

With this there grows
In my most ill-composed affection such
A stanchless avarice that, were I King,
90 I should cut off the nobles for their lands,
Desire his jewels and this other's house;
And my more-having would be as a sauce
To make me hunger more, that I should forge
Quarrels unjust against the good and loyal,
95 Destroying them for wealth.

MACDUFF

This avarice
Sticks deeper, grows with more pernicious root
Than summer-seeming lust, and it hath been
The sword of our slain kings. Yet do not fear.
100 Scotland hath foisons to fill up your will
Of your mere own. All these are portable,
With other graces weigh'd.

MALCOLM

But I have none. The king-becoming graces,
As justice, verity, temp'rance, stableness,
105 Bounty, perseverance, mercy, lowliness,
Devotion, patience, courage, fortitude,
I have no relish of them, but abound
In the division of each several crime,
Acting it many ways. Nay, had I pow'r, I should
110 Pour the sweet milk of concord into hell,
Uproar the universal peace, confound
All unity on earth.

MACDUFF

O Scotland, Scotland!

MALCOLM

If such a one be fit to govern, speak:

115 I am as I have spoken.

MACDUFF

Fit to govern?
No, not to live. —O nation miserable!
With an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptered,
When shalt thou see thy wholesome days again,
120 Since that the truest issue of thy throne
By his own **interdiction** stands accursed,
And does blaspheme his breed? Thy royal father
Was a most sainted king. The queen that bore thee,
Oft'ner upon her knees than on her feet,
125 Died every day she lived. Fare thee well!
These evils thou repeat'st upon thyself
Have banish'd me from Scotland. O my breast,
Thy hope ends here!

interdiction: *ban; prohibition of an activity*

MALCOLM

Macduff, this noble passion,
130 Child of integrity, hath from my soul
Wiped the black scruples, **reconciled** my thoughts
To thy good truth and honour. Devilish Macbeth
By many of these trains hath sought to win me
Into his power, and modest wisdom plucks me
135 From **over-credulous** haste. But God above
Deal between thee and me! For even now
I put myself to thy direction, and
Unspeak mine own **detraction**, here **abjure**
The taints and blames I laid upon myself,
140 For strangers to my nature. I am yet
Unknown to woman, never was forsworn,
Scarcely have coveted what was mine own,
At no time broke my faith, would not betray
The devil to his fellow, and delight
145 No less in truth than life. My first false speaking
Was this upon myself. What I am truly,
Is thine and my poor country's to command.
Whither indeed, before thy here-approach,
Old Siward, with ten thousand warlike men,

reconciled: *brought back together; made friends*

over-credulous: *greatly naive; gullible*

detraction: *negative comment or act that takes away from something or someone*

abjure: *to renounce*

150 Already at a point was setting forth.
Now we'll together, and the chance of goodness
Be like our warranted quarrel! Why are you silent?

MACDUFF

Such welcome and unwelcome things at once
'Tis hard to reconcile.

Enter a DOCTOR.

MALCOLM

155 Well, more anon.—Comes the King forth, I pray you?

DOCTOR

Ay, sir. There are a crew of wretched souls
That stay his cure. Their malady[7] convinces
The great assay of art; but at his touch—
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand—
160 They presently amend.

MALCOLM

I thank you, doctor.

Exit [DOCTOR].

MACDUFF

What's the disease he means?

MALCOLM

'Tis call'd the evil:
A most miraculous work in this good king,
165 Which often, since my here-remain in England
I have seen him do. How he solicits heaven,
Himself best knows, but strangely-visited people,
All swoll'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye,
The mere despair of surgery, he cures,
170 Hanging a golden stamp about their necks,
Put on with holy prayers; and 'tis spoken,
To the succeeding royalty he leaves

7 **their malady:** "the King's Evil," or scrofula, frequently characterized by an enlarged degeneration of lymphatic glands in the neck; the disease was thought to be curable by the touch of any king descended from Edward the Confessor.

The healing benediction. With this strange virtue,
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,
175 And sundry blessings hang about his throne,
That speak him full of grace.

Enter ROSS.

MACDUFF

See, who comes here.

MALCOLM

My countryman, but yet I know him not.

MACDUFF

My ever gentle cousin, welcome hither.

MALCOLM

180 I know him now.—Good God, betimes remove
The means that makes us strangers!

ROSS

Sir, amen.

MACDUFF

Stands Scotland where it did?

ROSS

Alas, poor country!
185 Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot
Be call'd our mother but our grave, where nothing
But who knows nothing is once seen to smile;
Where sighs and groans, and shrieks that rent the air
Are made, not marked; where violent sorrow seems
190 A modern ecstasy. The dead man's knell
Is there scarce ask'd for who, and good men's lives
Expire before the flowers in their caps,
Dying or ere they sicken.

MACDUFF

O, relation too nice, and yet too true!

MALCOLM

195 What's the newest grief?

ROSS

That of an hour's age doth hiss the speaker;
Each minute teems a new one.

MACDUFF

How does my wife?

ROSS

Why, well.

MACDUFF

200 And all my children?

ROSS

Well too.

MACDUFF

The tyrant has not battered at their peace?

ROSS

No, they were well at peace when I did leave 'em.

MACDUFF

But not a niggard of your speech. How goes 't?

ROSS

205 When I came hither to transport the tidings,
Which I have heavily borne, there ran a rumor
Of many worthy fellows that were out;
Which was to my belief witnessed the rather,
For that I saw the tyrant's power afoot.
210 Now is the time of help. Your eye in Scotland
Would create soldiers, make our women fight,
To doff their dire distresses.

MALCOLM

Be 't their comfort
We are coming thither. Gracious England hath

Lent us good Siward and ten thousand men;
An older and a better soldier none
That Christendom gives out.

ROSS

Would I could answer
This comfort with the like! But I have words
That would be howled out in the desert air,
Where hearing should not latch them.

MACDUFF

What concern they?
The general cause or is it a fee-grief
Due to some single breast?

ROSS

No mind that's honest
But in it shares some woe, though the main part
Pertains to you alone.

MACDUFF

If it be mine,
Keep it not from me, quickly let me have it.

ROSS

Let not your ears despise my tongue forever,
Which shall possess them with the heaviest sound
That ever yet they heard.

MACDUFF

Humh! I guess at it.

ROSS

Your castle is surprised; your wife and babes
Savagely slaughtered. To relate the manner,
Were, on the quarry of these murdered deer,
To add the death of you.

MALCOLM

Merciful heaven!
—What, man! Ne'er pull your hat upon your brows;

240 Give sorrow words. The grief that does not speak
Whispers the o'er-fraught heart and bids it break.

MACDUFF
My children too?

ROSS
Wife, children, servants, all that could be found.

MACDUFF
And I must be from thence! My wife killed too?

ROSS
245 I have said.

MALCOLM
Be comforted.
Let's make us med'cines of our great revenge,
To cure this deadly grief.

MACDUFF
He has no children. All my pretty ones?
250 Did you say "all"? O hell-kite! All?
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop?

MALCOLM
Dispute it like a man.

MACDUFF
I shall do so,
255 But I must also feel it as a man.
I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,
And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff,
They were all struck for thee! Naught that I am,
260 Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
Fell slaughter on their souls. Heaven rest them now!

MALCOLM

Be this the whetstone of your sword. Let grief
Convert to anger; blunt not the heart, enrage it.

MACDUFF

O, I could play the woman with mine eyes
265 And braggart with my tongue! But, gentle heavens,
Cut short all intermission; front to front
Bring thou this fiend of Scotland and myself;
Within my sword's length set him. If he 'scape,
Heaven forgive him too!

MALCOLM

270 This tune goes manly.
Come, go we to the King. Our power is ready;
Our lack is nothing but our leave. Macbeth
Is ripe for shaking, and the powers above
Put on their instruments. Receive what cheer you may.
275 The night is long that never finds the day.

Exeunt.

After You Read *Macbeth: Act IV*

Literary Lens: Foreshadowing

Macbeth can be viewed as a series of riddles for which Shakespeare provides his audience dark clues along the way. In Act IV, a good example comes when the witches again prophesy Macbeth's future. Though the outcome remains unclear until Act V, the audience is alerted to future events. Create a graphic organizer like the one below to consider the events foreshadowed by the witches' imagery. For each example of foreshadowing, make a note on what you predicted about it.

Foreshadowing		What I Predict
a helmeted head	→	
a bloody child	→	
a crowned child	→	
a sinking cauldron	→	

Explore Context: What's in the Cauldron?

The ingredients in the witches' cauldron are distasteful, if not lethal. Among other things, the First Witch throws a bit of "sweltered venom" of a toad into the pot. Toads actually do secrete venom from their skin, which they use as a form of self-protection. The venom can paralyze and kill animals, but the worst it does to humans is irritate the eyes and tongue. What are some of the other unsavory elements in the cauldron, and what do you think they might signify?

Apply and Create: Rhyming Couplets

Using the witches' "Double, double toil and trouble" chant as a model, write a fourteen-line sequence of rhyming couplets calling forth an event or situation you would like to see take place in your own life. Make sure you use very strict rhyme and meter.

Read Critically

Reread the following passage from Act IV, Scene I, and answer the questions that follow.

Enter MACBETH.

MACBETH

How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags!
What is 't you do?

ALL

A deed without a name.

MACBETH

I conjure you, by that which you profess,
Howe'er you come to know it, answer me:
Though you untie the winds and let them fight
Against the churches; though the yeasty waves
Confound and swallow navigation up;
Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down;
Though castles topple on their warders' heads;
Though palaces and pyramids do slope
Their heads to their foundations; though the treasure
Of nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken; answer me
To what I ask you.

FIRST WITCH

Speak.

SECOND WITCH

Demand.

THIRD WITCH

We'll answer.

1. Based on this excerpt, how has Macbeth's attitude toward the witches changed since their earlier meeting?
2. What is the main thing Macbeth hopes to gain from this visit? Do you think he believes he has attained it? Support your answer with information from the text.

Before You Read *Macbeth: Act V*

Shakespeare only lived about ten more years following the first production of *Macbeth* at the court of King James I. Although the exact date of his death is still the subject of some debate, he allegedly died on his birthday, April 23, in 1616. He left his money and his property to his daughters, Susanna and Judith. To his wife, Anne, he left his "second best bed." Seven years after Shakespeare's death, in 1623, two of his theatre colleagues published the First Folio edition of his collected plays. Only about half of the plays had been published prior to that. Since the First Folio was published, Shakespeare's work has enjoyed enormous worldwide respect. His understanding of the human condition and his ability to pose universal questions within a rich dramatic framework have made him perhaps the most revered writer of all time.

Literary Lens

Dramatic Irony Shakespeare had enormous control as a playwright, doling out information at just the right points to keep his audience fully engaged. This often involved using dramatic irony, a literary technique that reveals information about the past or the present to the audience about which the characters know nothing. For example, in Act I of *Macbeth*, Duncan is unaware that his loyal general Macbeth plans to murder him, but the audience is privy to the plan right away. Try to spot examples of dramatic irony as you read Act V.

Extended Metaphor As you know, a metaphor is a figure of speech that compares things that are not alike. An extended metaphor is more complex: a comparison that goes on over the course of several lines, comparing unlike things point by point. You will find many examples of extended metaphor in the works of William Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's Language

As a dramatist, Shakespeare was a master craftsman, but he was also a poet well known for the beauty and rigorous form of his sonnets. His use of poetic language and imagery throughout his works for the stage is unparalleled. Nowhere is this more evident than in Macbeth's heartbroken Act V soliloquy on the nature of time and the unreality of life itself, which contains the oft-quoted sentiment, "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow creeps in this petty pace from day to day." This poetic image reveals Macbeth's bleak view of all of life's ups and down as nothing more than a few dull days. His assessment of life is that it is nothing more than a brief stop along the road to "dusty death," a candle that flickers and then goes out. Finally, he compares all of mankind's machinations to the ravings of a stage actor, a "poor player/That struts and frets his hour upon the stage/ And then is heard no more."

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. It's been quite a while since Lady Macbeth has had anything to say in the play. What do you imagine she has been doing since her last appearance?
2. Based on the play so far, do you see any way out for Macbeth? What would you suggest that he do either to keep his crown or, more importantly, to save his life?
3. What emotions might lead someone to end his or her own life? What might cause someone to feel this is the only option left?

ACT V, SCENE I

[*Dunsinane. In the castle.*] *Enter a* DOCTOR *of Physic and a Waiting*-GENTLEWOMAN.

DOCTOR

I have two nights watched with you, but can perceive no truth in your report. When was it she last walked?

GENTLEWOMAN

Since his Majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon 't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

DOCTOR

A great **perturbation** in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching! In this slumb'ry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?

perturbation: *disturbance*

GENTLEWOMAN

That, sir, which I will not report after her.

DOCTOR

You may to me, and 'tis most meet you should.

GENTLEWOMAN

Neither to you nor any one, having no witness to confirm my speech.

Enter LADY MACBETH, *with a taper.*

Lo you, here she comes! This is her very guise, and, upon my life, fast asleep! Observe her; stand close.

DOCTOR

How came she by that light?

GENTLEWOMAN

Why, it stood by her. She has light by her continually. 'Tis her command.

DOCTOR
You see, her eyes are open.

GENTLEWOMAN
Ay, but their sense is shut.

DOCTOR
What is it she does now? Look, how she rubs her hands.

GENTLEWOMAN
It is an accustomed action with her, to seem thus washing
25 her hands. I have known her continue in this a quarter of an hour.

LADY MACBETH
Yet here's a spot.

DOCTOR
Hark! She speaks. I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly.

LADY MACBETH
30 Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One. Two. Why, then 'tis time to do 't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier, and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our pow'r to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

DOCTOR
35 Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH
The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What, will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o' that, my lord, no more o' that! You mar all with this starting.

DOCTOR
Go to, go to! You have known what you should not.

GENTLEWOMAN
40 She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that. Heaven knows what she has known.

LADY MACBETH
Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!

DOCTOR
What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

GENTLEWOMAN
I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity
of the whole body.

DOCTOR
Well, well, well—

GENTLEWOMAN
Pray God it be, sir.

DOCTOR
This disease is beyond my practise. Yet I have known those
which have walked in their sleep who have died holily in their beds.

LADY MACBETH
Wash your hands. Put on your nightgown. Look not so pale! I tell you yet again, Banquo's buried. He cannot come out on 's grave.

DOCTOR
Even so?

LADY MACBETH
To bed, to bed! There's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your hand! What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed!

Exit LADY [MACBETH].

DOCTOR
Will she go now to bed?

GENTLEWOMAN

Directly.

DOCTOR

Foul whisp'rings are abroad. Unnatural deeds
Do breed unnatural troubles. Infected minds
To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets.
More needs she the divine than the physician.
God, God forgive us all! Look after her;
Remove from her the means of all annoyance,
And still keep eyes upon her. So, good night.
My mind she has mated and amazed my sight.
I think, but dare not speak.

GENTLEWOMAN

Good night, good doctor.

Exeunt.

ACT V, SCENE II

[*The country near Dunsinane.*] *Drum and colours. Enter* MENTEITH, CAITHNESS, ANGUS, LENNOX, *and* SOLDIERS.

MENTEITH

The English power is near, led on by Malcolm,
His uncle Siward and the good Macduff.
Revenges burn in them; for their dear causes
Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm
5 Excite the mortified man.

ANGUS

Near Birnam Wood
Shall we well meet them; that way are they coming.

CAITHNESS

Who knows if Donalbain be with his brother?

LENNOX

For certain, sir, he is not. I have a file
10 Of all the gentry. There is Siward's son,
And many unrough youths that even now
Protest their first of manhood.

MENTEITH

What does the tyrant?

CAITHNESS

Great Dunsinane he strongly **fortifies**:
15 Some say he's mad; others, that lesser hate him
Do call it valiant fury, but, for certain,
He cannot buckle his distempered cause
Within the belt of rule.

ANGUS

Now does he feel
20 His secret murders sticking on his hands;
Now minutely revolts **upbraid** his faith-breach.
Those he commands move only in command,

fortifies: *strengthens*

upbraid: *to scold or reprimand*

Nothing in love. Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robe
25 Upon a dwarfish thief.

MENTEITH

Who then shall blame
His pestered senses to **recoil** and start,
When all that is within him does condemn
Itself for being there?

recoil: *flinch or retreat in horror or disgust*

CAITHNESS

30 Well, march we on,
To give obedience where 'tis truly owed.
Meet we the med'cine of the sickly weal,
And with him pour we in our country's purge
Each drop of us.

LENNOX

35 Or so much as it needs,
To dew the sovereign flower and drown the weeds.
Make we our march towards Birnam.

Exeunt, marching.

ACT V, SCENE III

[*Dunsinane. A room in the castle.*] *Enter* MACBETH, DOCTOR, *and* ATTENDANTS.

MACBETH

Bring me no more reports. Let them fly all!
Till Birnam Wood remove to Dunsinane
I cannot taint with fear. What's the boy Malcolm?
Was he not born of woman? The spirits that know
All mortal consequences have pronounced me thus:
"Fear not, Macbeth; no man that's born of woman
Shall e'er have power upon thee." Then fly, false thanes,
And mingle with the English epicures.
The mind I sway by and the heart I bear
Shall never sag with doubt nor shake with fear.

Enter a SERVANT.

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!
Where got'st thou that goose look?

SERVANT

There is ten thousand—

MACBETH

Geese, villain?

SERVANT

Soldiers, sir.

MACBETH

Go prick thy face and over-red thy fear,
Thou lily-liver'd boy. What soldiers, patch?
Death of thy soul! Those linen cheeks of thine
Are counselors to fear. What soldiers, whey-face?

SERVANT

The English force, so please you.

MACBETH

Take thy face hence.

Exit SERVANT.

Seyton!—I am sick at heart,
When I behold—Seyton, I say!—This push
Will cheer me ever, or disseat me now.
I have lived long enough. My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
Seyton!

Enter SEYTON.

SEYTON
What's your gracious pleasure?

MACBETH
What news more?

SEYTON
All is confirmed, my lord, which was reported.

MACBETH
I'll fight, till from my bones my flesh be hacked.
Give me my armour.

SEYTON
'Tis not needed yet.

MACBETH
I'll put it on.
Send out more horses; skirr the country round;
Hang those that talk of fear. Give me mine armour.
How does your patient, doctor?

DOCTOR
Not so sick, my lord,
As she is troubled with thick-coming fancies,
That keep her from her rest.

MACBETH

Cure her of that.
Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain
50 And with some sweet **oblivious antidote**
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that **perilous** stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?

oblivious: *unaware of what is going on*

antidote: *medicine that counteracts a poison*

perilous: *unsafe*

DOCTOR

Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.

MACBETH

55 Throw physic to the dogs, I'll none of it.—
Come, put mine armour on. Give me my staff.
Seyton, send out.—Doctor, the thanes fly from me.—
Come, sir, dispatch.—If thou couldst, doctor, cast
The water of my land, find her disease,
60 And purge it to a sound and **pristine** health,
I would applaud thee to the very echo,
That should applaud again.—Pull 't off, I say.—
What rhubarb, senna, or what purgative drug,
Would scour these English hence? Hear'st thou of them?

pristine: *clean and pure*

DOCTOR

65 Ay, my good lord. Your royal preparation
Makes us hear something.

MACBETH

Bring it after me.
I will not be afraid of death and bane,
Till Birnam Forest come to Dunsinane.

[*Exeunt* MACBETH *and* SEYTON.]

DOCTOR [*aside*]

70 Were I from Dunsinane away and clear,
Profit again should hardly draw me here.

Exit.

ACT V, SCENE IV

[*Country near Birnam Wood.*] *Drum and colours. Enter* MALCOLM, SIWARD, MACDUFF, YOUNG SIWARD, MENTEITH, CAITHNESS, ANGUS, *and* SOLDIERS, *marching.*

MALCOLM

Cousins, I hope the days are near at hand
That chambers will be safe.

MENTEITH

We doubt it nothing.

SIWARD

What wood is this before us?

MENTEITH

5 The Wood of Birnam.

MALCOLM

Let every soldier hew him down a bough
And bear 't before him. Thereby shall we shadow
The numbers of our host and make discovery
Err in report of us.

SOLDIERS

10 It shall be done.

SIWARD

We learn no other but the confident tyrant
Keeps still in Dunsinane and will endure
Our setting down before 't.

MALCOLM

'Tis his main hope;
15 For where there is advantage to be gone,
Both more and less have given him the revolt,
And none serve with him but constrained things
Whose hearts are absent too.

MACDUFF

Let our just censures
Attend the true event, and put we on
Industrious soldiership.

industrious: *hard-working*

SIWARD

The time approaches
That will with due decision make us know
What we shall say we have and what we owe.
Thoughts **speculative** their unsure hopes relate,
But certain issue strokes must arbitrate;
Towards which advance the war.

speculative: *theoretical*

Exeunt, marching.

ACT V, SCENE V

[*Dunsinane. Within the castle.*] *Enter* MACBETH, SEYTON, *and* SOLDIERS, *with drum and colours.*

MACBETH

Hang out our banners on the outward walls.
The cry is still "They come!" Our castle's strength
Will laugh a siege to scorn. Here let them lie
Till famine and the ague eat them up.
Were they not forced with those that should be ours,
We might have met them dareful, beard to beard,
And beat them backward home.

A cry within of women.

What is that noise?

SEYTON

It is the cry of women, my good lord.

[*Exit.*]

MACBETH

I have almost forgot the taste of fears.
The time has been, my senses would have cooled
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in 't. I have supped full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts
Cannot once start me.

[*Enter* SEYTON.]

Wherefore was that cry?

SEYTON

The Queen, my lord, is dead.

MACBETH

She should have died hereafter;

20 There would have been a time for such a word.[1]
Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
25 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
30 Signifying nothing.

Enter a MESSENGER.

Thou com'st to use thy tongue; thy story quickly!

MESSENGER

Gracious my lord,
I should report that which I say I saw,
But know not how to do it.

MACBETH

35 Well, say, sir.

MESSENGER

As I did stand my watch upon the hill,
I look'd toward Birnam, and anon, methought,
The wood began to move.

MACBETH

Liar and slave!

MESSENGER

40 Let me endure your wrath, if 't be not so.
Within this three mile may you see it coming;
I say, a moving grove.

MACBETH

If thou speak'st false,
Upon the next tree shalt thou hang alive,

1 **She should . . . a word:** She would have died sometime.

Till famine cling thee. If thy speech be sooth,
I care not if thou dost for me as much.
I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt th' **equivocation** of the fiend
That lies like truth: "Fear not, till Birnam Wood
Do come to Dunsinane!" And now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane. Arm, arm, and out!
If this which he avouches does appear,
There is nor flying hence nor tarrying here.
I 'gin to be aweary of the sun,
And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone.
Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! Come wrack!
At least we'll die with harness on our back.

Exeunt.

equivocation: *lie; evasion*

ACT V, SCENE VI

[Dunsinane. Before the castle.] Drum and colours. Enter MALCOLM, SIWARD, MACDUFF, *and their* ARMY, *with boughs.*

MALCOLM

Now near enough. Your leafy screens throw down.
And show like those you are. You, worthy uncle,
Shall, with my cousin, your right noble son,
Lead our first battle. Worthy Macduff and we
5 Shall take upon 's what else remains to do,
According to our order.

SIWARD

Fare you well.
Do we but find the tyrant's power tonight,
Let us be beaten, if we cannot fight.

MACDUFF

10 Make all our trumpets speak; give them all breath,
Those clamorous harbingers of blood and death.

Exeunt. Alarums continued.

ACT V, SCENE VII

[*Another part of the field.*] *Enter* MACBETH.

MACBETH

They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But bear-like, I must fight the course.[2] What's he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none.

Enter YOUNG SIWARD.

YOUNG SIWARD

5 What is thy name?

MACBETH

Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.

YOUNG SIWARD

No, though thou call'st thyself a hotter name
Than any is in hell.

MACBETH

My name's Macbeth.

YOUNG SIWARD

10 The devil himself could not pronounce a title
More hateful to mine ear.

MACBETH

No, nor more fearful.

YOUNG SIWARD

abhorred: *despised*

Thou liest, **abhorred** tyrant; with my sword
I'll prove the lie thou speak'st.

Fight, and YOUNG SIWARD *slain.*

2 **bear-like . . . course:** Bearbaiting was a popular sport in Shakespeare's time. A bear was chained to a stake in a ring or arena and ferocious dogs were released to attack it. *Course* was a common term for *bout.*

MACBETH

15 Thou wast born of woman
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandished by man that's of a woman born.

Exit.

Alarums. Enter MACDUFF.

brandished: *waved or flourished in excitement or anger*

MACDUFF

That way the noise is. Tyrant, show thy face!
If thou be'st slain and with no stroke of mine,
20 My wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still.
I cannot strike at wretched kerns, whose arms
Are hired to bear their staves. Either thou, Macbeth,
Or else my sword with an unbatter'd edge
I sheathe again undeeded. There thou shouldst be;
25 By this great clatter, one of greatest note
Seems bruited. Let me find him, Fortune!
And more I beg not.

Exit. Alarums.

Enter MALCOLM *and* SIWARD.

SIWARD

This way, my lord. The castle's gently render'd.
The tyrant's people on both sides do fight;
30 The noble thanes do bravely in the war;
The day almost itself professes yours,
And little is to do.

MALCOLM

We have met with foes
That strike beside us.

SIWARD

35 Enter, sir, the castle.

Exeunt. Alarum.

ACT V, SCENE VIII

[*Another part of the field.*] *Enter* MACBETH.

MACBETH

Why should I play the Roman fool[3] and die
On mine own sword? Whiles I see lives, the gashes
Do better upon them.

Enter MACDUFF.

MACDUFF

Turn, hell-hound, turn!

MACBETH

Of all men else I have avoided thee.
But get thee back! My soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.

MACDUFF

I have no words;
My voice is in my sword, thou bloodier villain
Than terms can give thee out!

Fight. Alarum.

MACBETH

Thou losest labor:
As easy mayst thou the intrenchant air
With thy keen sword impress as make me bleed.
Let fall thy blade on vulnerable crests;
I bear a charmed life, which must not yield,
To one of woman born.

MACDUFF

Despair thy charm
And let the angel whom thou still hast served
Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb
Untimely ripped.[4]

---

3 **Roman fool:** Roman soldiers traditionally committed suicide to avoid dishonor in defeat.

4 **untimely ripped:** Cesarian section, the operation of taking a child from the uterus by cutting through the walls of the abdomen

MACBETH

Accursed be that tongue that tells me so,
For it hath cowed my better part of man!
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense;
25 That keep the word of promise to our ear,
And break it to our hope. I'll not fight with thee.

MACDUFF

Then yield thee, coward,
And live to be the show and gaze o' th' time:
We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are,
30 Painted upon a pole and under writ
"Here may you see the tyrant."

MACBETH

I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.
35 Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed, being of no woman born,
Yet I will try the last. Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on, Macduff;
And damned be him that first cries, 'Hold, enough!'

Exeunt, fighting. Alarums.

They enter fighting, and MACBETH *is slain.* [*Exit* MACDUFF, *with* MACBETH.] *Retreat and flourish. Enter, with drum and colours,* MALCOLM, SIWARD, ROSS, THANES, *and* SOLDIERS.

MALCOLM

40 I would the friends we miss were safe arrived.

SIWARD

Some must go off; and yet, by these I see,
So great a day as this is cheaply bought.

MALCOLM

Macduff is missing, and your noble son.

ROSS

Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt.
He only lived but till he was a man;
The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed
In the unshrinking station where he fought,
But like a man he died.

SIWARD

Then he is dead?

ROSS

Ay, and brought off the field. Your cause of sorrow
Must not be measured by his worth, for then
It hath no end.

SIWARD

Had he his hurts before?

ROSS

Ay, on the front.

SIWARD

Why then, God's soldier be he!
Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
I would not wish them to a fairer death;
And so, his knell is knolled.

MALCOLM

He's worth more sorrow,
And that I'll spend for him.

SIWARD

He's worth no more.
They say he parted well and paid his score,
And so God be with him! Here comes newer comfort.

Enter MACDUFF, *with* MACBETH's *head.*

MACDUFF

Hail, King! For so thou art: behold, where stands
Th' usurper's cursed head. The time is free.
I see thee compassed with thy kingdom's pearl,

That speak my salutation in their minds,
Whose voices I desire aloud with mine:
Hail, King of Scotland!

ALL

Hail, King of Scotland!

Flourish.

MALCOLM

We shall not spend a large expense of time
Before we reckon with your several loves,
And make us even with you. My thanes and kinsmen,
Henceforth be earls, the first that ever Scotland
In such an honour named. What's more to do,
Which would be planted newly with the time—
As calling home our exiled friends abroad
That fled the snares of watchful tyranny,
Producing forth the cruel ministers
Of this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen,
Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life—this, and what needful else
That calls upon us, by the grace of Grace,
We will perform in measure, time, and place.
So, thanks to all at once and to each one,
Whom we invite to see us crown'd at Scone.

Flourish. Exeunt Omnes.

FINIS.

After You Read *Macbeth: Act V*

Literary Lens: Dramatic Irony

As all the loose ends of the play are tied up, there are several examples of dramatic irony that occur in Act V. Make a chart like the one below to analyze the dramatic irony that occurs.

Event That Occurs in Act V	What the Audience Knows That Makes the Event Ironic
Malcolm instructs his soldiers to cut down branches from Birnam Wood to hide the army as they attack the castle.	
Macduff tells Macbeth that he was ripped from his mother's womb before he could be born naturally.	

Explore Context: It's All in the Lines

In Shakespeare's day, plays were performed upon a bare stage. There were no elaborate sets and very few props. Consequently, playwrights had to supply information about the setting and action in the lines of dialogue. For example, Macbeth calls out, "Give me my armour." He is the king, so we can assume that the armor is brought to him immediately. But before he has managed to get it on completely, he changes his mind: "Pull 't off, I say." Before he exits the scene he commands, "Bring it after me," and of course we know that the armor is carried off behind him. We understand all this without the benefit of stage directions.

Apply and Create: Extended Metaphor

On page 426, Lennox and Caithness engage in an extended metaphor to end Act V, Scene II. Paraphrase the various parts of the metaphor by substituting modern language. Then create an extended metaphor of your own, relating to a situation that you have taken part in at your school or in your community.

Read Critically

Read the following passage from Act V, Scene I, and answer the questions that follow.

LADY MACBETH

30 Out, damned spot! Out, I say! One. Two. Why, then 'tis
time to do 't. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie! A soldier,
and afeard? What need we fear who knows it, when none
can call our pow'r to account? Yet who would have
thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?

DOCTOR

35 Do you mark that?

LADY MACBETH

The Thane of Fife had a wife. Where is she now? What,
will these hands ne'er be clean? No more o' that, my lord,
no more o' that! You mar all with this starting.

DOCTOR

Go to, go to! You have known what you should not.

GENTLEWOMAN

40 She has spoke what she should not, I am sure of that.
Heaven knows what she has known.

LADY MACBETH

Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of
Arabia will not sweeten this little hand. O, O, O!

DOCTOR

What a sigh is there! The heart is sorely charged.

GENTLEWOMAN

45 I would not have such a heart in my bosom for the dignity
of the whole body.

1. How would you describe Lady Macbeth's mental state in this scene?
2. What is the gentlewoman's assessment of the queen's actions and statements? Why do you think she believes as she does?
3. How do you interpret Lady Macbeth's obsession with washing her hands?

Connecting Eras: Infer

In this section of Unit 3, you explored William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth*. Shakespeare wrote the play in the early 1600s, but he set it some five hundred years earlier in medieval Scotland. And although there was a real Macbeth who ruled Scotland in the mid-eleventh century, Shakespeare was far less concerned about getting the historical facts straight than he was about telling a great story. The three witches that incite the action in *Macbeth* represent a case in point. Shakespeare used the witches not only as a handy plot device but also as a nod to his patron, King James I. Before he took the throne of England, while he was ruling over Scotland, James gave in to his own deep-seated fears and superstitions about witchcraft; he gave these fears the force of Scottish law by authorizing the torture and execution of anyone accused of being a witch. In the years that followed, there were many abuses and false accusations. Dozens of so-called witches were burned at the stake. James's obsession with witchcraft led to the largest witch hunt in British history. Shakespeare, aware of his new king's fascination, made certain that the element of witchcraft loomed large in *Macbeth*.

Rebecca Reisert is a contemporary playwright and novelist whose book *The Third Witch* follows many of the events from *Macbeth* but is told from the point of view of one of the three witches. In Reisert's acknowledgments, she notes Shakespeare's rather fuzzy take on Scottish history; nonetheless, she says she opted to place her story against the backdrop of the play rather than using historical facts. According to Reisert's story, the "third witch," who goes by the name of Gilly (short for Gillyflower), is in reality not a witch at all, but a fiery young woman with a troubled, violent past. As an abandoned child, Gilly stumbled upon two forest-dwelling women, Nettle and Mad Helga, who took her in. These women practice the healing arts by means of herbs and incantations. They are presumed by some to be witches, although Reisert's story reveals that the women tend to do more good than evil.

Like Macbeth, Gilly is driven by an obsessive desire to achieve a deadly goal. While Macbeth seeks power and glory at any cost, Gilly seeks a single outcome—the death of a man she calls "He" or "Him." Gilly has become very impatient to achieve her goal. Three days earlier, she, Nettle, and Mad Helga had been collecting valuables from the bodies of dead soldiers on a battlefield. Accosted by a trio of thugs, Gilly's life is saved by the man she loathes. This act of salvation only serves to further inflame Gilly's hatred. In the excerpt that follows, Gilly alternately cajoles and rages to enlist Nettle's help in her vengeful quest.

As you read, consider the life mission the narrator has chosen for herself. What might be the long-term effects of such a preoccupation on a person's mind and spirit?

from The Third Witch

Rebecca Reisert

"When shall we kill Him?"

My words fall like a stone into the pool of quiet darkness inside the hut.

Nettle and Mad Helga pause for a moment, then resume their work. All the treasures of the battlefield, except the book, are spread out on the hearth. With the hem of her gown, Nettle cleans and polishes them. Her two wild cats are hunched down at her side—Graymalkin, with his one eye and his three sound legs, and Hecate, with her broken tail. In summer they mostly live in the wood, but as the season of binding[1] approaches, they creep inside to huddle next to the woman who saved them. Every turn of the moon, Mad Helga brings home one or two broken creatures, rocking them in her arms and gibbering at them in a strange language that no one else seems to speak. Despite her attention, most of her wild creatures die. Then as if in some lunatic tribute, she boils their bones until they are clean as Saint John's soul. She piles the boiled bones 'round her bed pallet to use as playthings or prayer beads or conjuring twigs or some such nonsense. This evening Mad Helga kneels at the far side of the hearth, rocking the skeleton of a toad in her cupped hands, her lips moving in the rhythm of a soundless chant.

I stamp my bare foot against the hard-packed earthen floor. "Listen to me! I say we kill Him tomorrow."

---

1 **season of binding:** the approach of fall and winter, when peasants would tie up harvested wheat or corn into sheaves

The two older women look at each other silently. I hate it when they exchange these silent looks.

"We will leave at dawn," I shout. Instead of the gentle dripping of water, I have become a flood. "Get sleep now, for we must get an early start."

"Women weep and children scream," Mad Helga croons to the tiny skeleton in her gnarled hands. "Paddock sleep and paddock dream. Rockabye, be not shy, we shall all sleep bye and bye."

"Listen to me!" I long to shake the old woman until her jaw rattles.

Suddenly Nettle begins to laugh, a harsh, broken cackle that hurts my ears.

"Stop it!" I shout. I want to shake her, too.

But Nettle cackles on and on.

"Don't laugh at me!"

Nettle shakes her head. "When you are daft, child, then I must laugh. Now we have had enough of your jests. There's barley porridge[2] in the kettle. Fetch your bowl and eat your dinner."

"No!" I hit the frame of the door with my fist. "When I came here, seven years ago, you promised to help me. 'Give us seven years of service,' you said, 'and we shall aid you in fetching your heart's desire.' Seven years of service had I given to you, seven years of faithful service, and now I claim my rights." I take a deep breath. "Three days ago I saw Him, the man that I must kill. For seven years I have made my life an arrow, and He is its target. For seven years I have made my heart a dagger, and He is its sheath.[3] I call to you both. Fulfill your promise. Help me kill Him."

---

2 **barley porridge:** a hot dish of cereal made by cooking barley in water or milk

3 **sheath:** the cover for the blade of a knife or sword

Critical Thinking: Infer

Ask Yourself

1. Can you infer the identity of the man Gilly longs to kill (He)? What makes you think so?
2. How would you describe Gilly's relationship with Nettle and Mad Helga? Cite details from the excerpt that led you to draw these conclusions.
3. How do you think people in the nearby villages or countryside feel about these three forest women? Why?
4. Gilly always refers to the object of her hatred as "He." What does this detail tell you about her?
5. What similarities does Gilly share with the Macbeth you have come to know in the play?

Examine the Writing

Inferring is reading between the lines to understand elements that are not explicitly stated. Novels, plays, and poetry often demand that the reader make multiple inferences to derive the deeper meanings of the text. You, the reader, are a vital component in creating meaning from what the writer supplies. If the writer tells you everything directly, there is little to pull you through the text. Good writers leave some blanks for the reader to fill in. You use prior knowledge from your own life and past reading in combination with clues and implied ideas from the text to guide and deepen your understanding. When you read about Gilly, you make inferences based not only on what she says and thinks but on her actions, her way of speaking, her treatment of others, and many other details. Because Gilly's journey is closely aligned with the story of *Macbeth*, you can also make inferences about the story based upon your understanding of the play.

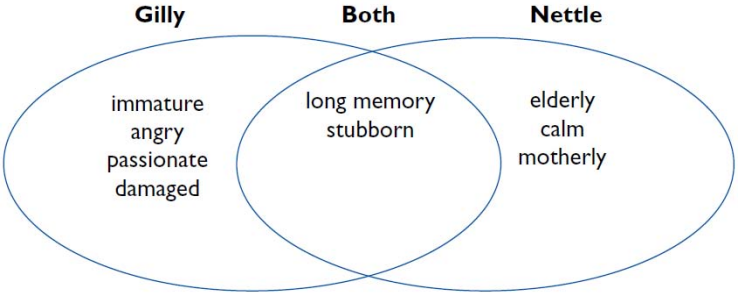
Today, the theme of revenge and retribution remains strong throughout the world—among individuals, between groups, and as the basis for some legal systems. Retribution is often a significant factor in the violent interplay among street gangs, as well as in the tactics of military forces. Choose one of the topics below related to *Macbeth* and *The Third Witch*. Address the topic by writing an essay or giving an oral presentation.

1. In *Macbeth*, the title character fights to the death to achieve his unyielding ambition. In *The Third Witch*, Gilly struggles against huge obstacles to accomplish her revenge. In your opinion, what is a cause or goal that is worth fighting for—and perhaps even dying for? Describe this cause, and explain why you feel as you do.
2. What type of past actions do you think might have caused Gilly to dedicate her life to bringing about the death of "Him"?

Organize Your Thoughts

You can use a Venn diagram like the one below to help clarify your inferences about characters within a work. The example in the chart is based on Gilly and Nettle in the excerpt from *The Third Witch*.

When your diagram is complete, use it as the basis for side-by-side portrait collages of the two characters. You can draw the images yourself or put together composites snipped from outside photographic sources such as newspapers, magazines, or Web sites.



Get Active

With a partner, write the script for a scene depicting a meeting between Gilly and Macbeth. Use details from the play and from the excerpt of the novel to guide you. At what point in the chronology of Macbeth might this meeting take place—during Macbeth's rise or just before his fall? Will Gilly stick to her resolve? What about Macbeth? How might he handle this intense young woman? Be creative and use your inferences to inject as much drama as possible into your scene. When you have finished writing, rehearse with your partner, and perform the scene for the class.

Before You Read *Selected Poetry of John Donne*

John Donne (c. 1572–1631), a Catholic for much of his life, later converted to Anglicanism (the official religion of England) and became an Anglican priest. His early writings are mostly love poems; his later works generally focus on matters of faith. In many of his poems, romantic and religious feeling blend together. In "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," the speaker describes his love for a woman in deeply spiritual terms. As dean of St. Paul's Cathedral in London, Donne was an enormously influential voice in his day. Yet most of his writings are intensely personal as opposed to addressing issues of society and culture. "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" was written when the poet had to travel abroad and be separated from his wife; "Meditation 17" was written when he was dangerously ill.

Literary Lens

Metaphysical Poetry and Conceit Donne was the leading voice of what came to be called *metaphysical poetry,* poetry that moves beyond the physical world to deal with philosophical and religious matters. Often applying logic to emotions, such poetry is known for using the metaphysical conceit, which is an elaborate, often far-fetched comparison even more striking than that of the Petrarchan conceit (see page 249). For example, in one poem Donne compares himself and his wife to compasses, which are tools used to draw circles.

Paradox In addition to conceits, metaphysical poetry makes frequent use of paradoxes. A paradox is a statement or situation that at first seems impossible or illogical but, on closer examination, turns out to be true in some way. Poets often use paradoxes to draw greater truths to the surface or to allow for philosophical insight. For example, Spenser's "Sonnet 30" (page 252) uses a paradox in speaking of fire that grows hotter when it encounters ice. At first it seems impossible that ice can make fire hotter, but then we realize what the speaker means: the icy behavior of his beloved inflames his desire for her.

Donne's Language

Donne's language is quirky and jarring. Breaking with the conventions of Elizabethan love poems, he employs unconventional images—an earthquake, a pair of compasses—instead of the usual birds, flowers, and other pleasant aspects of the natural world. In contrast to poets like Ben Jonson (see page 461), Donne uses language that lacks a harmonious sound, often employing off rhyme, or words that do not quite rhyme, like *move* and *love*, and including midline pauses instead of flowing lines.

The first two poems presented here include parallel text on the facing pages to aid in your understanding of the selections. As always, read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, try using the context as a clue to meaning before turning to the parallel text.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Reflect on poems in the previous units. Which, if any, might you classify as metaphysical poetry? Why?
2. One of Donne's sonnets tells Death not to be proud. If you were writing about death, what adjectives might you use to describe it? Does death seem proud in any way? Explain your answer.
3. What are some paradoxes in modern American life? Identify one, and explain why it is a paradox.

valediction: *statement of farewell*

A Valediction: *Forbidding Mourning*

John Donne

virtuous: *having high moral standards; morally good*

As **virtuous** men pass mildly away,
And whisper to their souls, to go,
Whilst some of their sad friends do say,
The breath goes now, and some say, no:

So let us melt, and make no noise,
No tear-floods, nor sigh-tempests move,
'Twere **profanation** of our joys
To tell the **laity** our love.

profanation: *the disrespect or dishonoring of something sacred*

laity: *common people*

Moving of th' earth brings harms and fears,
Men reckon what it did and meant,
But **trepidation** of the spheres,
Though greater far, is innocent.

trepidation: *feeling of fear*

Dull **sublunary** lovers' love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.

sublunary: *referring to this world, as opposed to a more spiritual, otherworldly realm*

But we by a love, so much refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Interassurèd of the mind,
Care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

A Valediction: *Forbidding Mourning*

John Donne

Parallel Text

Good men die quietly,
Whispering to their souls to go,
While some of their sad friends watch on and say,
"He's gone now," and others say, "No."

Like them, let us melt away from each other quietly
Without floods of tears or storms of sighs.
It would show disrespect to our love
To speak of it to those who cannot understand.

Earthquakes cause both harm and fear,
And men wonder why they come and what they mean.
But changes that happen in the heavens
Cause no harm, even though they are much greater.

The love of dull, sublunary lovers
Is purely physical. So these lovers cannot accept
Each other's absence, because absence removes
Everything their love is made of.

But our love is so fine
That we cannot understand it ourselves.
When our very minds are mingled,
It is less important that our eyes, lips, and hands
are not together.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A **breach**, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

breach: *a break in connections or relations*

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two,
Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

And though it in the center sit,
Yet when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and **hearkens** after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

hearkens: *pays close attention to; listens to*

Such wilt thou be to me, who must
Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end, where I begun.

And so our two souls are one.
And though I must go away, our souls do not suffer
A break. Instead, they expand
Like a sheet of gold beaten to the thinness of air.

25 If our souls are two, they are two in the way
That a drawing compass has two points.
Your soul is the fixed point, and it does not seem
To move. But it does move if the other point moves.

Your point sits in the center of the circle
30 And leans and watches the other point
When it roams far away.
Then it stands straight again when the other point
comes back.

You will be like this to me, for I must
Move away, like the other point.
35 Your faithfulness will make the circle I draw perfect,
And so I will end just where I started.

Meditation 17

John Donne

Nunc lento
sunitu dicunt,
Morieris.

Perchance he for whom this bell tolls,[1] may be so ill, as that he knows not it tolls for him; and perchance I may think myself so much better than I am, as that they who are about me, and see my state, may have caused it to toll for me, and I know not that. The Church is catholic, universal, so are all her actions;[2] all that she does belongs to all. When she baptizes a child, that action concerns me; for that child is thereby connected to that Head[3] which is my Head too, and **engrafted** into that body, whereof I am a member.

engrafted: *joined together*

And when she buries a man, that action concerns me: All mankind is of one Author, and is one volume; when one man dies, one chapter is not torn out of the book, but translated into a better language; and every chapter must be so translated;

God employs several translators; some pieces are translated by age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice; but God's hand is in every translation; and his hand shall bind up all our scattered leaves again, for that Library[4] where every book shall lie open to one another:

As therefore the bell that rings to a sermon, calls not upon the preacher only, but upon the congregation to come; so this bell calls us all: but how much more me, who am brought so near the door by this sickness.

contention: *disagreement; argument*

piety: *dedication to one's beliefs, particularly religious beliefs; devotion to faith*

There was a **contention** as far as a suit (in which both **piety** and dignity, religion and estimation, were mingled), which of the religious

1 **for whom this bell tolls:** Donne is referring to the church bells that would ring out when a member of the community had died.
2 **her actions:** The Church is generally referred to using female pronouns.
3 **Head:** Christ
4 **that Library:** Heaven

Meditation 17

John Donne
Parallel Text

Now, this bell that tolls softly
for another says to me,
"You must die."

Perhaps the man for whom this bell tolls is so ill that he does not know it tolls for him. And perhaps I think myself much more well than I am. So perhaps the people around me see how sick I am, and have caused it to toll for me, and I don't realize it.

The church is broad and limitless, and so are all Her actions. All that She does belongs to everyone. When She baptizes a child, that action concerns me. For that child becomes connected to that Head which is my head too. The child joins that body of Christ of which I am also a part.

And when the church buries a man, that action also concerns me. All mankind has one author, God, and is one book. When one man dies, a chapter is not torn out of the book. Instead, it is translated into a better language. And every chapter must be so translated.

God uses several translators. Some pieces are translated by old age, some by sickness, some by war, some by justice. But God's hand is in every translation. And his hand will bind together all our scattered pages again. And we will go to that library where all books shall lie open to one another.

And so the bell that rings for a sermon does not call only the preacher. It also calls his flock to come. This bell calls us all. But it calls to me most of all, because I have been brought so near death by this sickness.

I know of a quarrel that turned into a lawsuit. In it, faith and dignity, religion and self-esteem were all mixed together. It had to do with

orders should ring to prayers first in the morning; and it was determined, that they should ring first that rose earliest.

If we understand aright the dignity of this bell that tolls for our evening prayer, we would be glad to make it ours, by rising early, in that application, that it might be ours, as well as his, whose indeed it is. The bell doth toll for him that thinks it doth; and though it **intermit** again, yet from that minute, that that occasion wrought upon him, he is united to God. Who casts not up his eye to the sun when it rises? but who takes off his eye from a comet when that breaks out? Who bends not his ear to any bell, which upon any occasion rings? but who can remove it from that bell, which is passing a piece of himself out of this world?

intermit: *stop for a period of time*

No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a **clod** be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a **promontory** were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.

clod: *lump of earth or clay*

promontory: *piece of land that juts out above water*

Neither can we call this a begging of misery or a borrowing of misery, as though we were not miserable enough of ourselves, but must fetch in more from the next house, in taking upon us the misery of our neighbors.

Truly it were an excusable covetousness if we did; for **affliction** is a treasure, and scarce any man hath enough of it. No man hath affliction enough that is not matured, and ripened by it, and made fit for God by that affliction.

affliction: *something that causes pain or suffering*

If a man carry treasure in bullion, or in a wedge of gold, and have none coined into current monies, his treasure will not **defray** him as he travels. Tribulation is treasure in the nature of it, but it is not current money in the use of it, except we get nearer and nearer our home, Heaven, by it.

defray: *pay a cost or expense*

Another man may be sick too, and sick to death, and this affliction may lie in his bowels, as gold in a mine, and be of no use to him; but this bell, that tells me of his affliction, digs out, and applies that gold to me;

if by this consideration of another's danger I take mine own into contemplation, and so secure myself by making my recourse to my God, who is our only security.

which monastery should ring the prayer bells first in the morning. It was decided that the monastery that rose earliest should ring first.

If we fully understand the dignity of this bell tolling for our evening prayer, we will gladly rise early to ring it. Then it will belong to us, as well as to the man for whom it is meant.

The bell tolls for any man who thinks it tolls for him. And even though the bell may stop again, a man is united with God from the moment he realizes this.

Who does not turn his eye toward the sun when it rises? Who can stop looking at a comet once it appears? Who does not turn to listen to any bell, no matter what it rings for? And who cannot think that it marks the passing of a piece of himself from this world?

No man is an island, complete in itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the mainland. If a piece of dirt is washed away by the sea, Europe is made smaller, just as it would be if a whole hill were washed away—or a house belonging to your friends, or your own house.

Any man's death makes me smaller, because I am part of mankind. So never send someone to find out for whom the bell tolls. It tolls for you.

In saying all this, we are not begging or borrowing misery Are we not miserable enough already? Must we fetch more misery from the next house, and take upon us the misery of our neighbors?

But truthfully, we would be excusable in our envy if we did. For suffering is a treasure, and hardly any man has enough of it. If a man suffers enough, his suffering matures and ripens him, and he is made more fit for God by it.

Suppose a man carries his treasure in bars of gold and has none coined into money. His treasure will not pay his way as he travels. Trouble is treasure by its very nature. But it is not really money, except when we use it to get nearer and nearer our home, heaven.

Perhaps another man is sick too, and sick to death. This illness may lie in his bowels, as gold lies in a mine, and be of no use to him. But this bell that tells me of his illness digs out his gold and makes it useful to me.

Someone else's danger makes me think carefully about my own. And so I bring myself safety by asking for help from God, who is our only safety.

Holy Sonnet 10

John Donne

Death be not proud, though some have callèd thee
Mighty and dreadful, for though art not so,
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow,
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me.
5 From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,[1]
And soonest our best men with thee do go,
Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.[2]
Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
10 And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
And poppy,[3] or charms can make us sleep as well,
And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And death shall be no more; Death, thou shalt die.

1 **From rest . . . must flow:** We receive so much pleasure from rest and sleep, so similar to death, that we should find death even more pleasurable.
2 **soul's delivery:** freeing of the soul from the body that comes with death
3 **poppy:** opium, a narcotic drug made from the juice of the poppy

After You Read *Selected Poetry of John Donne*

Literary Lens: Paradox

"Holy Sonnet 10" ends with a paradox. On a chart like the one below, explain why the statement is a paradox. Then complete another row for at least one other paradox in the selections by Donne.

Selection	Paradox	Why It Seems Impossible	How It Can Be True
"Holy Sonnet 10"	Death, thou shalt die.		

Explore Context: Scientific Advancement

Several of the images in Donne's poems come from the world of science. Do research to learn more about scientific advancement in Renaissance England, especially in the areas of astronomy, earth science, and physical geography. Then write a paragraph or two explaining how the scientific developments during the Renaissance are reflected in Donne's poetry. Cite specific examples from the poems to support your conclusions.

Apply and Create: A Modern Twist

Several of Donne's observations and statements about human nature have been adapted and used by artists that came after him. Find a summary online of Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. In small groups, discuss how the use of Donne's phrase from "Meditation 17" might relate to Hemingway's novel about the Spanish Civil War. Then, listen to Simon and Garfunkel's classic song "I Am a Rock." Compare their perspective to Donne's in "Meditation 17" ("No man is an island . . ."). In your groups, brainstorm an idea for a novel or song using another one of Donne's more impacting observations. Create an outline that gives an overview of the novel's main plot or the general concept of the song, and share your idea with the class.

Read Critically

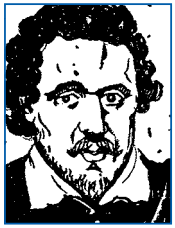
Read these lines from "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning." Then answer the questions that follow.

Dull sublunary lovers' love
(Whose soul is sense) cannot admit
15 Absence, because it doth remove
Those things which elemented it.
But we by a love, so much refined,
That ourselves know not what it is,
Interassurèd of the mind,
20 Care less eyes, lips, and hands to miss.

Our two souls therefore, which are one,
Though I must go, endure not yet
A breach, but an expansion,
Like gold to airy thinness beat.

1. What does the speaker say is more important than physical love? Explain why he forbids his love from mourning their physical separation.
2. In what way is the message in "Holy Sonnet 10" (see page 458) similar to the speaker's message to his wife in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"?

Before You Read *Selected Poetry of Ben Jonson*



Ben Jonson (1573–1637) was the stepson of a bricklayer and practiced that trade for a time during his youth. He had little formal education but more than made up for it by doing his own reading and studying. He and William Shakespeare were close friends; in fact, Shakespeare acted in Jonson's first play, *Every Man in His Humor*. Yet Jonson could be critical of his fellow playwright. He felt that Shakespeare's plays were sometimes carelessly written and showed a lack of education. Even so, he wrote a poem honoring Shakespeare's memory for an early edition of his friend's plays.

Jonson's best-known plays are comedies such as *Volpone* and *The Alchemist.* He was also one of the most respected lyric poets of his time. Drawing on ancient Roman poets like Horace and Catullus, his well-crafted, musical verse helped inspire a younger generation of poets often called the Sons (or Tribe) of Ben.

Literary Lens

Tone The two poems by Jonson each have a very different tone. Tone is the attitude conveyed by a speaker or writer toward his or her subject. In poetry, imagery, sound, types of sentences (such as questions or exclamations), and diction (or word choice) all help convey a writer's tone.

Epigram "On My First Son" appears in a group of poems that Jonson called *epigrams*. The word *epigram* comes from two Greek roots that together mean "to write upon." An epigram is a short piece written to give permanence to an event—like an engraving on a monument. Most epigrams display a certain amount of wit, even when their subjects are very serious, as is Jonson's subject in this poem.

Jonson's Language

As a lyric poet, Jonson used polished, musical language. In contrast to John Donne (see page 449), a contemporary of Jonson's whose style greatly impacted future poets, Jonson's language is much smoother, with none of the jarring images for which Donne is known. Jonson's rhythms, too, are smooth and regular. Midline pauses are infrequent in his poetry, and he uses end-stopped lines, in which the sense does not run on from one verse to another. Jonson's poems have often been set to music because of their lyric beauty, "Song: To Celia" being one of the better-known examples.

Each of Jonson's poems presented here includes parallel text on facing pages to aid in your understanding of the text. As always, read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, try using the context as a clue to meaning before turning to the parallel text.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Which poems that appear earlier in this unit do you think are best suited to being set to music? Why?
2. "On My First Son" was inspired by the death of Jonson's young son. What are some of the different emotions that the death of a child might cause a parent to feel?
3. "Song: To Celia" speaks of pledging love with one's eyes. Do you think that is possible? Why or why not?

On My First Son

Ben Jonson

Farewell, thou child of my right hand,[1] and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy:
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
5 Oh, could I lose all father now! for why
Will man **lament** the state he should envy—
To have so soon 'scaped world's and flesh's rage,
And if no other misery, yet age?
Rest in soft peace, and asked, say, "Here doth lie
10 Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry;
For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such
As what he loves may never like too much."

lament: *mourn; express one's grief*

1 **child of my right hand:** Jonson's son was also named Benjamin, which in Hebrew means "son of my right hand."

On My First Son

Ben Jonson

Parallel Text

Ben Jonson lost two children to the plague—a daughter and a son. He wrote poems about both deaths. In this poem, he says farewell to his son, whom he calls "child of my right hand." This is a translation from Hebrew of the boy's name, Benjamin.

The boy died on his seventh birthday. Seven years was the amount of time typically given to pay back a loan. So Jonson compares the boy's life to a loan. "Forced by fate, I pay you back on the exact day," he says.

He wishes he could end his feeling of fatherhood. He finds it strange that he should grieve, when his son's fate is truly enviable. After all, Benjamin has escaped trouble, sickness, and old age.

He asks his son to rest in peace. He also asks him to tell visitors to his grave that he is Ben Jonson's "best piece of poetry." As for Jonson, he vows never to love anyone in quite the same way he loved his son.

Song: To Celia

Ben Jonson

pledge: *solemn promise*

divine: *of or from the gods*

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will **pledge** with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink **divine**;
But might I of Jove's nectar[1] sup,
I would not change for thine.
I sent thee late a rosy wreath,
Not so much honoring thee
As giving it a hope, that there
It could not withered be.
But thou thereon didst only breathe,
And sent'st it back to me;
Since when it grows, and smells, I swear,
Not of itself but thee.

1 **Jove's nectar:** Jove is another name for the god Jupiter; he would not trade his lady's love for wine of the gods.

Song: To Celia

Ben Jonson

Parallel Text

Simply drink to me with your eyes,
And I will promise faithfulness with mine.
Or put nothing in the cup but a kiss,
And I'll not wish there was wine in it.
5 The thirst felt by the soul
Longs for a divine drink.
But even if I could sip from the immortal drink of the gods,
I would not exchange it for yours.
Lately, I sent you a wreath of roses—
10 Not so much to honor you
As in the hope
That it would never wither.
You merely breathed on it
And sent it back to me.
15 Since then it keeps growing—and I swear that it smells
Not like flowers, but like you.

After You Read *Selected Poetry of Ben Jonson*

Literary Lens: Tone

Contrast the tone of the two poems by Ben Jonson. Create a chart like the one below to gather details about the poems' diction, imagery, sentence flow, and sound. Explain how these details all contribute to the poem's tone.

Poetic Element	How It Contributes to Tone of "On My First Son"	How It Contributes to Tone of "Song: To Celia"
Diction		
Imagery		
Sentence Flow		
Sound		

Explore Context: Child Mortality

Jonson's son Benjamin, who died of the plague in 1603, was one of many children in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries who perished before their tenth birthday. Research child mortality and its effects on society in Jonson's day. Then write a short report on your findings and share them with the class. Also discuss how "On My First Son" reflects parental attitudes about child mortality during this time.

Apply and Create: Epigram

With a partner, discuss how "On My First Son" fits the definition of an epigram. Where would it be appropriate to inscribe the poem? Why? After your discussion, work together to create a four- to eight-line epigram on a different subject. For example, your poem might be about travel or labor and be appropriate for inscription on a newly completed bridge or tunnel.

Read Critically

Reread these lines from Jonson's poems. Then answer the questions that follow.

from "On My First Son"

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;
My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy:
Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,
Exacted by thy fate, on the just day.
5 Oh, could I lose all father now! for why
Will man lament the state he should envy—
To have so soon 'scaped world's and flesh's rage,
And if no other misery, yet age?

from **"Song: To Celia"**

Drink to me only with thine eyes,
And I will pledge with mine;
Or leave a kiss but in the cup,
And I'll not look for wine.
5 The thirst that from the soul doth rise
Doth ask a drink divine;
But might I of Jove's nectar sup,
I would not change for thine.

1. In "On My First Son," why do you think the speaker feels that loving his son too much was a "sin"? What irony about human attitudes toward death do lines 5–8 underscore?
2. What "drink" does the speaker in "Song: To Celia" value more than wine and even the nectar of the gods?
3. Contrast "Song: To Celia" with Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning" (page 450). Focus on differences in imagery and sound. Which poem do you think best conveys the love that the speaker wants to express? Why?

Before You Read *"To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," "To His Coy Mistress," and "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars"*

Robert Herrick (1591–1674) was one of several poets who called themselves Sons of Ben because they were strongly influenced by Ben Jonson. Herrick was a clergyman, but most of his poems are worldly, lighthearted love poems.

Andrew Marvell (1621–1678) was better known as a politician than as a poet. A Puritan, he became a member of Parliament during Oliver Cromwell's rule, and his political career continued after Cromwell's fall.

Richard Lovelace (1618–1658) wrote "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars" when he was about to fight for King Charles in the English Civil War. Lovelace is known as a Cavalier, a name used at the time for supporters of King Charles. Herrick was also a Cavalier. After the Puritans took power, Lovelace spent much time in prison and died in poverty. While in prison, he wrote a poem in which he famously declared "Stone walls do not a prison make, / Nor iron bars a cage."

Literary Lens

Hyperbole Many poems about love contain hyperbole, which is exaggeration not meant to be taken literally but used for poetic, humorous, and/or persuasive effect. When the speaker in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" says that if they had time, his mistress could stand in India while he courted her from England, he is using hyperbole.

Carpe Diem Herrick's "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" and Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" are probably the two most famous examples of carpe diem poems in English. The phrase *carpe diem*, which goes back to a poem by the ancient Roman poet Horace, literally means "seize the day" in Latin. Carpe diem poems advise the reader to make the most of life, because it is fleeting. The logic of such an argument appealed to seventeenth-century poets, who often used logic to explain or defend human emotions.

Herrick's, Marvell's, and Lovelace's Language

Both Robert Herrick and the Cavalier poet Richard Lovelace employ the musical language and traditional poetic imagery associated with Ben Jonson's verse. Herrick compares innocent young maidens to rosebuds, for example; Lovelace speaks of the "nunnery" of such a maiden's "chaste breast and quiet mind." In contrast, the language of Puritan poet Andrew Marvell shows the influence of John Donne's metaphysical verse, employing unusual, far-fetched images such as comparing himself and his beloved to "birds of prey" and slow-growing love to a vegetable.

Each poem presented here includes parallel text on facing pages to aid in your understanding of the text. As always, read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, try using the context as a clue to meaning before turning to the parallel text.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. How might Renaissance thinking be reflected in carpe diem poems? Do you think *carpe diem* also reflects modern thinking? Why or why not?
2. Which characters that you met in the Prologue of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (see pages 94–145) do you think would support a carpe diem philosophy? Why?

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Robert Herrick

Gather ye rosebuds while ye may,
Old time is still a-flying;
And this same flower that smiles today
Tomorrow will be dying.

The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
When youth and blood are warmer:
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

Then be not **coy**, but use your time,
And, while ye may, go marry;
For, having lost but once your **prime**,
You may forever tarry.

coy: *modest or hesitant*

prime: *time of greatest strength and energy in a person's life*

To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time

Robert Herrick

Parallel Text

Gather rosebuds while you can,
For time is always passing.
And this same flower that blooms today
Will be dying tomorrow.

That glorious lamp of heaven,
The sun, rises in the sky.
But the higher he goes, the sooner his race is run,
And the closer he is to setting.

The best time of life is the earliest,
When youth and blood are warm.
But once youth is gone, worse and worse
Is the time that follows.

So don't be coy, use your time well,
And marry while you can.
For once you've lost your youth,
You might wait for marriage forever.

TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Andrew Marvell

Had we but world enough, and time,
This coyness, Lady, were no crime.
We would sit down, and think which way
To walk, and pass our long love's day.
5 Thou by the Indian Ganges'[1] side
Shouldst rubies[2] find; I by the tide
Of Humber[3] would complain.[4] I would
Love you ten years before the Flood,[5]
And you should, if you please, refuse
10 Till the conversion of the Jews.[6]
My vegetable love[7] should grow
Vaster than empires and more slow;
An hundred years should go to praise
Thine eyes, and on thy forehead gaze;
15 Two hundred to adore each breast,
But thirty thousand to the rest;
An age at least to every part,
And the last age should show your heart.
For, Lady, you deserve this state,

1 **Indian Ganges':** The Ganges is one of the major rivers in India.
2 **rubies:** People used to believe these gems protected women's virginity.
3 **Humber:** body of water in northern England
4 **complain:** sing mournful songs
5 **Flood:** Biblical flood that occurs in the book of Genesis
6 **Till . . . Jews:** Marvell is referring to the belief shared by Christians during that time that all Jews would convert to Christianity just before the end of the world and the Last Judgment.
7 **vegetable love:** love that grows slowly like a plant

TO HIS COY MISTRESS

Andrew Marvell

Parallel Text

If we had enough space and time,
Lady, your coyness would be no crime.
We would sit down and think about which way
To walk, and how to pass our long day in love.
5 You would find rubies
By the side of the Indian Ganges, while I
Would complain on the Humber's shore.
I would love you for ten years before the flood,
And if you wished to, you could refuse me
10 Till the conversion of the Jews.
My plant-like love would grow
Greater and more slowly than empires.
I would take a hundred years to praise
Your eyes and gaze on your forehead,
15 Then take two hundred to adore each breast,
And 30,000 more for the rest of you.
Each part would take an age,
And the last age would show your heart.
For, lady, you deserve all this attention,

Nor would I love at lower rate.
But at my back I always hear
Time's wingèd chariot hurrying near;
And yonder all before us lie
Deserts of **vast** eternity.

vast: *immense; of great quantity*

Thy beauty shall no more be found,
Nor, in thy marble vault, shall sound
My echoing song; then worms shall try
That long-preserved virginity,
And your quaint honor turn to dust,
And into ashes all my lust:
The grave's a fine and private place,
But none, I think, do there embrace.
Now therefore, while the youthful **hue**
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,

hue: *shade or color*

And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
Than **languish** in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life;
Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

languish: *grow weak; fail to move*

Nor do I wish to give you less love.
But at my back, I always hear
The winged chariot of time hurrying near.
And spread out before us yonder
Are eternity's vast deserts.
Your beauty will not be found
In your marble funeral vault, nor will my echoing song
Be heard there. Then worms will try to take
Your long-guarded virginity.
Your old-fashioned honor will turn to dust,
And my lust will turn to ashes.
The grave is a fine and private place,
But I do not think anyone embraces there.
Right now, a youthful color
Sits on your skin like morning dew,
And your willing soul breathes
Out quick fires from your every pore.
So let us enjoy each other while we can
And behave like loving birds of prey,
Devouring time instead of
Allowing time to slowly chew us up.
Let us roll up all our strength
And sweetness into a cannonball,
And take pleasure in using it to tear through
The iron gates of life.
So even though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, we will make him run.

To Lucasta, on **Going to the Wars**

Richard Lovelace

Tell me not, sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind
To war and arms I fly.

5 True, a new mistress now I chase,
The first foe in the field;
And with a stronger faith embrace
A sword, a horse, a shield.

inconstancy: *frequently changing; not dependable*

Yet this **inconstancy** is such
10 As you too shall adore;
I could not love thee, dear, so much,
Loved I not honor more.

To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars

Richard Lovelace

Parallel Text

In this poem addressed to his sweetheart, the speaker compares going to war to taking another lover. He describes his sweetheart's company as pure and virtuous—a kind of "nunnery," or convent where nuns live together.

He now leaves to chase a "new mistress"—"the first foe in the field." And with greater faithfulness than he has ever shown to his sweetheart, he will embrace "a sword, a horse, a shield."

Even so, he tells his sweetheart that she should cherish this unfaithfulness. It reflects well on his love for her. "I could not love you so much, dear," he says, "if I did not love honor more."

After You Read *"To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time," "To His Coy Mistress," and "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars"*

Literary Lens: Hyperbole

In addition to the example given on page 468, find two more examples of hyperbole in "To His Coy Mistress." Explain how the example helps convey the poem's ideas or emotions and how the woman addressed in the poem might react to the hyperbole.

Explore Context: The English Civil War

Based on "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars," what conclusions can you draw about the motives and principles of the Cavaliers, such as Richard Lovelace, who fought for the monarchy in the English Civil War? Write a paragraph stating your conclusions, supporting them with details from the poem. Then research the English Civil War. Expand your paragraph by adding new information about the ideals that inspired the Cavaliers.

Apply and Create: Examine an Argument's Validity

In small groups, debate the *carpe diem* theme as conveyed in the poems by Herrick and Marvell. Consider the logic each poem uses to argue its point and the validity of the argument it makes. You might use a mathematical formula such as the one below to help you explain the logic in Marvell's poem, filling in specific information from the poem.

If x *were true,*	In the poem, *x* is_____;
Then we would do y*;*	*y* is _____;
But the opposite of x *is true,*	the opposite of *x* is _____;
So we should do the opposite of y.	the opposite of *y* is _____

Read Critically

Read these lines from the poems by Herrick and Marvell. Then answer the questions that follow.

from "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time"

5 The glorious lamp of heaven, the sun,
The higher he's a-getting,
The sooner will his race be run,
And nearer he's to setting.

That age is best which is the first,
10 When youth and blood are warmer:
But being spent, the worse, and worst
Times still succeed the former.

from **"To His Coy Mistress"**

Now therefore, while the youthful hue
Sits on thy skin like morning dew,
35 And while thy willing soul transpires
At every pore with instant fires,
Now let us sport us while we may,
And now, like amorous birds of prey,
Rather at once our time devour
40 Than languish in his slow-chapped power.
Let us roll all our strength and all
Our sweetness up into one ball,
And tear our pleasures with rough strife
Through the iron gates of life;
45 Thus, though we cannot make our sun
Stand still, yet we will make him run.

1. What do both poems suggest about youth and age? What does the sun represent in each poem?
2. Explain the relationship of the poems' speakers to those addressed. Which speaker seems to have purer motives? Explain.
3. How is the main message of these two poems different from that of "To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars" (page 476)? Which poem do you think best reflects events or ideas of seventeenth-century England? Why?

Before You Read *Selected Poetry of John Milton*

John Milton (1608–1674) was a deeply religious poet whose greatest work, *Paradise Lost*, explores the ways of God in the world. Milton knew from an early age that he wished to write great poetry, but as a young man he was disappointed with the poems he wrote. When Oliver Cromwell took power, Milton, a Puritan, served in his government. During this time, Milton's writing was almost exclusively political. Milton was arrested when Cromwell died and the monarchy was restored. The poet lived under threat of execution and survived this difficult time partly due to the help of his friend and fellow poet Andrew Marvell. Later in life, Milton gradually went blind from an eye ailment and was completely sightless by the time he was forty-three. Losing his sight did not diminish his talent, however. *Paradise Lost*, considered by many to be the greatest epic poem in the English language, was created in Milton's final years by the poet dictating the entire text to assistants and family.

Literary Lens

Epic You've already read excerpts from Chaucer's epic poem, *The Canterbury Tales*. Like that work, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a long narrative that conveys noble ideas through lofty words and heroic action. Although Milton's epic includes common Christian beliefs and values of his time, he modeled the text on traditional epics of classical Greece and Rome. For example, he begins the poem *in medias res*, or in the middle of the action. Much has happened before the poem begins. Milton also offers an invocation, a common Roman device that is a call for inspiration. In *Paradise Lost,* he calls on a Christian muse for help.

Allusion Milton's poetry makes many allusions to classical mythology and the Bible. An allusion is a reference within a work to a famous person, event, or another work of literature. Editors often provide footnotes, marginal notes, or other explanations to help readers understand a writer's allusions.

Milton's Language

Throughout all his work, especially his epic *Paradise Lost,* Milton employs lofty language to convey his noble themes. His diction, or word choice, is vivid and eloquent; Hell, for example, is a region of "doleful shades," "torture without end," and a "fiery deluge." His use of longer lines (rhymed iambic pentameter in the sonnets and unrhymed iambic pentameter, or blank verse, in *Paradise Lost*) adds to the serious, elevated tone, as do his complex sentences extending over many lines.

The selections presented here include parallel text on facing pages to aid in comprehension. As always, read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, try using the context as a clue to meaning before turning to the parallel text.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. What historical events and ideas of the time (see pages 242–247) most likely affected Milton as a writer?
2. Legend has it that Homer, the ancient Greek author of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, was blind. How might knowledge of Homer's blindness have impacted Milton?

3. Think about epic movies you've seen. Based on this and your reading of *Beowulf* in Unit 1, what kinds of scenes and characters do you expect to find in *Paradise Lost?*

How Soon Hath Time

John Milton

subtle: *cunning or crafty*

semblance: *outward appearance*

How soon hath Time, the **subtle** thief of youth,
Stoln on his wing my three and twentieth year!
My hasting days fly on with full career,
But my late spring no bud or blossom show'th.
Perhaps my **semblance** might deceive the truth,
That I to manhood am arrived so near,
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,
That some more timely-happy spirits endu'th.
Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,
It shall be still in strictest measure even
To that same lot, however mean or high,
Toward which Time leads me, and the will of Heaven;
All is, if I have grace to use it so,
As ever in my great Taskmaster's[1] eye.

1 **great Taskmaster's:** Milton is referring to God as an authoritative figure who assigns and oversees work.

How Soon Hath Time

John Milton

Parallel Text

Time, that cunning thief of youth,
has flown away with my 23rd year so quickly!
My hurried days fly by with full speed,
but I haven't accomplished all I would have liked to by now.
Perhaps my appearance is deceiving
and doesn't show that I'm so close to manhood.
Perhaps my inner maturity isn't as easy to see
as the outward signs of maturity some are blessed with.
But whether my growth is less or more, or fast or slow,
it will always be adequate.
I will fulfill my fate, however low or high,
toward which time and the will of heaven lead me.
All is eternal in God's eye,
and I only need faith to accept this.

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent

John Milton

When I consider how my light is spent
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning **chide**;
"Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?"
I fondly[1] ask; but Patience to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

chide: *rebuke or scold*

1 **fondly:** used here to mean "foolishly"

When I Consider How My Light Is Spent

John Milton

Parallel Text

In this sonnet, Milton explores his feelings about his own blindness. He has "spent" his eyesight before his life is half over. How can he, a poet, fulfill his duty to God when he cannot see?

He remembers a story told by Jesus in the book of Matthew (25:14–30). In it, a master gave his servant a coin **(talent)** and expected him to invest it wisely for him. Instead, the servant buried the coin, for which he was driven away by his master.

Milton compares himself to the servant, even though he is much more eager to serve his own master, God. His sight, like the coin, is hidden and useless, and he fears that God will criticize him. Milton wonders, "Does God expect me to work, even when I have no light?"

But Milton's inner voice **(Patience)** prevents him from making such a complaint against God and answers: "God does not need a man's work or gifts. A man serves God best by quietly bearing his troubles **(mild yoke)**. God lives a kingly life, and thousands of angels rush over land and sea obeying his orders without rest. But others serve him by simply standing and waiting."

from Paradise Lost

John Milton

According to Christian belief, humankind had suffered a terrible fall from perfection. Adam and Eve, the first human beings, originally lived blissfully in the Garden of Eden. However, when an evil serpent convinced them to disobey God and eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, God had no choice but to bring death and suffering into the world and force the couple to leave Eden forever.

The story of original sin has stirred up many questions over the centuries: Why was it such a sin to eat from the tree? Why did God have no choice but to end Adam and Eve's perfect life and kick them out of Eden? Why did Jesus Christ have to die to save humankind from this original sin? A devout Puritan, Milton wanted to take on these questions and more; in Paradise Lost *he planned to do nothing less than "justify the ways of God to men." Milton's story starts before the fall of Adam and Eve—and even before creation of the world.*

As the poem begins, Satan is writhing in Hell. He and his fellow rebel angels have been cast out of heaven for warring against God. It is Satan who will become the evil serpeant who urges Adam and Eve to disobey.

There was surely no doubt in Milton's mind that Satan was evil. Even so, Milton could not help portraying Satan as a complex and tragic character. Satan has noble qualities, including strength, courage, intelligence, and skill at leadership. Although Milton presents humanity, as represented by Adam and Eve, as the hero of Paradise Lost, *many writers that followed, including William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley, have suggested that Satan is the true hero of the epic.*

Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
5 Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing, Heavenly Muse,[1] that on the secret top

1 **Heavenly Muse:** The ancient epics of Homer and Virgil began with the poet asking for the help of one of the Muses, the goddesses of artistic inspiration. Here, Milton is referring to the Spirit of God.

from Paradise Lost

John Milton

Parallel Text

Sing, Heavenly Muse, of man's first disobedience, and the fruit
Of that forbidden tree whose deadly taste
Brought death and woe into the world.
Sing of how Eden was lost to us until Jesus Christ
5 Regains that happy place for us again.
On the secret mountain tops

Of Oreb, or of Sinai,[2] didst inspire
That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
In the beginning how the heavens and earth
10 Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook[3] that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
15 Above th' Aonian mount,[4] while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
20 Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dovelike sat'st brooding on the vast **abyss**,
And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
Illumine; what is low, raise and support;
That to the height of this great argument
25 I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justify the ways of God to men.
Say first (for Heaven hides nothing from thy view,
Nor the deep tract of Hell), say first what cause
Moved our grand parents, in that happy state,
30 Favored of Heaven so highly, to fall off
From their Creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the world
besides?
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?
Th' **infernal** serpent; he it was, whose guile,
35 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,

abyss: *bottomless pit; seemingly endless chasm*

infernal: *relating to or characteristic of hell*

2 **Oreb . . . Sinai:** mountains where Moses heard the voice of God
3 **Sion hill . . . Siloa's brook:** places in Jerusalem
4 **Aonian mount:** Mount Helicon, a mountain in Greece where the Muses were thought to live

Of Horeb and Sinai, you inspired
Moses to teach the Jews
How the heavens and earth rose out of Chaos
10 In the beginning. Or perhaps Mount Zion
Delights you more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the Temple. If so, by their names
I ask your help for my adventurous song.
For I intend to make no trifling flight
15 Above Mount Helicon in pursuit
Of things not yet attempted in prose or rhyme.
So teach me, Spirit—
You who prefer an upright and pure heart
To all temples. Teach me, for you know all. You were present
20 At the beginning, and you spread your mighty, dove-like wings
As you sat brooding over the vast nothingness,
Then gave it shape. Whatever is dark in me,
Make light. Whatever is low in me, raise and support.
Help me rise to the height of this great subject
25 So I can praise God's plan for the universe
And show men the justice of God's ways.
Neither heaven nor the deepest parts of hell
Can hide anything from you. So speak first of
Adam and Eve, born to happy lives
30 And favored so highly by heaven. Why did they fall out
With their creator? Why did they disobey his will
In one small matter, when they could have been lords of
the world?
Who first persuaded them to that foul revolt?
It was the infernal serpent. His cunning
35 Was stirred up with envy and revenge, so he lied
To the mother of mankind. Because of his pride,
He had already been cast out of heaven, with all his army
Of rebel angels. With their aid, he had hoped
To set himself above his equals in glory.

He trusted to have equaled the Most High,
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God
Raised **impious** war in Heaven and battle proud,
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from th' **ethereal** sky
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In **adamantine** chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent to arms.
Nine times the space that measures day and night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf
Confounded though immortal. But his doom
Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his **baleful** eyes,
That witnessed huge affliction and dismay,
Mixed with **obdùrate** pride and steadfast hate.
At once, as far as angels **ken**, he views
The dismal situation waste and wild:
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Served only to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, **doleful** shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery **deluge**, fed
With ever-burning sulphur[5] unconsumed:
Such place Eternal Justice had prepared
For those rebellious; here their prison ordained
In utter darkness and their portion set
As far removed from God and light of Heaven
As from the center thrice to th' utmost pole.
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed

impious: *not showing respect or reverence*

ethereal: *heavenly; spiritual*

adamantine: *unbreakable*

confounded: *overthrown; defeated*

baleful: *threatening or destructive*

obdurate: *stubborn*

ken: *range of knowledge*

doleful: *mournful, glum*

deluge: *large quantity of something*

5 **ever-burning sulphur:** also known as brimstone; associated with Hell and God's wrath

Indeed, he expected to have been a match for God himself
If they should fight. So with the ambitious aim
Of seizing the throne and kingship of God,
He started an unholy war in Heaven. Satan fought proudly,
But in vain. The almighty power
Hurled him headfirst and flaming from heaven.
Down he fell horribly, all on fire,
To bottomless damnation. There he was to live
In unbreakable chains and punishing fire
For having dared defy God with arms.
For nine times the time that mortal men call
Day and night, Satan and his horrid crew
Lay defeated, rolling in the fiery deep,
Baffled but immortal. But Satan's doom
Meant only more suffering, for now he was tortured
By thoughts of both his lost happiness
And lasting pain. He looked around with deadly eyes,
Seeing great suffering and dismay,
Feeling a mixture of stubborn pride and determined hate.
As far as angels can see, he viewed
The dismal scene, wasted and wild.
It was a horrible dungeon—a great, flaming furnace
On all sides. And yet, those flames gave
No light, but rather a visible darkness
Which served only to show sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, and sad shadows. Peace
And rest can never live there. Hope, that comes to all,
Is never there. But torture without end
Always afflicts—and a rain of fire fed
With ever-burning, endless sulfur.
Such a place eternal justice had prepared
For those who rebelled. It was a prison fixed
In utter darkness, and their part was set
Twice as far below the earth
As God and the light of Heaven are above it.
Oh, how unlike the place they fell from!
Satan soon could see the comrades who had fallen

With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
He soon discerns; and, weltering by his side,
One next himself in power, and next in crime,
80 Long after known in Palestine, and named
Beëlzebub. To whom th' arch-enemy,
And thence in Heaven called Satan,[6] with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence thus began:
"If thou beëst he—but O how fallen!
how changed
85 From him who in the happy realms of light
Clothed with **transcendent** brightness didst outshine
Myriads, though bright! if he whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the glorious enterprise,
90 Joined with me once, now misery hath joined
In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest
From what height fallen, so much the
stronger proved
He with his thunder: and till then who knew
The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,
95 Nor what the potent Victor in his rage
Can else inflict, do I repent or change,
Though changed in outward luster, that fixed mind
And high disdain, from sense of injured merit,
That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,
100 And to the fierce contention brought along
Innumerable force of spirits armed,
That durst dislike his reign, and me preferring,
His utmost power with adverse power opposed
In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven,
105 And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
All is not lost: the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?

transcendent: *beyond the human experience; not subject to the limitations of the material world*

myriad: *extremely large number*

6 **known in Palestine . . . called Satan:** Satan, Hebrew for "evil," is the name of the angel who fell from Heaven. Beëlzebub is another name used to refer to Satan and was originally the name of a god worshipped by the Philistines and Phoenicians.

With him, overwhelmed with floods and whirlwinds
Of stormy fire. And writhing at his side
Was one who was next in power and in crime.
80 Long afterwards, he was known in Palestine by the name of
Beëlzebub. Satan, whose very name
Means "enemy," broke the horrid silence
With these bold words:
"Are you really he? Oh, how you've fallen! How
you've changed!
85 Once, in happy worlds of light,
You were dressed in perfect brightness, and you outshone
Countless other bright beings! You sided with me,
Became my comrade. We shared thoughts and advice,
And our hopes and risks in this glorious plan
90 Were equal. But now misery has joined us
In equal ruin. You see what a pit we've fallen into,
And from what a height, because God proved so much
stronger
With his thunder. Till then, who knew
The strength of those grim arms? And yet I won't repent or change—
95 Not because of our fall, nor anything else
Our powerful victor can do to us in his rage.
My outward brilliance is gone, but I still have a fixed mind
And high pride that come from unrewarded worth.
I raised myself up to fight with the mightiest
100 In fierce battle, and brought along
An armed force of countless spirits
That disliked his reign and preferred me.
We attacked his utmost power with all we had
In doubtful battle on the plains of heaven
105 And shook his throne. So what if the field is lost?
All is not lost. I still have my unconquerable will,
My pursuit of revenge, my undying hate,
And my courage never to surrender.
And what else do I have to lose?

suppliant: *making a plea*

ignominy: *public disgrace*

That glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace
With **suppliant** knee, and deify his power
Who from the terror of this arm so late
Doubted his empire—that were low indeed;
That were an **ignominy** and shame beneath
This downfall; since, by fate, the strength of gods
And this empyreal[7] substance cannot fail;
Since, through experience of this great event,
In arms not worse, in foresight much
advanced,
We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war,
Irreconcilable to our grand Foe,
Who now triùmphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven."
So spake th' apostate angel, though in pain,
Vaunting[8] aloud, but racked with deep despair;
And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:[9]
"O prince, O chief of many thronèd powers,
That led th' embattled seraphim to war
Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds
Fearless, endangered Heaven's perpetual King,
And put to proof his high supremacy,
Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate!
Too well I see and rue the dire event
That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
Hath lost us Heaven, and all this mighty host
In horrible destruction laid thus low,
As far as gods and heavenly essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
Invincible, and vigor soon returns,
Though all our glory extinct, and happy state
Here swallowed up in endless misery.
But what if he our Conqueror (whom I now
Of force believe almighty, since no less

7 **empyreal:** heavenly
8 **vaunting:** boasting
9 **compeer:** person of equal rank or status

His might and anger will never force me
To give up my glory. I will not bow and beg for mercy
On a humble knee, nor worship his power—
Not after this arm of mine so recently frightened him
Into fearing for his empire. That would be low indeed—
A disgrace and shame even worse than
This downfall. Because of fate, I am strong and made of
A heavenly substance; my body can never die.
And the experience of this event
Has left me no poorer in arms and much richer in foresight.
So we can decide to wage war, either by force or cleverness,
With better hope than before.
We will never make peace with our grand foe,
Who now triumphs. He rejoices too much
As he reigns alone in tyranny over heaven."
So spoke the renegade angel, though in pain,
Boasting aloud, but torn with deep despair.
Then his bold partner and comrade answered him thus:
"Oh, prince, chief of many royal armies,
You led the desperate angels to war
Under your orders. And your dreadful, fearless deeds
Endangered heaven's eternal king.
You put his high authority to the test,
Whether he kept it by strength, chance, or fate!
I see too well this terrible outcome, and regret it.
Our sad overthrow and foul defeat
Have lost us heaven. And this whole mighty army
Is laid low in horrible destruction,
Even though gods and heavenly beings
Can never truly die. For the mind and spirit remain
Indestructible, and our strength soon returns,
Even though our glory is dead, and our happiness
Is swallowed up here in endless misery.
I now believe our conqueror
To be almighty, indeed. He couldn't have overpowered

Than such could have o'erpowered such force as ours)
Have left us this our spirit and strength
entire,
Strongly to suffer and support our pains,
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire,
Or do him mightier service as his **thralls**
By right of war, whate'er his business be,
here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,
Or do his errands in the gloomy deep?
What can it then avail though yet we feel
Strength undiminished, or eternal being
To undergo eternal punishment?"
Whereto with speedy words th' arch-fiend replied:
"Fallen cherub, to be weak is miserable,
Doing or suffering: but of this be sure,
To do aught good never will be our task,
But ever to do ill our sole delight,
As being the contrary to his high will
Whom we resist. If then his providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
Our labor must be to pervert that end,
And out of good still to find means of evil;
Which ofttimes may succeed, so as perhaps
Shall grieve him, if I fail not, and disturb
His inmost counsels from their destined aim.
But see! the angry Victor hath recalled
His ministers of vengeance and pursuit
Back to the gates of Heaven; the sulphurous hail,
Shot after us in storm, o'erblown hath laid
The fiery surge that from the precipice
Of Heaven received us falling; and the thunder,
Winged with red lightning and impetuous rage,
Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now
To bellow through the vast and boundless deep.
Let us not slip th' occasion, whether scorn
Or **satiate** fury yield it from our Foe.
Seest thou yon dreary plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,

thralls: *slaves; captives*

satiate: *satisfy*

A force like ours if he were less.
And what good is it that he has left our spirit and strength
whole?
We can only suffer and withstand our pains more strongly,
And so better satisfy his vengeful anger.
Or perhaps he means for us to serve him mightily as slaves
He's won in war. He might have business
Here in the heart of hell, and want us to work in fire
Or do his errands in the gloomy deep.
So how does it help us to feel
As strong as ever, or that we'll live forever
Only to undergo eternal punishment?"
Satan replied with these quick words:
"Fallen angel, it is miserable to be weak,
Whether we attack or suffer. But be sure of this—
It will never be our task to do anything good.
Always to do ill will be our sole delight,
Because it is against the high will of him
Whom we resist. If it is God's plan
To bring forth good out of our evil,
We must work to ruin his plan,
And always find ways to bring evil out of good.
We may often succeed, and so perhaps
We'll grieve him. If I'm not mistaken, we'll prevent
His deepest wishes from coming true.
But look! The angry victor has called
His vengeful, pursuing army
Back to the gates of heaven. The hail of sulfur
That was shot at us has calmed
The fiery waves into which we've fallen
From heaven's heights. And the thunder,
With wings of red lightning and violent rage,
Seems to have used up all its arrows. It has stopped
Booming through the vast, bottomless depths.
Let's not miss this chance, whether it comes
From our foe's scorn or satisfaction.
Do you see that dreary plain, sad and wild,
A desolate place without light

Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
From off the tossing of these fiery waves;
185 There rest, if any rest can harbor there;
And reassembling our afflicted powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our enemy, our own loss how repair,
How overcome this dire calamity,
190 What reinforcement we may gain from hope,
If not, what resolution from despair."
Thus Satan talking to his nearest mate
With head uplift above the wave, and eyes
That sparkling blazed; his other parts besides
195 Prone on the flood, extended long and large
Lay floating many a rood,[10] in bulk as huge
As whom the fables name of monstrous size,
Titanian or Earth-born, that warred on Jove,
Briareos or Typhon, whom the den
200 By ancient Tarsus held, or that sea beast
Leviathan, which God of all his works
Created hugest that swim th' ocean-stream.[11]
Him, haply, slumbering on the Norway foam,
The pilot of some small night-foundered skiff,
205 Deeming some island, oft, as seamen tell,
With fixèd anchor in his scaly rind
Moors by his side under the lee, while
night
Invests the sea, and wishèd morn delays:
So stretched out huge in length the arch-fiend lay,
210 Chained on the burning lake; nor ever thence
Had risen or heaved his head, but that the will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs,
That with reiterated crimes he might

10 **rood:** an old English measurement equal to a quarter of an acre

11 **Titanian . . . ocean-stream:** In Greek and Roman mythology, the Titans (including Briareos) were giants who ruled the universe before Jove (Jupiter) and the Olympian gods. The Titans (including Typhon) rebelled against Jove. Typhon was sometimes said to live near Tarsus, a city on the coast of what is now Turkey. A leviathan is a huge sea creature mentioned in the Bible.

Except for the dreadful glimmering
Of those pale flames? Let's move toward it
From these tossing, fiery waves.
185 We will rest, if any rest can be found there,
And gather our beaten troops.
Then we can discuss how to best attack
Our enemy, mend our losses,
And overcome this awful disaster.
190 There we'll see if there is any hope for us—
And if not, what firmness can come from our despair."
So said Satan to his closest mate,
With his head above the water and his eyes
Sparkling and blazing. The rest of him
195 Lay prone along the waves. He stretched out long and large,
For yards and yards. He was as huge
As anything old stories called monstrous in size—
For example, the Titan Briareos,
Or the Giant Typhon, now held in a cave
200 Near ancient Tarsus. Or else he was like that sea beast
Called Leviathan, the largest thing
God ever made to swim in the ocean.
Leviathan might be dozing on the waves near Norway
When the pilot of some small boat overtaken by night
205 Would think him an island. Seamen often tell
Of fixing an anchor in his scaly hide.
Then they stay fastened to him away from the wind, while night
Covers the sea and precious morning is delayed.
So Satan was stretched out, huge in length,
210 Chained on the burning lake. He never
So much as raised or tossed his head without the will
And permission of all-ruling heaven.
For God left him at large to do his dark deeds,
So that Satan might heap more damnation on himself

Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enraged might see
How all his malice served but to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy shown
On man by him seduced, but on himself
Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance poured.
Forthwith upright he rears from off the pool
His mighty **stature**; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and rolled
In billows, leave i' th' midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,
That felt unusual weight; till on dry land
He lights, if it were land that ever burned
With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,
And such appeared in hue; as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus or the shattered side
Of thundering Etna,[12] whose combustible
And fuelèd entrails thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singèd bottom all involved
With stench and smoke: such resting found the sole
Of unblest feet. Him followed his next mate,
Both glorying to have 'scaped the Stygian flood[13]
As gods, and by their own recovered strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal[14] power.
"Is this the region, this the soil, the clime,"
Said then the lost archangel, "this the seat

stature: *height*

sublimed: *converted to a gas; vaporized*

12 **Pelorus . . . Etna:** Pelorus is a cape in Sicily, and Etna is a nearby volcano.

13 **Stygian flood:** refers to the river Styx, which is a river in the underworld according to Greek mythology

14 **supernal:** heavenly

With repeated crimes. He'd seek
Evil for others, only to be enraged by failure.
All his cruelty only served to bring forth
Infinite goodness, grace, and mercy
For the men he snared. But for himself,
He only tripled his confusion, rage, and punishment.
At once, he raised his mighty form upright
From the water. On each side of him, he drove the flames backward,
Sloping in their pointed spires. The billows rolled,
Leaving a horrid valley in the middle.
Then he spread his wings and flew
Upward, lying on the dark air,
Which felt unusually heavy. At last, he lighted
On dry land—if you could call it land that burned with solid fire,
Just as the lake had burned with liquid fire.
The fire burned many colors. The land looked like Pelorus
Or the shattered side of thundering Etna
When underground winds
Blast and tear whole hills away from them.
At such times, the earth's fiery and explosive interior creates fire
Which is vaporized by sheer heat. This fire helps the winds
To singe the ground and wrap it
In stench and smoke. In such a place rested the soles
Of Satan's unblessed feet, and Beelzebub followed him.
Both rejoiced to have escaped the Styx's tide
Like true gods—by their own recovered strength,
And not by permission of heavenly power.
"Is this the region, the soil, the climate, the home
That we must exchange for heaven?" asked the lost but mighty angel then.

That we must change for Heaven this mournful gloom
245 For that celestial light? Be it so, since he
Who now is sovereign can dispose and bid
What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
Whom reason hath equaled, force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewell, happy fields,
250 Where joy forever dwells! Hail, horrors! hail,
Infernal world! and thou, profoundest Hell,
Receive thy new possessor, one who brings
A mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and in itself
255 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
260 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence.
Here we may reign secure; and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
265 Th' associates and copartners of our loss,
Lie thus astonished on th' oblivious pool,[15]
And call them not to share with us their part
In this unhappy mansion, or once more
With rallied arms to try what may be yet
270 Regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell?"

15 **oblivious pool:** refers to the river Lethe in the underworld, which caused forgetfulness

"Must we have mournful gloom
245 Instead of starry light? Let it be so.
He who is now king can choose and decide
What shall be right. It is best to be farthest from him.
In reason, he was merely our equal; it took force to place him
above us. Farewell, happy fields,
250 where joy lives forever! Welcome, horrors! Welcome,
fiery world! Deepest hell,
meet your new owner—one who brings
a mind not to be changed by place or time.
The mind is its own place, and by itself
255 can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
What does it matter where I am? I am still the same,
and what I should be. And I am still second only to God,
who is greater only because of his thunder. Here at least
we shall be free. The almighty has not built here
260 and does not envy this place, so he will not drive us away.
Here we may rule safely. And in my view,
to rule is worthy of ambition, even though in hell.
Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.
But why do we neglect our faithful friends,
265 the comrades and partners in our loss,
letting them lie stunned in pools of forgetfulness?
Let us call them to share with us their part
in this unhappy home. Let us learn together
what may be gained with renewed fighting
270 in heaven—or what more may be lost in hell."

After You Read *Selected Poetry of John Milton*

Literary Lens: Allusion

Create a chart like the one below. List one allusion from "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" and at least three allusions from *Paradise Lost*. Why do you think Milton included these particular allusions?

Allusion	Explanation

Explore Context: Faith and Politics

Milton held strong beliefs about the political and religious happenings of the time. Some critics read *Paradise Lost* as a political reflection on the short-lived Commonwealth and subsequent restoration of Charles II. Others focus on the epic's presentation of Milton's individual religious beliefs, somewhat controversial at the time, regarding human will and the power that humans have compared to the power God has. Find an article or credible online source that discusses one of these viewpoints. Write a one-page summary of the article, including your own reflections on the author's conclusions.

Apply and Create: Epic Film

In a group of six, discuss the qualities that make *Paradise Lost* an epic. Then imagine that the poem is being turned into an epic film. Create a storyboard showing the events and characters from the portion of *Paradise Lost* that you would include in the film. You might have each group member contribute a different section of the storyboard, or you might have one group member who is artistically talented do the actual drawing while others describe the events and characters.

Read Critically

Reread these lines from *Paradise Lost*. Then answer the questions that follow.

The mind is its own place, and in itself
255 Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less than he
Whom thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built

260 Here for his envy, will not drive us hence.
Here we may reign secure; and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven.
But wherefore let we then our faithful friends,
265 Th' associates and copartners of our loss,
Lie thus astonished on th' oblivious pool,
And call them not to share with us their part
In this unhappy mansion, or once more
With rallied arms to try what may be yet
270 Regained in Heaven, or what more lost in Hell?"

1. What do Satan's remarks about the mind show about his personality and worldview? From what you have read of Milton's epic, do you agree with some critics that Satan may be the hero of *Paradise Lost*? Why or why not?
2. Contrast Satan's remark "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven" with the thoughts of "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" (page 484). Which view do you think Milton held? Why?
3. What view of human achievement is shared by "How Soon Hath Time" (page 482) and "When I Consider How My Light Is Spent" (page 484)? Based on that view, how do you think Milton would have felt about the *carpe diem* theme in "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (page 470) and "To His Coy Mistress" (page 472)?

Before You Read *Psalm 23 and The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

The King James Bible Soon after ascending the throne in 1603, King James I commissioned an authorized English translation of the Bible for use in the Church of England. Fifty-four scholars and clergymen labored for seven years at the task. The result, which became known as the King James Bible, is often named along with Shakespeare's plays as the greatest literary contribution of the age.

The Bible is a collection of books sacred to Judaism and Christianity. It consists of the Old Testament, composed mostly in Hebrew and tracing the history and beliefs of the ancient Jews, and the New Testament, written in Greek and centering on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. English translations of parts of the Bible go back to King Alfred's reign, but the English translation that most influenced the King James commission was that of Protestant martyr William Tyndale, who had translated the New Testament and part of the Old before being executed for his beliefs in Belgium in 1536.

Literary Lens

Psalm Although the Old Testament is mostly prose, it also contains beautiful poetry like the Book of Psalms, attributed to King David. A psalm (sälm) is a sacred song written for God. The King James translations of the psalms are among the earliest examples of free verse—poetry with no meter, or fixed pattern of rhythm.

Parable The Parable of the Prodigal Son is one of several famous parables told by Jesus in the New Testament. A parable is a brief story told to illustrate a religious or moral lesson. To interpret that lesson, you need to view the parable's details as symbols.

Language of The King James Bible

As the most famous translation of the world's most widely read book, the King James Bible has had enormous influence on the development of the English language. Its use of now archaic, or outdated, verb and pronoun forms, such as *maketh* for *make* and *thou* for *you*, has helped keep such terms familiar to modern readers.

One trait of the King James Bible is a tendency to shift pronoun references a bit vaguely. Consider this sentence from The Parable of the Prodigal Son: "And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine." You need to examine the context to figure out that the first *he* and the pronouns *himself* and *him* refer to the prodigal son, while the second *he* and the pronoun *his* refer to the citizen who owned the fields where the prodigal son found a job.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Considering the events discussed on pages 243–247, why do you think King James I would want a newly authorized translation of the Bible?
2. *Prodigal* means "recklessly wasteful." If you had a prodigal son or daughter, how would you treat him or her?

3. Why do you think religions use stories and parables to help teach lessons instead of simply stating the lessons?

Psalm 23

1 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2 He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
3 He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of **righteousness** for his name's sake.
4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5 Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.

righteousness: *morally good and upright*

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

from *Luke, Chapter 15*

riotous: *uncontrolled; wild*

famine: *extreme shortage of food*

fain: *gladly; with pleasure*

perish: *die, usually in an untimely or violent manner*

11 And he said, A certain man had two sons:

12 And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living.

13 And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance[1] with **riotous** living.

14 And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty **famine** in that land; and he began to be in want.

15 And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine.

16 And he would **fain** have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.

17 And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I **perish** with hunger!

18 I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee,

19 And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.

20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

21 And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son.

22 But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet:

1 **wasted his substance:** spent his inheritance

23 And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry:

24 For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated[2] him.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither **transgressed** I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a **kid**, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet[3] that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

transgressed: *go outside the boundary of a moral standard*

kid: *young goat*

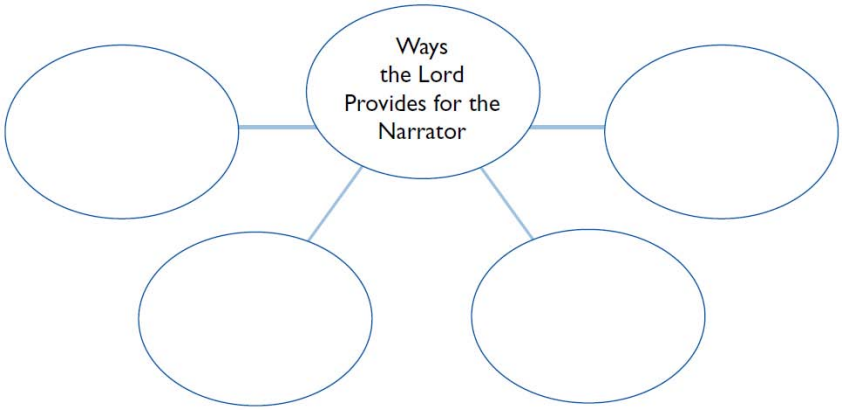
2 **intreated:** alternate spelling of *entreated*

3 **meet:** archaic meaning is "suitable" or "proper"

After You Read *Psalm 23 and The Parable of the Prodigal Son*

Literary Lens: Psalm

The speaker in Psalm 23 praises God for doing various things for him. Make a web diagram like the one below, identifying the different ways "the Lord is [the speaker's] shepherd." Be sure to translate the archaic and figurative language into modern, concrete ideas. For example, "He leadeth me beside the still waters" might be written in the diagram as "He quenches thirst."



Explore Context: Bible Translations

Through a library or place of worship, find a translation of the Bible other than the King James version. Do research, if necessary, to learn when and where the translation was made and what religious group or groups use it. Then compare its translation of Psalm 23 (in the Book of Psalms) with the translation from the King James version presented in this book. Present your findings in a brief report to classmates.

Apply and Create: Parable

In a small group, discuss what you feel is the main lesson of The Parable of the Prodigal Son. Then discuss changes you might make for a modern update of the parable that teaches the same lesson with contemporary characters, activities, and settings. After you decide on the changes you would make, present your modern adaptation to the class.

Read Critically

Reread these verses from The Parable of the Prodigal Son. Then answer the questions that follow.

25 Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard music and dancing.

26 And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant.

27 And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound.

28 And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him.

29 And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends:

30 But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf.

31 And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine.

32 It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.

1. Is the elder brother's initial attitude understandable and realistic? Explain.
2. What does the father mean when he says that the younger brother was dead and is alive again? What does killing the fatted calf symbolize, or represent?
3. What qualities does the father in the parable share with God as presented in Psalm 23 (page 507)? Might the father symbolize God? Explain.

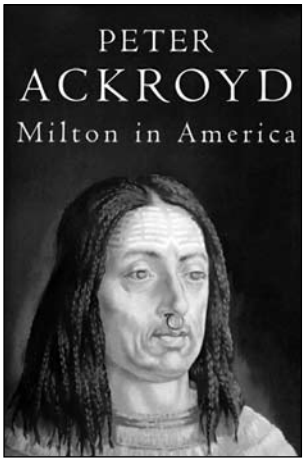
Connecting Eras: Generalize

In this section you explored the burgeoning intellectual and artistic output of the English Renaissance. One Renaissance man who made his mark late in the period was John Milton (see pages 480–505). Brilliant and educated far beyond even the high standards of his day, Milton was a gifted and versatile poet with a strong conscience and a drive to make his views public. He was known for his poetry as well as for his views on political and religious matters—advocating freedom of the press, rigorous methods of educating the young, and incompatibility as sufficient grounds for divorce. His strong opinions weren't always popular with the ruling class, particularly when he criticized King Charles I for sending troops to invade Scotland in 1639.

Milton was a strong supporter of Oliver Cromwell. After Cromwell's forces overthrew and executed Charles, Cromwell dominated the government of the newly established Commonwealth of Britain. He appointed Milton to the post of Secretary for Foreign Tongues. Milton went blind in 1652, and he required aides to transcribe for him and help him carry out his other duties. After Cromwell died in 1658, Milton was left unprotected when supporters of Charles II (Charles I's son) began to rise up. The poet was arrested and briefly imprisoned. When he was freed, he dedicated his life to tutoring students and writing his masterwork, the epic *Paradise Lost*.

Since the Renaissance, humankind has experienced many periods of intense artistic, intellectual, and cultural reawakening—the most obvious large-scale movement in recent years perhaps being the rise of the Internet and computer literacy around the globe. Like the advances brought about by the printing press, the Internet allows people to increase their understanding of their own culture and the larger world. It is possible to generalize specific ways in which the Renaissance, and artists of the time such as John Milton, laid the groundwork for learning, innovation, and the arts that now flourish in our own time.

Peter Ackroyd is a contemporary novelist who has used the Renaissance as the backdrop for his novel *Milton in America*. Ackroyd's tale imagines poet John Milton journeying to America in search of a new way of life. The novel begins after Cromwell's death as the blind Milton flees the detested monarchy that has returned to power. Milton escapes England and crosses the ocean to join the Puritans in America. Along the way, he takes on a young assistant named Goosequill. In the excerpts that follow, Milton and Goosequill are on their way to the ship that will take them to New England; later, they are onboard that ship. Goosequill is telling the story to his wife, Kate. Passages in quotation marks take place between Milton and Goosequill. Passages without quotation marks are Goosequill's impressions or his conversations with Kate.



As you read, think about humankind's ongoing quest for knowledge and a new world order. Then consider what this quest demands from the individuals who attempt it. Generalize Milton's and Goosequill's reasons for taking on their arduous journey to understand why people are following in their footsteps today.

Milton in America

Peter Ackroyd

It was all very satisfactory, and we were soon on our way once more. He asked Welkin if he had observed anyone following us, but there was not an ant on the road behind us. So we sat up in the cart and jogged along easily enough. Of course, I was curious, Kate, about this blind man's strange journey, and eventually I blurted it out. "Why did you seek cover, sir—"

"Why did I seek the cover of night and darkness, Goosequill?"

"No, sir. Why did you cover the cart?"

"Sufficient for you to know that I leave England in order to save England."

"That is good news."

"I leave England in order to pray for England. I leave England in order to be a witness for England. I leave England to be England."

"That would be a task to baffle Merlin, sir."

"We need no wizards or fairy, Goosequill. Providence is my guide."

"I am told that Providence is a paltry giver." I knew what I wanted to say, Kate, so I came out with it at once. "You need a companion with more flesh and blood."

"You mean?"

"Me, sir."

"You would guide me, as you once guided your sister?"

"If I can manage Smithfield on market day, sir, I can manage Asia and Africa and all combined."

"Do you write as easily as you speak?"

"I am proud to say that I can do it without thinking, sir."

"You will write to my dictate, then. Letters. Histories. Proclamations."

"And prayers, I hope?"

"Prayers will be very frequent, too. And in return I can promise you this, Goosequill. I will recompense you with immortality." I like fine words, as you know, but they cannot be cooked and eaten.

I think you might live off your words, Goose, you prepare and garnish them so lovingly.

Thank you, Kate. You have taken those same words out of my mouth.

"That is very kind of you," I said to him. "But how am I supposed to live in the meantime?"

"God will provide."

"Then I hope God knows of me. Otherwise I shall grow rather thin."

"No impiety, please. We live in sacred times. He watches and protects us always." Then, with a smile, he took out a leather purse and shook it. "You will not starve like the followers of faithless Abryon." Something with an "on" at the end. Could it have been Babylon? Or London? "I have coin enough to take us to the other side."

"And what side may that be, sir? Heaven or hell?"

"Your tongue is sharp enough to cut your own teeth, Goose. We are going far to the west, on the wide ocean, where we shall find a lasting seat." The cart rolled over a pothole, and we both jumped. "We are traveling to a land of refuge and a mansion house of liberty. We will find a nation of sages, of prophets, and of worthies. I am impatient to kiss that pregnant soil."

"It sounds a rather damp place. Does it have a name yet?"

"Sion. Christ's Vineyard." There was a bead of sweat on his forehead, and I wiped it away. "The new Canaan. The Promised Land."

"Now I am completely lost. I cannot find my north and south in your world."

"It is the New World, Goosequill. It is New England. Our last and latest land!"

. . . So I asked him why we were traveling into the West Country. He said

that there were friends there who would protect him. Protect you from what? I asked him. Wicked men, he said. An evil race of idolaters. Oh dear, I said, how shall we know them? Worms, he said. They resemble slugs all bedecked in finery. An easy task then, master. I must look for a worm with oiled hair and an emerald cloak pin. We reached your old neighborhood two days later, but he decided to remain outside Barnstaple in case, he said, of spies or paid informants. Of course, I was beginning to learn something of his history, and of the risks he ran. He has told you about Cromwell and the rest of those he served, Kate, but he may not have mentioned that he was being hunted down. The new restored king would be more friendly towards Beelzebub than John Milton. So we waited until dark before walking into town. . . .

Once Goosequill and Milton have boarded the ship bound for the New World, Goosequill begins to keep a journal.

April 7, 1660. The girl had not caught the plague contagion, but the spots were a sign of the smallpox, which has now destroyed her. She was buried in the sea by Captain Farrel and her parents, all of them as solemn as midnight. The sailors tied a great bullet around her neck and another to her legs, and then they turned her out at a porthole while giving fire to their guns. They asked Mr. Milton to make an oration over her body, but he pleaded sickness and fatigue. He remained in our lodgings until she was well sunk beneath the waves.

April 9, 1660. Today he began a letter to one Reginald de la Pole, a clerk of the old abolished Council. "Loving friend," he said, "we heartily salute you. No. First add *Laus Deo* to the top of the page."

"Which is to say?"

"Which is to say, keep silent or be struck down." He lolled in his elbow chair, which the captain had lent to him, smiling to himself while he dictated his epistle (as he called it). Never have I heard so many grave words coming from so cheerful a countenance. "There cannot be a more ill-boding sign to the nation," he said, "than when the inhabitants, to avoid insufferable grievance at home, are forced by heaps to forsake their native country. Yet we have been compelled to leave our own dear England for the wide ocean and the savage deserts of America—"

"I remembered you to say that it will be very pleasant."

"Do you wish to stand at the helm with a basket of stones around your neck?"

"Very cruel and ingenious, sir."

"—savage deserts of America, where the poor afflicted remnants of our martyred countrymen, our poor expulsed brethren of New England, sit on the seashore, counting the hours till our arrival with their sighs and falling tears."

"Oh Lord." I did not know whether to admire him for his prose, or fear him for his prophecy.

"But we can never and in no wise be persuaded or compelled to return home. With mature wisdom, deliberate virtue and clear affection we intend to restore our lost liberties in the wilderness."

"The captain speaks of flourishing towns and villages."

He raised his fist in the air, and shook it fiercely at me, so I said no more. "Change of air changes not our minds. We shall reach our steady hands"—he unfurled his fist then—"as steady as they may be in this misinformed and wearied life of man, to renew our lost heritage, our tenures and our freeholds, our native and domestic charters. Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold. That is enough now, Goosequill. It is a weary business, coining words."

Critical Thinking: Generalize

Ask Yourself

1. What generalizations can you make about Milton based on Goosequill's description of events?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the nature of the relationship between the two men based on what they say to each other?
3. In general, do you think Milton will miss his homeland? What details lead you to your conclusion?
4. What general characteristics of a Renaissance man does Milton reveal in this excerpt?
5. What conclusions can you draw about how Milton might have fared on his journey to America had Goosequill not accompanied him?
6. Generalize about the way in which Milton and Goosequill's journey might be said to reflect an essential aspect of the Renaissance.

Examine the Writing

Generalizations are based on drawing conclusions from the ideas and evidence provided in a text. A general statement about the English Renaissance Period might be that it was a time of great artistic and intellectual reawakening. Of course this doesn't mean that every person alive during the Renaissance took part in the reawakening; in fact, another generalization of the time is that a vast segment of English society was made up of poor people who were uneducated and had few opportunities for advancement of any kind. The difference between the Renaissance and theMedievalPeriod that preceded it was that during medieval times most highly educated people were members of the clergy or closely allied with the Church in some way. The Renaissance gave way to greater and more widespread learning and artistic output among laypeople.

Choose one of the following topics related to the quest for knowledge and/or a new life. Address the topic by writing an essay or giving an oral presentation.

1. Generalize about the similarities and differences between the fictional Milton's idea of a new beginning and the journey of more contemporary emigrants leaving their homelands to seek new lives in America.
2. This excerpt from *Milton in America* ends with Milton making the statement that "Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold." Reflect on what Milton means by this statement. Do you think others who sought to settle in the New World had this same idea of what life would be like there? If not, explain what others' ideas about life in the New World might have been.

Organize Your Thoughts

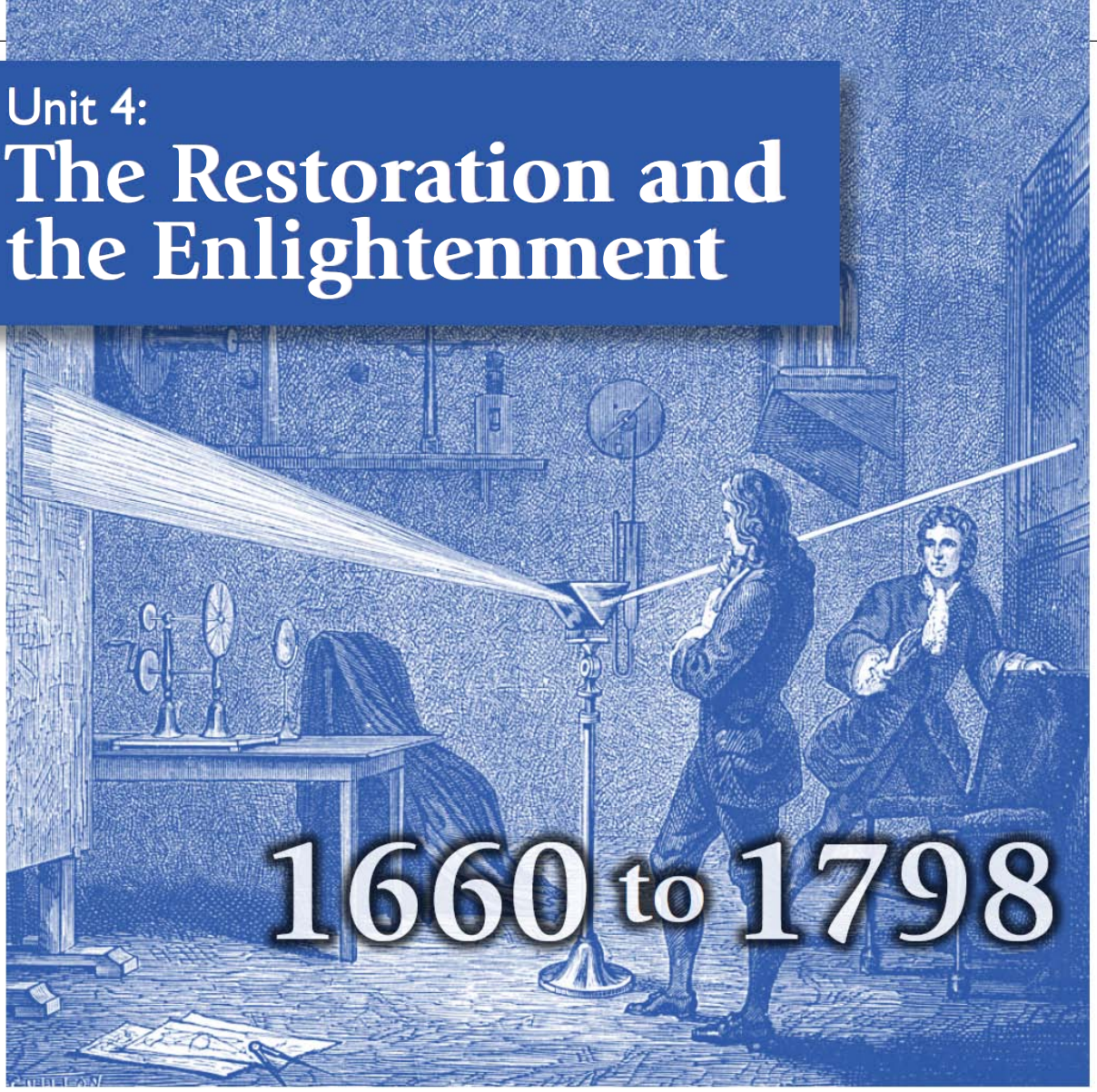
You can use a chart like the one below to use evidence from the excerpt to make generalizations about Milton and Goosequill.

Specific Details About Character	Generalization

Get Active

With a partner, reenact one of the excerpt's conversations between Milton and Goosequill. Use information from your charts as a guide for your presentation. Try to create physical and vocal representations that highlight specific aspects of the characters.

Unit 4: The Restoration and the Enlightenment



Eye on an Era

1660
Charles II is restored to the throne.

1665
The Great Plague of London kills approximately one-fifth of London's population.

1666
The Great Fire of London destroys two-thirds of the city.

1667
John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is published.

1673
Test Act prohibits Catholics from holding public office.

After years of plotting his return while living in wretched poverty abroad, Charles II ascends the throne in 1660. Parliament is reconvened.

However, the restoration of the monarchy only brought about more power struggles for control of Britain between Catholics and Protestants. Hostility erupted when Charles II (a Protestant) died and his brother, James II (a Catholic), ascended the throne and placed Catholics in prominent government positions. Parliament conspired with James's son-in-law William, Prince of Orange, to invade England. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 resulted in James's flight to France, and William and his wife Mary, both Protestants, ascended the throne together. This event is also called "The Bloodless Revolution" because of the fairly peaceful transition between these reigns. In the years that followed, Jacobites, supporters of James II and the Stuart line, tried to reclaim the throne, concluding with an effort by Charles Edward Stuart, called Bonnie Prince Charlie, in 1745.

King James II

Tired of over-reaching monarchs changing laws at their whim, Parliament enacted the Bill of Rights to ensure fewer abuses of power. The Bill of Rights limited the monarch's power and gave all control of taxation and legislation to Parliament. Thus England became a constitutional monarchy. During this period, Parliament was presided over by two dominate factions: the conservative Tories, largely made up of aristocrats, and the Whigs, largely supported by the budding merchant class.

1685
James II, a Catholic, ascends the throne upon the death of his brother Charles II.

1688
William of Orange and his army invade England, and James II flees to France. William and Mary take the throne.

1689
Parliament passes the Bill of Rights limiting the power of the monarch and giving more rights to Parliament.

Disease and Disaster

The 1660s brought to London both a deadly epidemic and a disaster that threatened to destroy the entire city. In 1665, the bubonic plague, also known as the Black Death, attacked the city in full force. Named for the black bumps that appeared on victims' bodies, the disease was spread by fleas carried by rats. Initial casualties were isolated to the poor sections of London, but the disease spread rapidly during the sweltering summer months. Many fled the city for the country, but mobs on the roads caused the government to close the city gates, allowing only those with bills of health to leave. Casualties are estimated at well over 100,000 people.

Before the city could fully recover from the plague, another tragedy struck. A fire that started in the home of the king's baker spread quickly throughout the city, destroying all buildings in its path. Fueled by houses made of wood and roofs of thatch, the blaze raged unabated for days. The fire was finally checked by pulling down buildings in the path of the fire to give it less fuel. Thousands of Londoners lost their homes and businesses, and at least two-thirds of the city was destroyed. Amazingly, only sixteen people died in the fire. Even more amazingly, the plague ended right after the fire. It was not until almost the end of the nineteenth century that scientists discovered the truth: the Great Fire of London destroyed the rats and their fleas, which carried the plague. A cleaner city was rebuilt on the ashes of the old, new sewage systems and wider streets were designed, and the use of thatched roofs was forbidden.

1707
England and Scotland are joined politically through the Act of Union.

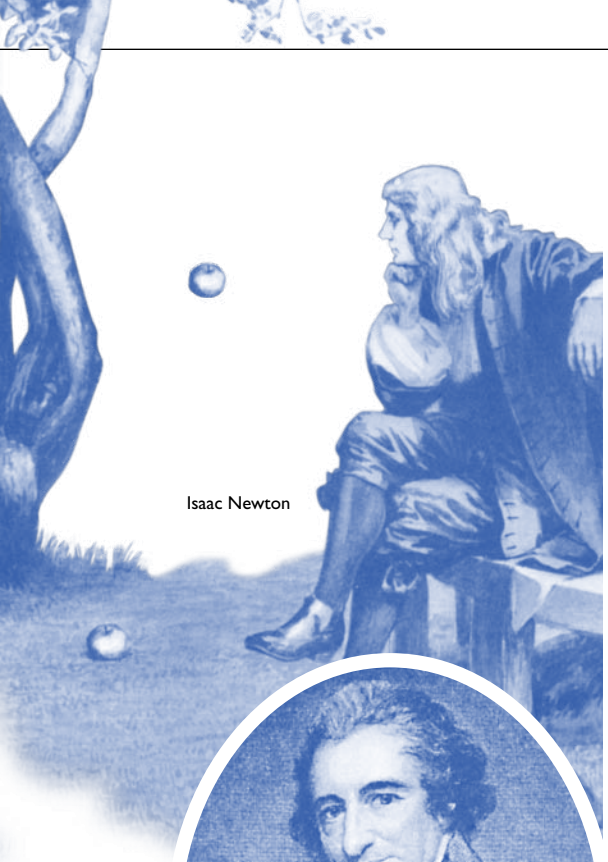
1714
George I becomes king.

1726
Jonathan Swift publishes *Gulliver's Travels.*

Reason and Rationality

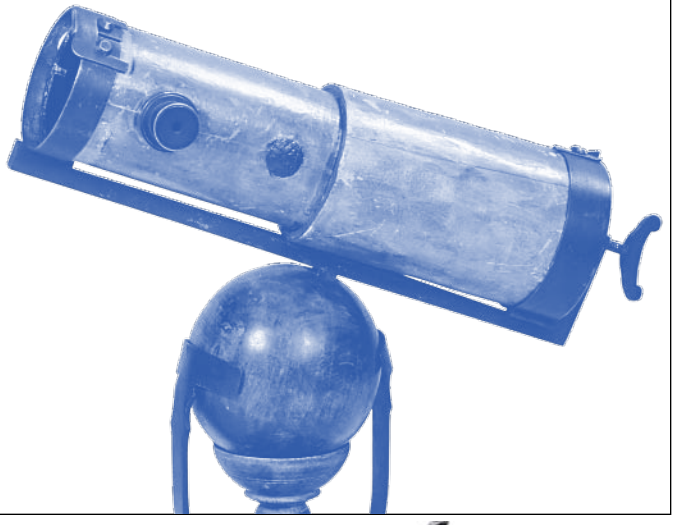
By the end of the seventeenth century, many scientists were dissatisfied with schools of thought that explained events in nature as mysterious reflections of God's will. Scientists began asserting that humans could understand the natural world through observation, theory, and methodical testing. This new "scientific method" would seek to explain wide-ranging phenomena. Isaac Newton's experiments with gravity and his laws of motion led others to search for scientific explanations for natural events.

The focus on reason extended itself to areas other than science. Philosophers turned to natural law in order to illuminate truth. They focused on the value of human experience over authority and considered doubt a healthy avenue to discovering meaning. Critiques of traditional beliefs and organized religion abounded. One of the most influential works was Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*.



Isaac Newton

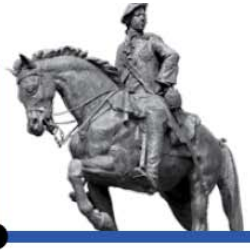
Thomas Paine



1734
Alexander Pope's *An Essay on Man* is published.

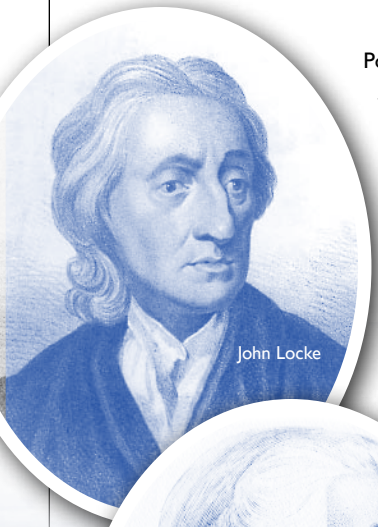
1740
George Anson, an admiral in the British Navy, begins his journey around the world. He successfully circumnavigates the globe and returns home in 1744.

1745
Bonnie Prince Charlie lands in Scotland to lead the last Jacobite revolt.

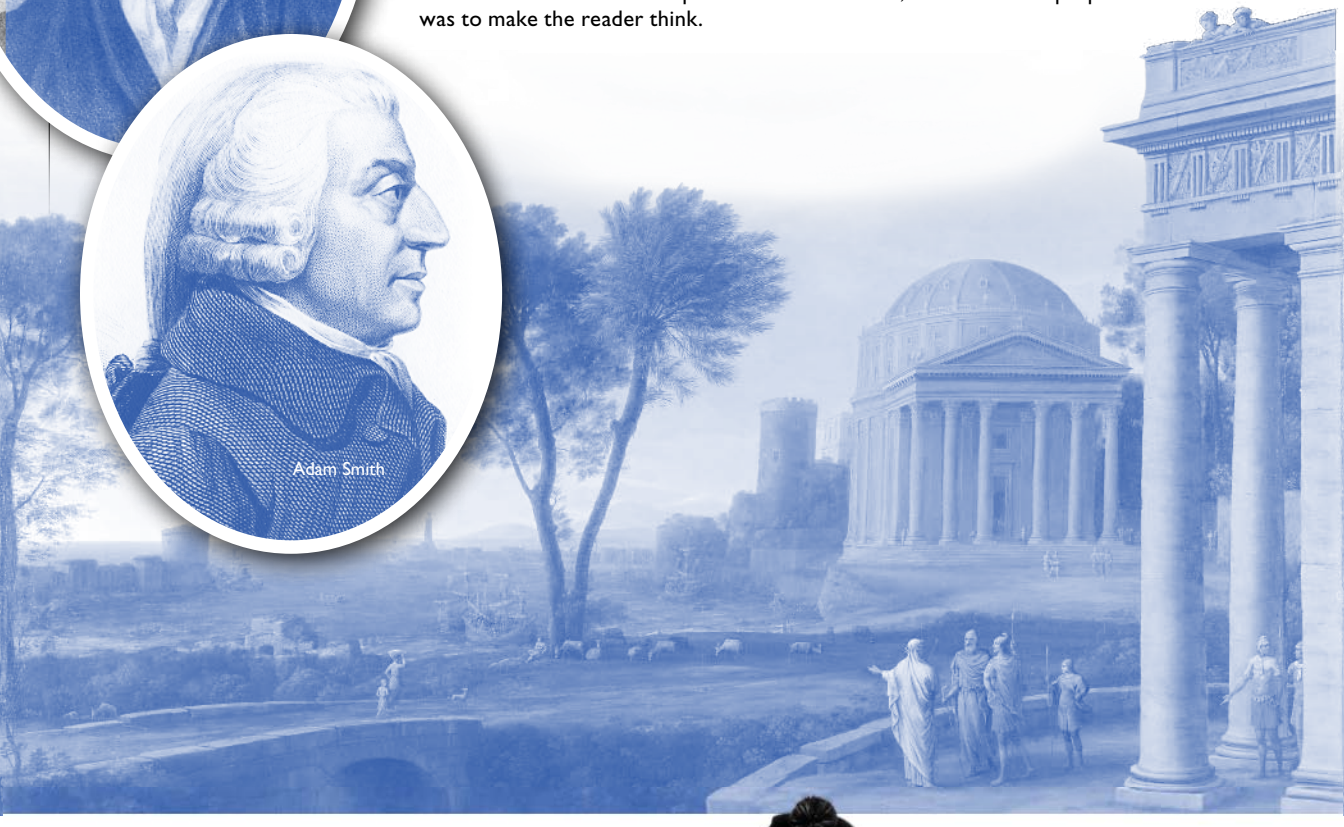


Politics and economics were also greatly influenced by ideas born of the Enlightenment. John Locke's reflections on personal liberty and an individual's rights would inspire the American revolutionaries. Adam Smith promoted a laissez-faire approach to economics, letting natural laws of supply and demand take their course without intervention.

The elevation of human reason overflowed into the literature of the period as well. Writers looked back to Greek and Roman classicism for inspiration and often alluded to mythic and epic heroes and themes. Harmony, restraint, and adherence to recognized standards of form and craftsmanship were practiced by many writers of the period. Reason took precedence over imagination. Although writers such as Swift and Pope wrote creative tales, their foremost purpose was to make the reader think.


John Locke

Adam Smith



1755
Samuel Johnson publishes his *Dictionary of the English Language*, a work that took nine years to complete.

1756
The Seven Years' War begins with the French and Indian War in the colonies, then spreads to Europe, with Britain and Prussia pitted against France and Spain.

1760
George III ascends the throne.

1763
The Treaty of Paris ends the Seven Years' War. Britain gains territories in present-day Canada and Florida.

A Teen of the Time

William Spenser sipped his coffee and surveyed the eclectic crowd at the coffeehouse. Two clergymen quietly read the newspaper at the next table. Several lawyers, still wearing their powdered wigs and robes, loudly discussed politics in the back. Near the front window sat a group of young men in expensive silk coats, striped stockings, and high-heeled shoes. One man, wearing a huge wig, giggled and then daintily wiped his nose with a lacy handkerchief. Such fashion-conscious fops were called *macaronis* (a word that means "boorish fool" in Italian) because of their affectation of European styles and manners.

Eighteen-year-old William would soon leave for his own grand tour of Europe, the crowning achievement of a gentleman's education. As a child, William had attended boarding school, where he had studied Greek, Latin, and history. Then he had studied for two years at Oxford University. After a year of traveling, he would be expected to return to England and marry.

At the thought of marriage, William grimaced. He had come to his favorite haunt, Turf's Coffee House, to forget about his impending engagement and to escape his family's formal town house near the fashionable St. James's Square. A coffeehouse was one of the few places in London where a shopkeeper could converse with a Duke or a famous writer could hear his work critiqued by a chimney sweep. William normally found the place liberating; tonight, however, the smoky atmosphere and sparse wooden furniture of his favorite club seemed oppressive.

William's father, Baron Spenser, was a proud man who relished the life of an English landowner. Recently, however, the family fortunes had begun to dwindle, and an infusion of cash was needed. A strategic marriage for William would be a panacea for the family's financial woes. After months of balls and dinners, his parents had decided upon Harriet Fox, the daughter of a wealthy viscount. She would bring to the marriage a large dowry, or sum of money.

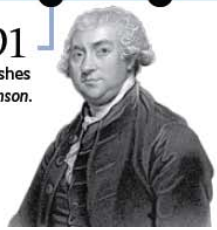
From William's few meetings with Harriet, he knew they were not very compatible. She was extremely shy and confessed to William that she didn't care much for reading or riding horses. How he wished he could avoid this whole unsavory business. His parents wanted to announce William and Harriet's engagement before he left for Europe. William took a long swallow of his bitter drink. Did he have the courage to go against the wishes of his parents?

1775
The American Revolution begins.

1789
The French Revolution begins with the storming of the Bastille.

1793
France declares war on Great Britain.

1791
James Boswell publishes *The Life of Samuel Johnson.*



Understanding the Restoration and the Enlightenment: Classify

The Enlightenment is also called the Age of Reason because during this period people began to use scientific reasoning rather than superstition to understand the natural world around them. Sir Isaac Newton's groundbreaking work on the law of gravity demonstrated that the world is governed by forces that can be studied and understood. Today scientists use the skill of classifying, or arranging ideas into categories based on shared qualities, in much of their work. Scientists conduct experiments, observe what happens, and classify the results according to scientific laws. Classification helps astronomers chart the movement of the planets around the sun and allows biologists to label new animal species around the globe.

Classification skills can also help you in language arts. Suppose you were writing a report on the biological advances during the English Enlightenment. Understanding classification would help you as you search the Web for information. If you go to the Web site www.wsu.edu/~dee/ENLIGHT/ENLIGHT.HTM and click the "Contents" link at the left of the page, you find information about the European Enlightenment organized into subheadings such as the following:

Pre-Enlightenment Europe
The Case of England
Seventeenth Century Enlightenment Thought
René Descartes
Blaise Pascal
The Scientific Revolution

Clicking on the subheading "The Scientific Revolution," yields the following information:

> **Biology:** The greatest strides in systematizing . . . occurred in biology. While Galileo trained his new optical device on the stars and discovered new worlds, another optical device was being used to discover equally dramatic worlds in drops of water: the microscope. The earliest scientists to use the microscope, Robert Hooke in England, and Jan Swammerdam and Antony van Leeuwenhoek (1632–1723), found that plant and animal tissues were made out of rooms or cells, but they also discovered frightening and nonsensical monsters in mud puddles: hydras, ameobas [sic], and equally baffling creatures.

Once you have done your research and checked its authenticity, you will organize your writing around a thesis, or main idea. Classification will help there too, as you arrange details in a sequence that supports your ideas and makes sense to the reader. As you explore other aspects of the Restoration and the Enlightenment, be sure to use classifying in your reading and research.

Before You Read *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*

The son of a London tailor, **Samuel Pepys** (1633–1703), rose from obscurity to become one of the most powerful men in England. As Secretary of the Admiralty, Pepys (pronounced *peeps*) doubled the size of the Royal Navy, making it the strongest in the world. He also served in England's Parliament and led the Royal Society, a circle of scientists that included Sir Isaac Newton. Pepys' contribution to the world of literature was his diary, which he kept from 1660 to 1669. Writing in coded shorthand, he never intended this personal account to be published. Many years after his death, the diary was discovered and deciphered. Sections of it were first published in 1825.

Literary Lens

Diary Pepys' work is probably the most famous diary, or day-to-day account of personal experiences, in English literature. Some diaries are strictly concerned with personal matters; others throw valuable light on events and customs of the period in which they were written. Pepys' diary does both.

First-Person Point of View Diaries are written in the first-person point of view, using pronouns such as *I* and *me*. Diaries that record historical events can be useful when conducting research on a subject, since they are often primary sources, or works written during the time the events happened. However, diaries may also offer biased personal opinions, so readers should approach them critically.

Pepys' Language

Writing for his own personal pleasure, Pepys was not concerned with literary style. His language is simple and direct; yet he is a natural observer with a curious mind, and his diary teems with fascinating details. The diary also contains many allusions, or references, to people and places in seventeenth-century London. For example, he mentions "the Tower" without explaining that he means the Tower of London, a famous London landmark and former prison that was a short walk from his home. The footnotes provided in the text will help explain Pepys' allusions.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Based on what you have already read about the place and time period, what people, places, and events do you expect to read about in Pepys' diary?
2. What other famous diaries have become widely read or critically acclaimed? What attributes do they share?
3. Classify the kinds of subjects you think would turn an ordinary diary into a worthy piece of literature.

from The Diary of Samuel Pepys

Samuel Pepys

edited by
Robert Latham and William Matthews

The Fire of London

Sept. 2, 1666. (Lord's day.)[1] Some of our maids sitting up late last night to get things ready against our feast today, Jane called us up about three in the morning, to tell us of a great fire they saw in the city. So I rose and slipped on my night-gown, and went to her window, and thought it to be on the back side of Mark Lane at the farthest; but, being unused to such fires as followed, I thought it far enough off; and so went to bed again and to sleep. About seven rose again to dress

The white area on the map indicates the burned section of the city after the Great Fire of London, 1666.

1 **Lord's Day:** Sunday

myself, and there looked out at the window, and saw the fire not so much as it was and farther off. So to my closet to set things to rights after yesterday's cleaning. By and by Jane comes and tells me that she hears that above 300 houses have been burned down tonight by the fire we saw, and that it is now burning down all Fish Street, by London Bridge. So I made myself ready presently, and walked to the Tower,[2] and there got up upon one of the high places, Sir J. Robinson's little son going up with me; and there I did see the houses at that end of the bridge all on fire, and an infinite great fire on this and the other side the end of the bridge; which, among other people, did trouble me for poor little Michell and our Sarah on the bridge. So down, with my heart full of trouble, to the Lieutenant of the Tower, who tells me that it begun this morning in the King's baker's house in Pudding Lane, and that it hath burned St. Magnus's Church and most part of Fish Street already. So I down to the waterside, and there got a boat and through bridge, and there saw a lamentable fire. Poor Michell's house, as far as the Old Swan,[3] already burned that way, and the fire running farther, that in a very little time it got as far as the steel yard, while I was there. Everybody **endeavoring** to remove their goods, and flinging into the river or bringing them into lighters[4] that lay off; poor people staying in their houses as long as till the very fire touched them, and then running into boats, or clambering from one pair of stairs by the waterside to another. And among other things, the poor pigeons, I perceive, were loth to leave their houses, but hovered about the windows and balconies till they were, some of them burned, their wings, and fell down. Having stayed, and in an hour's time seen the fire rage every way, and nobody, to my sight, endeavoring to **quench** it, but to remove their goods, and leave all to the fire, and having seen it get as far as the steel yard, and the wind mighty high and

endeavoring: *striving; trying*

quench: *extinguish, as a fire*

2 **the Tower:** Tower of London, built as a fortress and later used as a prison
3 **Old Swan:** stairs leading to the river on the north bank of the Thames
4 **lighters:** barges

combustible: *able to catch fire*

driving it into the city; and everything, after so long a drought, proving **combustible**, even the very stones of churches, and among other things the poor steeple by which pretty Mrs.——— lives, and whereof my old schoolfellow Elborough is parson, taken fire in the very top, and there burned till it fell down. I to Whitehall[5] (with a gentleman with me who desired to go off from the Tower, to see the fire, in my boat), and there up to the King's closet in the chapel, where people come about me, and I did give them an account dismayed them all, and word was carried in to the King. So I was called for, and did tell the King and Duke of York what I saw, and that unless his Majesty did command houses to be pulled down nothing could stop the fire. They seemed much troubled, and the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him, and command him to spare no houses, but to pull down before the fire every way. The Duke of York bid me tell him that if he would have any more soldiers he shall; and so did my Lord Arlington afterwards, as a great secret. Here meeting with Captain Cocke, I in his coach, which he lent me, and Creed with me to Paul's,[6] and there walked along Watling Street, as well as I could, every creature coming away loaden with goods to save, and here and there sick people carried away in beds. Extraordinary good goods carried in carts and on backs. At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man **spent**, with a handkerchief about his neck. To the King's message he cried, like a fainting woman, "Lord! what can I do? I am spent: people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses; but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." That he needed no more soldiers; and that, for himself, he must go and refresh himself, having been up all night. So he left me, and I him, and walked home, seeing people all almost distracted, and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses, too, so very thick thereabouts, and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames

spent: *exhausted; extremely tired*

5 **Whitehall:** In Pepys' time, Whitehall was the royal palace. It was in the western part of London and safely away from the fire.

6 **Paul's:** St. Paul's Cathedral

Street; and warehouses of oil, and wines, and brandy, and other things. Here I saw Mr. Isaake Houblon, the handsome man, prettily dressed and dirty, at his door at Dowgate, receiving some of his brothers' things, whose houses were on fire; and, as he says, have been removed twice already; and he doubts (as it soon proved) that they must be in a little time removed from his house also, which was a sad **consideration**. And to see the churches all filling with goods by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time. By this time it was about twelve o'clock; and so home. Soon as dined, and walked through the city, the streets full of nothing but people and horses and carts loaden with goods, ready to run over one another, and removing goods from one burned house to another. They now removing out of Canning Street (which received goods in the morning) into Lumbard Street, and farther; and among others I now saw my little goldsmith, Stokes, receiving some friend's goods, whose house itself was burned the day after. I to Paul's Wharf, where I had appointed a boat to attend me, and took in Mr. Carcasse and his brother, whom I met in the street, and carried them below and above bridge to and again to see the fire, which was now got farther, both below and above, and no likelihood of stopping it. Met with the King and Duke of York in their barge, and with them to Queen-hithe,[7] and there called Sir Richard Browne to them. Their order was only to pull down houses **apace**, and so below bridge at the waterside; but little was or could be done, the fire coming upon them so fast. Good hopes there was of stopping it at the Three Cranes above, and at Buttolph's Wharf below bridge, if care be used; but the wind carries it into the city, so as we know not by the waterside what it do there. River full of lighters and boats taking in goods, and good goods swimming in the water, and only I observed that hardly one lighter or boat in three that had the goods of a house in, but there was a pair of virginals in it. Having seen as much as I could now, I away to Whitehall by appointment, and there walked to St. James's Park,

consideration: *an opinion obtained by careful thought*

apace: *quickly*

7 **Queen-hithe:** dock on the Thames River used to ferry citizens and goods to safety

and there met my wife and Creed and Wood and his wife, and walked to my boat; and there upon the water again, and to the fire up and down, it still increasing, and the wind great. So near the fire as we could for smoke; and all over the Thames, with one's face in the wind, you were almost burned with a shower of firedrops. This is very true; so as houses were burned by these drops and flakes of fire, three or four, nay, five or six houses, one from another. When we could endure no more upon the water, we to a little alehouse on the Bankside, over against the Three Cranes,[8] and there stayed till it was dark almost, and saw the fire grow; and, as it grew darker, appeared more and more, and in corners and upon steeples, and between churches and houses, as far as we could see up the hill of the city, in a most horrid **malicious** bloody flame, not like the fine flame of an ordinary fire. Barbary and her husband away before us. We stayed till, it being darkish, we saw the fire as only one entire

malicious: *causing injury or damage*

8 **Bankside . . . Three Cranes:** The Bankside is the south side of the Thames, where the fire did not reach. Like the Old Swan, the Three Cranes was a stairway to the river.

arch of fire from this to the other side the bridge, and in a bow up the hill for an arch of above a mile long: it made me weep to see it. The churches, houses, and all on fire and flaming at once; and a horrid noise the flames made, and the cracking of houses at their ruin. So home with a sad heart, and there find everybody **discoursing** and lamenting the fire; and poor Tom Hater come with some of his few goods saved out of his house, which is burned upon Fish Street Hill. I invited him to lie at my house, and did receive his goods, but was deceived in his lying there, the news coming every moment of the growth of the fire; so as we were forced to begin to pack up our own goods, and prepare for their removal; and did by moonshine (it being brave dry, and moonshine, and warm weather) carry much of my goods into the garden, and Mr. Hater and I did remove my money and iron chests into my cellar, as thinking that the safest place. And got my bags of gold into my office, ready to carry away, and my chief papers of accounts also there, and my tallies into a box by themselves. So great was our fear, as Sir W. Batten hath carts come out of the country to fetch away his goods this night. We did put Mr. Hater, poor man, to bed a little; but he got but very little rest, so much noise being in my house, taking down of goods.

discoursing: *engaged in conversation*

3rd. About four o'clock in the morning, my Lady Batten sent me a cart to carry away all my money, and plate, and best things, to Sir W. Rider's at Bednall Green. Which I did, riding myself in my nightgown in the cart; and, Lord! to see how the streets and the highways are crowded with people running and riding, and getting of carts at any rate to fetch away things. I find Sir W. Rider tired with being called up all night, and receiving things from several friends. His house full of goods, and much of Sir W. Batten's and Sir W. Pen's. I am eased at my heart to have my treasure so well secured. Then home, with much ado to find a way, nor any sleep all this night to me nor my poor wife.

After You Read *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*

Literary Lens: Diary

Create a graphic organizer similar to the one below. Fill in the chart with the main idea of the passage, and then write details that support the main idea. Use the information to write a summary of the piece.

Main Idea:
Supporting Details:

Explore Context: The Great Fire of London

With a partner, research the Great Fire of London. Create a map of London in Pepys' day, showing where the fire started, the direction it traveled, and the total area it destroyed. Use a special color to mark places on your map that are mentioned in Pepys' *Diary*.

Apply and Create: Diary Entry

Choose an important event from history such as the day Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated or the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center. Research the event and then write a diary entry using first-person point of view. Be sure to capture the sights, sounds, and emotions of an eyewitness. Share your entry with the rest of the class.

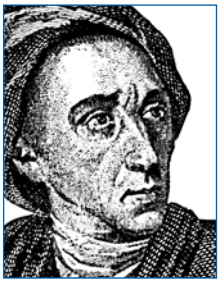
Read Critically

Reread this passage from Pepys' diary. Answer the questions by using details from the passage.

> . . . the King commanded me to go to my Lord Mayor from him, and command him to spare no houses, but to pull down before the fire every way . . . . At last met my Lord Mayor in Canning Street, like a man spent, with a handkerchief about his neck. To the King's message he cried, like a fainting woman, "Lord! what can I do? I am spent: people will not obey me. I have been pulling down houses; but the fire overtakes us faster than we can do it." . . . So he left me, and I him, and walked home, seeing people all almost distracted, and no manner of means used to quench the fire. The houses, too, so very thick thereabouts, and full of matter for burning, as pitch and tar, in Thames Street; and warehouses of oil, and wines, and brandy, and other things. . . . And to see the churches all filling with goods by people who themselves should have been quietly there at this time. By this time it was about twelve o'clock; and so home. Soon as dined, and walked through the city, the streets full of nothing but people and horses and carts loaden with goods, ready to run over one another, and removing goods from one burned house to another.

1. What details in his diary reveal Pepys' personality and position in Restoration society? What details would serve as sources for research?
2. What conclusions can you draw about the reasons the fire spread so rapidly and the means used to fight it? How does the situation in Pepys' London compare or contrast to a fire in a modern American city?
3. What kinds of human behavior does the fire seem to bring out? Cite details to support your answer.

Before You Read *An Essay on Man and The Rape of the Lock*



As a Roman Catholic in a Protestant country, **Alexander Pope** (1688–1744) was unable to receive a college education. Instead, Pope educated himself by reading the classics. Standing only four feet, six inches tall, he suffered from a deformed spine and poor health throughout his life. The strength he lacked in his physical body, he made up for with his bold, energetic writing. Pope began writing poetry while still in his teens. He won fame with his satirical wit, especially for his mock epics, *The Rape of the Lock* and *The Dunciad*. He was also a shrewd and sometimes ruthless judge of other people's writing as seen in his work, *An Essay on Criticism*.

Literary Lens

Parody and Mock Epic A parody is a humorous imitation of another work or type of writing. *The Rape of the Lock* is a type of parody called a *mock epic*, a long narrative poem that imitates elements of an epic to make fun of frivolous characters and trivial events. Instead of chronicling the brave exploits of a courageous hero, a mock epic might feature a silly nobleman who postures and primps his way though life. *The Rape of the Lock* describes how a lock of hair is cut off and stolen from young Belinda by an ardent baron. Like most parodies, Pope's mock epic is a scathing commentary on his society.

Heroic Couplet Both *An Essay on Man* and *The Rape of the Lock* are written in Pope's favorite verse form: the heroic couplet, a rhymed pair of lines in iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter consists of a line of ten syllables—each unaccented syllable followed by an accented syllable. Poems written entirely in heroic couplets, like Pope's, are often called *heroic verse*.

Pope's Language

You might be thinking that rape is a very bleak subject for a poem, but in Pope's time, the most common meaning was synonymous with *abduction*. Pope's lofty diction, or word choice, and descriptive details give the poem its humorous edge. For example, the shears that the Baron uses to snip off the lock of Belinda's hair are described as a "two-edged weapon," a "little engine," and a "glittering *forfex*."

Portions of what you are about to read include a summary or parallel text on facing pages. Read the original text first and then use the summary or parallel text to check your comprehension.

Think Critically

Before you read the poems, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. Read the first two lines from Pope's *An Essay on Man*. Do these lines seem to fit with the major themes of the Enlightenment? Why or why not?
2. Think about an epic poem you have already read in this book. Classify the types of characters, the diction, and the plot it contains. How might one of these poems be turned into a mock epic?
3. How do modern writers use parody to mock modern life or literature? Find examples of songs, movies, videos, or television shows that use parody for humor.

from An Essay *on* Man

Alexander Pope

Know now then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise, and rudely great:
With too much knowledge for the skeptic side,
With too much weakness for the Stoic's pride,
He hangs between; in doubt to act, or rest;
In doubt to deem himself a god, or beast;
In doubt his mind or body to prefer;
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err;
Alike in ignorance, his reason such,
Whether he thinks too little, or too much:
Chaos of thought and passion, all confused;
Still by himself abused, or disabused;
Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

from An Essay *on* Man

Alexander Pope

Parallel Text

"Know yourself," the speaker begins, echoing the Greek philosophers Socrates and Plato. Do not pry into (**scan**) God, for "the proper study of mankind is man."

Man lives in a realm somewhere below the angels and above the beasts **(this isthmus of a middle state)**. He is dim in his wisdom **(darkly wise)** and crude in his greatness **(rudely great)**.
The ancient skeptics claimed that man could know very little. The ancient stoics said that man should bear both pain and pleasure patiently. But, the speaker says, we are wiser than the skeptics claim, yet also weaker than the stoics say.

Man "hangs between," always in doubt, whether acting or resting. Is he a god or a beast? Should he be more concerned with his mind or his body? Man is "born only to die," and his reasoning leads him into error. It doesn't matter if man thinks too little or too much. For he is a confused mass **(Chaos)** of thought and passion.

He is always either deceiving himself **(by himself abused)** or finding out the truth **(disabused)**. He is "created half to rise, and half to fall." He rules things, yet things also rule him. He is the "sole judge of truth," yet he falls into endless error. He is, in short, "the glory, jest, and riddle of the world!"

These lines sound rather pessimistic. But as a whole, *An Essay on Man* is an optimistic poem. Man is small, but he has an important place in the Great Chain of Being. And although we humans can know very little, we can be sure of one thing: God has made this the best of all worlds.

from *The Rape of the Lock*

Alexander Pope

from **Canto III**

Close by those meads, forever crowned with flowers,
Where Thames with pride surveys his rising towers,
There stands a structure of majestic frame,
Which from the neighboring Hampton takes its name.
5 Here Britain's statesmen oft the fall foredoom
Of foreign tyrants, and of nymphs at home;
Here thou, great Anna! whom three realms obey,
Dost sometimes counsel take—and sometimes tea.
Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,

from *The Rape of the Lock*

Alexander Pope

Parallel Text

Background Early in the eighteenth century, Lord Petre, a young English nobleman, fell in love with Miss Arabella Fermor. In a reckless moment, Lord Petre cut off a lock of Arabella's hair. Arabella was furious, and a feud broke out between her family and Lord Petre's. Hoping to restore peace, John Caryll, a friend of both families, asked Alexander Pope to write a poem making light of the whole business. So Pope wrote "an heroic-comical" poem called *The Rape of the Lock*. In Canto I, the poet invokes the Muse for inspiration, a typical element of epic poems. Belinda, the poem's heroine, is warned by the sylph Ariel that she is in danger. In Canto II, Belinda travels up the River Thames to Hampton Court, the royal palace. She is noticed by the Baron, who vows to possess one of the beautiful locks of hair dangling down Belinda's neck. The following excerpts start at the beginning of Canto III.

from **Canto III**

A grand palace
named Hampton Court
stands near flower-filled meadows,
and the River Thames looks up proudly at its rising towers.
Here Britain's statesmen often predict the fall
of foreign tyrants—and also of young ladies at home.
And you, great Queen Anne, ruler of all Britain,
sometimes accept advice here—and sometimes tea.
Heroes and maidens come here

To taste awhile the pleasures of a court;
In various talk th' instructive hours they passed,
Who gave the ball, or paid the visit last;
One speaks the glory of the British queen,
And one describes a charming Indian screen;
A third interprets motions, looks, and eyes;
At every word a reputation dies.
Snuff,[1] or the fan, supply each pause of chat,
With singing, laughing, **ogling**, and all that.
Meanwhile, declining from the noon of day,
The sun **obliquely** shoots his burning ray;
The hungry judges soon the sentence sign,
And wretches hang that jurymen may
dine. . . .
Belinda now, whom thirst of fame invites,
Burns to encounter two adventurous knights,
At omber singly to decide their doom;
And swells her breast with conquests yet to come. . . .
The nymph **exulting** fills with shouts the sky;
The walls, the woods, and long canals reply.
Oh thoughtless mortals! ever blind to fate,
Too soon dejected and too soon elate.
Sudden, these honors shall be snatched away,
And cursed forever this victorious day.
For lo! the board with cups and spoons is crowned,
The berries crackle, and the mill turns round;
On shining altars of Japan they raise
The silver lamp; the fiery spirits blaze:
From silver spouts the grateful liquors glide,
While China's earth receives the smoking tide.
At once they gratify their scent and taste,
And frequent cups prolong the rich **repast**.
Straight hover round the fair her airy band;
Some, as she sipped, the fuming liquor fanned,
Some o'er her lap their careful plumes displayed,
Trembling, and conscious of the rich brocade.

ogling: *glancing with amorous invitation*

obliquely: *indirectly*

exulting: *rejoicing or celebrating a victory*

repast: *meal*

1 **snuff:** a powdered tobacco inhaled through the nose or pressed on the gums

to learn what pleasures can be found at court.
They pass many useful hours in all kinds of talk—
discussing who gave a ball, or who last paid a visit.
One person describes the British queen's glory,
while another describes a charming Indian screen.
Yet another studies movements, looks, and eyes.
And a reputation dies at every word.
Snuff or fans are used to fill up pauses,
and there is singing, laughing, flirting, and all that.
The sun slipped down from its noontime height
and shot its burning ray sideways.
Hungry judges were signing sentences quickly,
hanging unlucky men so that jurymen could get on with their meals. . . .
Belinda had come desiring fame,
burning to meet two adventurous knights.
At a card game for three, she planned to decide their fates,
and her breast swelled over her expected conquests. . . .
She filled the sky with rejoicing shouts,
and the walls, woods, and long canals replied with echoes.
Oh, unthinking mortals! You are always blind to fate!
Too quickly you become either sad or joyful.
All honors will soon be snatched away,
and this victorious day will be cursed forever.
The table was set with cups and spoons.
The coffee beans crackled in the grinder.
Fiery spirits blazed in silver lamps
set on little Japanese tables.
Floods of hot coffee flowed freely from silver spouts
into earthen china cups.
Taste and smell were both delighted,
and pleasure continued cup after cup.
Belinda's band of sprites hovered around her.
Some fanned the steaming coffee as she sipped,
while others spread their trembling feathers over her lap
to protect the fine fabric of her dress.

Coffee (which makes the politician wise,
And see through all things with his half-shut eyes)
Sent up in vapors to the Baron's brain
New stratagems, the radiant lock to gain.
Ah, cease, rash youth! desist ere 'tis too late,
Fear the just gods, and think of Scylla's[2] fate!
Changed to a bird, and sent to flit in air,
She dearly pays for Nisus' injured hair!
But when to mischief mortals bend their will,
How soon they find fit instruments of ill!
Just then, Clarissa[3] drew with tempting grace
A two-edged weapon from her shining case;
So ladies in romance assist their knight,
Present the spear, and arm him for the fight.
He takes the gift with reverence, and extends
The little engine on his fingers' ends;
This just behind Belinda's neck he spread,
As o'er the fragrant steams she bends her head.
Swift to the lock a thousand sprites repair,
A thousand wings, by turns, blow back the hair;
And thrice they twitched the diamond in her ear;
Thrice she looked back, and thrice the foe drew near.
Just in that instant, anxious Ariel[4] sought
The close recesses of the virgin's thought;
As on the nosegay in her breast reclined,
He watched th' ideas rising in her mind,
Sudden he viewed, in spite of all her art,
An earthly lover lurking at her heart.[5]
Amazed, confused, he found his power expired,
Resigned to fate, and with a sigh retired.
The peer now spreads the glittering *forfex* wide,
T' enclose the lock; now joins it, to divide.
Even then, before the fatal engine closed,

2 **Scylla:** In classical mythology, the princess Scylla cut the hair of her father, King Nisus. She was turned into a bird as punishment.

3 **Clarissa:** a friend of the Baron who disapproves of Belinda's vanity

4 **Ariel:** one of the sylphs, or supernatural creatures, who protect Belinda

5 **Sudden . . . heart:** Because Belinda is attracted to the Baron, Ariel can do nothing to help her.

Coffee makes the politician wise
so he can see through all things with his half-shut eyes.
Its vapors sent new schemes to the Baron's brain,
telling him to get the glowing lock.
Ah, stop, reckless youth! Stop before it is too late!
Fear the just gods, and think of Scylla's fate!
She dearly paid for cutting Nisus' hair
by being turned into a bird, sent flitting in the air.
But when mortals decide on mischief,
how soon they find the tools to do it!
Just then, Clarissa gracefully drew
a pair of scissors from her shining case,
in the same way a lady in a romance helps her knight
by giving him a spear, arming him for a fight.
He took the gift respectfully, and spread
the scissors open with his fingers.
He held them just behind Belinda's neck
as she bent her head toward the coffee's sweet-smelling steam.
A thousand sprites rushed to the lock,
blowing back her hair with their wings
and twitching her diamond earring three times.
She looked back three times, and the foe drew nearer each time.
At that moment, anxious Ariel lay
among the flowers on her breast.
He looked into the virgin's deepest thoughts,
watching ideas rising in her mind.
In spite of all her efforts, he suddenly saw
an earthly lover lurking in her heart.
Frightened and confused, his power gone,
Ariel surrendered to fate and left with a sigh.
Then the Baron spread the glittering scissors wide
around the lock, then closed them to cut it off.
Just before the fatal blades closed,

A wretched sylph too fondly interposed;
Fate urged the shears, and cut the sylph in twain,
80 (But airy substance soon unites again).
The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
From the fair head, forever and forever!
Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,
And screams of horror rend th' affrighted skies.
85 Not louder shrieks to pitying Heaven are cast,
When husbands, or when lapdogs breathe their last;
Or when rich china vessels fallen from high,
In glittering dust, and painted fragments lie!
"Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine,"
90 The victor cried, "the glorious prize is mine!
While fish in streams, or birds delight in air,
Or in a coach and six the British fair,
As long as *Atalantis*[6] shall be read,
Or the small pillow grace a lady's bed,
95 While visits shall be paid on solemn days,
When numerous wax lights in bright order blaze,
While nymphs take treats, or **assignations** give,
So long my honor, name, and praise shall live!
What time would spare, from steel receives its date,
100 And monuments, like men, submit to fate! . . ."
Steel could labor of the gods destroy,
And strike to dust the imperial towers of Troy;
Steel could the works of mortal pride confound,
And hew triumphal arches to the ground.
105 What wonders then, fair nymph! thy hairs should feel
The conquering force of unresisted steel?

assignations: *appointments to meet in secret*

In Canto IV, a furious Belinda demands that her beau, Sir Plume, rescue her stolen lock of hair. Plume, however, fails to convince the Baron to return the curl.

At the beginning of Canto V, Clarissa, the young woman who supplied the Baron with the scissors, tries to end the uproar. Instead, tempers become even more heated.

6 ***Atalantis:*** *The New Atalantis* was a rather scandalous memoir that was popular in Pope's time.

an unlucky Sylph foolishly stepped between them.
Fate closed the scissors, cutting the Sylph in half—
80 (although airy bodies soon grow back again).
The scissor blades removed the sacred hair
from the fair head forever!
Then living lightning flashed from her eyes,
and her screams of horror tore through the frightened skies.
85 No louder shrieks are raised to pitying heaven
when husbands or lapdogs die—
nor even when expensive china cups fall from on high
and break into glittering dust and painted pieces!
"Let my forehead be crowned with wreaths of
triumph!"
90 the victor cried. "The glorious prize is mine!
My honor, name, and praise shall live
as long as fish delight in streams, or birds in air,
or British ladies in coaches drawn by six horses;
or as long as *Atalantis* shall be read
95 and small pillows lie on ladies' beds;
or as long as formal evening visits are paid
with many brightly lit wax candles;
or as long as young ladies take snacks or meet their lovers!
What time might save has been destroyed by steel,
100 and monuments must surrender to fate, like men!"
Steel could destroy something built by the gods,
And even turn the imperial towers of Troy into dust.
Steel could ruin the works of proud mankind,
And topple triumphal arches to the ground.
105 So is it any wonder, fair lady, that your hair should feel
The fierce power of unchallenged steel?

from **Canto V**

"To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago[7] cries,
And swift as lightning to the combat flies.
All side in parties, and begin th' attack;
Fans clap, silks rustle, and tough whalebones[8] crack;
Heroes' and heroines' shouts confus'dly rise,
And bass and treble voices strike the skies.
No common weapons in their hands are found,
Like gods they fight, nor dread a mortal wound. . . .
See, fierce Belinda on the Baron flies,
With more than usual lightning in her eyes:
Nor feared the chief th' unequal fight to try,
Who sought no more than on his foe to die.
But this bold lord with manly strength endued,
She with one finger and a thumb subdued:
Just where the breath of life his nostrils drew,
A charge of snuff the wily virgin threw;
The gnomes direct, to every atom just,
The **pungent** grains of titillating dust.
Sudden with starting tears each eye o'erflows,
And the high dome re-echoes to his nose.
"Now meet thy fate," incensed Belinda cried,
And drew a deadly bodkin[9] from her side. . . .
"Boast not my fall," he cried, "insulting foe!
Thou by some other shalt be laid as low.
Nor think, to die dejects my lofty mind:
All that I dread is leaving you behind!
Rather than so, ah, let me still survive,
And burn in Cupid's flames—but burn alive."
"Restore the lock!" she cries; and all around
"Restore the lock!" the vaulted roofs rebound.

pungent: *sharp or stinging to the senses*

7 **virago:** a loud, threatening woman; here, a friend of Belinda's named Thalestris
8 **whalebones:** strips from the jaw of a whale used to stiffen a woman's corset, or girdle
9 **bodkin:** ornamental pin shaped like a dagger

from **Canto V**

"To arms, to arms!" the fierce virago cried,
and flew into battle as swift as lightning.
Everyone took sides and began the attack.
110 Fans snapped shut, silks rustled, and tough whalebones cracked.
The shouts of heroes and heroines rose wildly,
and low and high voices reached the skies.
They had no ordinary weapons in their hands
and fought like gods, not fearing a mortal wound. . . .
115 How fiercely Belinda flew at the Baron,
with even more lightning in her eyes than usual!
Nor did the Baron fear to join in this unequal fight,
for he wanted nothing more than to be killed by his foe.
But though this bold lord was filled with manly strength,
120 she tamed him with just one finger.
The wily virgin threw a wad of snuff
straight toward his nostrils.
The sprites directed every atom
of the peppery grains of stinging dust.
125 Suddenly, each eye overflowed with bursting tears,
and his sneeze echoed from the top of his head to his nose.
"Now meet your fate!" furious Belinda cried,
drawing a deadly hairpin from her side. . . .
"Don't boast of my defeat, insulting foe!" he cried.
130 "You will be defeated by some other suitor.
And don't suppose I'm sad at the thought of death.
The only thing I dread is giving you up!
Instead of that, let me
burn in the flames of love—but burn alive."
135 "Give back the lock!" she cried. And the high roof
echoed all around, "Give back the lock!"

Not fierce Othello in so loud a strain
Roared for the handkerchief that caused his pain.[10]
But see how oft ambitious aims are crossed,
And chiefs contend till all the prize is lost!
The lock, obtained with guilt, and kept with pain,
In every place is sought, but sought in vain:
With such a prize no mortal must be blessed,
So Heaven decrees! with Heaven who can contest?
Some thought it mounted to the lunar sphere,
Since all things lost on earth are treasured there.[11]
There heroes' wits are kept in **ponderous** vases,
And beaux' in snuffboxes and tweezer cases.
There broken vows and deathbed alms are found,
And lovers' hearts with ends of riband bound. . . .
But trust the Muse—she saw it upward rise,
Though marked by none but quick, poetic eyes: . . .
A sudden star, it shot through liquid air,
And drew behind a radiant trail of hair[12]. . . .
Then cease, bright nymph! to mourn thy ravished hair,
Which adds new glory to the shining sphere!
Not all the tresses that fair head can boast,
Shall draw such envy as the lock you lost.
For, after all the murders of your eye,
When, after millions slain, yourself shall die;
When those fair suns shall set, as set they must,
And all those tresses shall be laid in dust,
This lock, the Muse shall **consecrate** to fame,
And midst the stars inscribe Belinda's name.

ponderous: *unwieldy or clumsy because of weight and size*

consecrate: *to make sacred or worthy of awe and worship*

10 **Othello . . . pain:** In Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, the play's villain, Iago, steals a handkerchief from Othello's wife, Desdemona, and uses it to convince Othello that she is unfaithful.

11 **lunar . . . treasured there:** It used to be said that all lost things ended up on the moon.

12 **trail of hair:** *Comet* comes from a Greek word that means "having long hair."

Even fierce Othello never roared so loudly
for the handkerchief that caused his pain.
But ambitious aims are often defeated,
140 and warriors fight on till the prize is lost!
The lock, guiltily gotten and painfully kept,
was looked for everywhere, but couldn't be found.
Heaven had declared that no mortal must be blessed
with such a prize. And who can argue with Heaven?
145 Some thought the lock climbed up to the moon,
since all things lost on earth are treasured there.
Heroes' wits are kept there in heavy vases,
and wits of fancy lords in snuffboxes and tweezer cases.
Broken vows and deathbed offerings are found there,
150 and lovers' hearts tied together with ribbons. . . .
But trust the Muse, who says she saw it rise upward,
unseen except by people with quick, poetic eyes: . . .
A comet, shooting through clear air,
followed by a radiant trail of hair. . . .
155 So young lady, stop mourning for your
stolen hair,
which adds new glory to the skies!
Not all the hair upon your head
shall draw as much envy as the lock you lost.
Someday, after you've slain millions
160 of young men with your eyes, you'll die yourself.
Someday, those very eyes of yours must close,
and all your hairs will lie in the grave.
But even then, the Muse will bless this lock with fame,
writing among the stars Belinda's name.

After You Read *An Essay on Man* and *The Rape of the Lock*

Literary Lens: Mock Epic

Create a chart like the one below analyzing Pope's mock epic. Fill in the left-hand column with elements usually found in traditional epic poetry. The first one is filled in for you. In the right-hand column, write explanations of how Pope changed each element of traditional epics. Then write an essay explaining Pope's criticisms of eighteenth-century society.

Traditional Epics	Pope's Mock Epic
Courageous, honorable heroes	

Explore Context: Anne's Court

Write a paragraph describing Anne's court as it is portrayed in *The Rape of the Lock*. Supply details from the poem to illustrate your points. Then do further research to learn more about the real court in Queen Anne's day. Write a second paragraph comparing and contrasting the reality with the picture Pope presents.

Apply and Create: Parody

Parody is still a popular way of lampooning works of art, movies, or famous people. Write a parody of a popular song, book, or movie. Consider which elements of the work you want to imitate, including characters, plot devices, or writing style. Share your parody with the class.

Read Critically

Reread these lines from Pope's poetry and answer the questions that follow.

from "An Essay on Man"

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man. . . .
15 Created half to rise, and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

1. Assess the poem's view of humanity. Explain your assessment using examples from the text.
2. Interpret the meaning of lines 17–18. What is your response?
3. Pope often places strongly contrasting words or ideas side by side. Cite examples and explain the emotional impact of each.

Before You Read *Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal"*

Jonathan Swift (1667–1745) was perhaps the greatest satirist in the English language. Born and educated in Ireland, he moved to England, where he was ordained as an Anglican priest and began to write pamphlets, magazine articles, and books. Swift returned to Ireland and became dean of Dublin's St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1713. Sensitive to religious differences spilling over into the politics of his day, Swift pokes fun at religion and learning in *A Tale of a Tub*. In *The Battle of the Books*, he sides with ancient, classical learning over modern ideas. "A Modest Proposal" is a harsh attack on social conditions in Ireland. Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a caustic satire of politics and humanity, disguised as a tale of a man who travels to fantastical lands.

Literary Lens

Irony and Satire Jonathan Swift was a master of verbal irony, the contrast between the way things seem and the way they really are. When using verbal irony, a person says one thing but means something quite different. For example, a student who says "I just love taking a really hard test" is probably using verbal irony. Irony is the main literary technique that Swift uses in his satire, writing that pokes fun at a human behavior in order to bring about change. In "A Modest Proposal," Swift uses a type of satire now often called *black humor*, in which subjects that are usually thought too grim for laughter are treated humorously.

Swift's Language

During Swift's lifetime, Irish Catholics could not vote or get an education. These oppressive English policies kept many Irish in abject poverty. Instead of writing a factual pamphlet about the injustices in Ireland, Swift chose a more dramatic tactic in "A Modest Proposal," adopting a persona, or a character's voice. He presents himself as a wealthy Dubliner, a persona who fancies himself to be humane and caring, but whose words and tone betray him. Children are referred to as *carcasses*; mothers are *breeders*. The reader becomes aware that this proposal is not at all modest and is certainly no solution to suffering. Portions of "A Modest Proposal" include parallel text on facing pages. Read the original text first. When you encounter unfamiliar language, use the context to decipher the meaning, then use the parallel text to check your comprehension.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

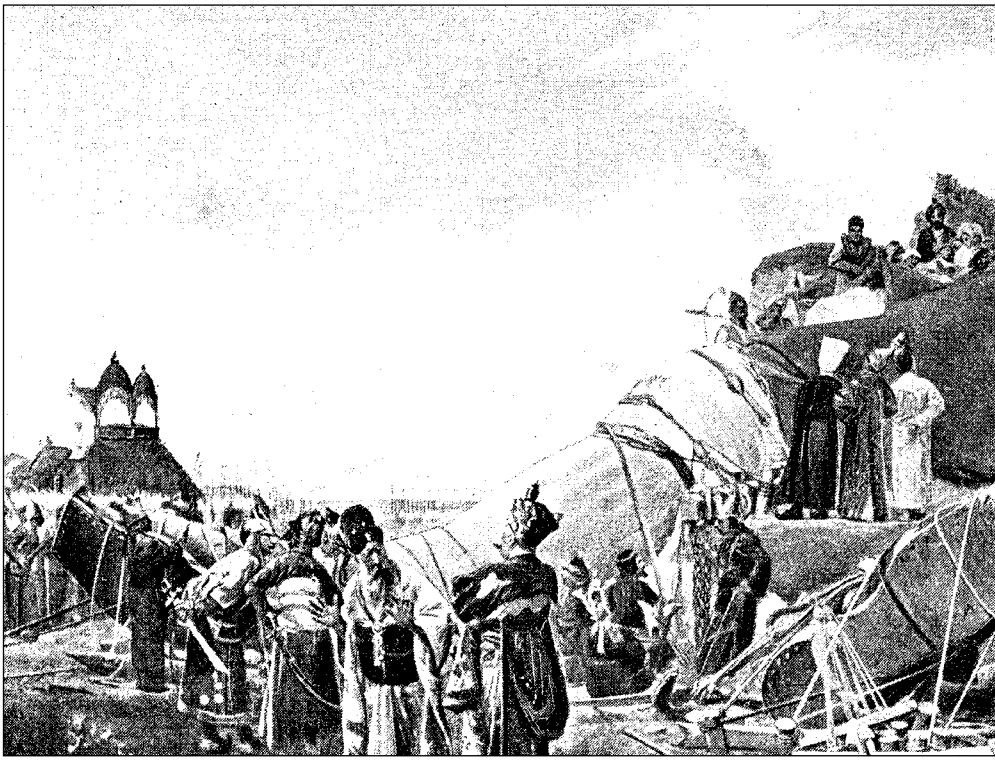
1. Look back at the works you have read so far in this book. Which works could be categorized as satire?
2. Think about how writers use satire and parody. How are they similar? How are they different?
3. Have you watched a television program or feature film that contained satire? How was it able to draw you in and keep you interested?

Introduction to

Gulliver's Travels

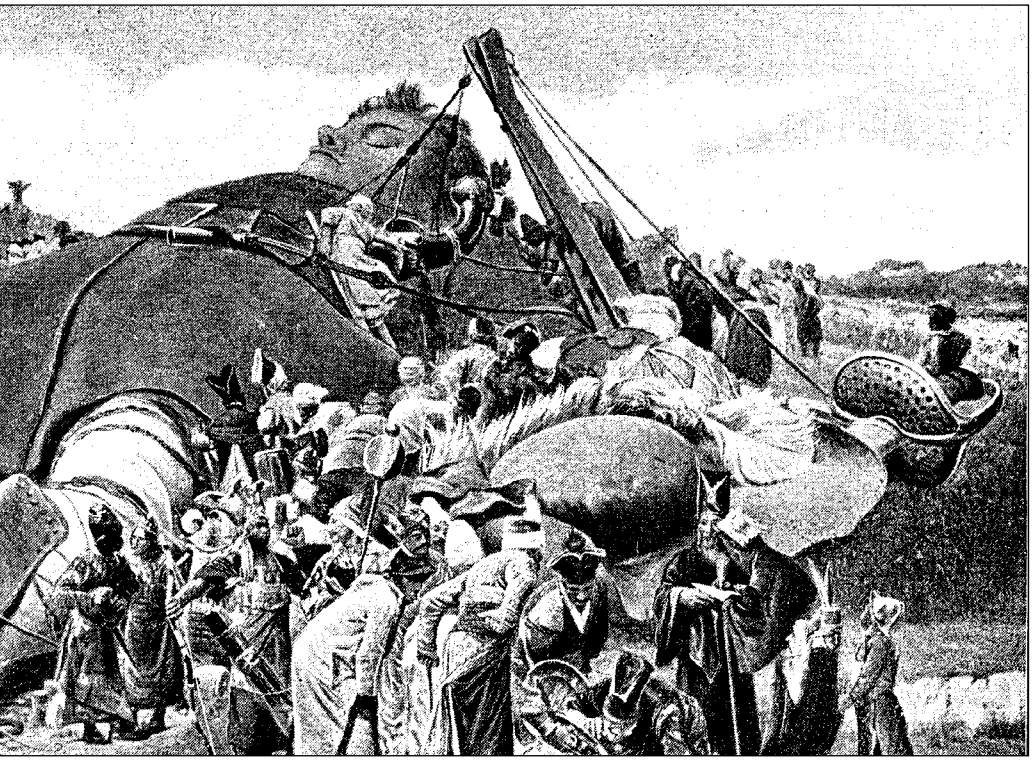
Gulliver's Travels *is Swift's most comical satire—and one of his angriest. Its full title is* Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World. In Four Parts. By Lemuel Gulliver, First a Surgeon, and then a Captain of Several Ships. *Each of the novel's four parts describes one of Gulliver's voyages.*

In Book I, Gulliver is shipwrecked on the island of Lilliput, where he encounters a race of tiny people. The following excerpts are from this part of the book. Perceptive readers of Swift's time would have realized that Lilliput was much like England. Like Englishmen (at least as Swift saw them), the Lilliputians are small, vain, and foolish. Lilliput's enemies live on another island called Blefuscu,



similar to England's enemy, France. Lilliput has two political parties that violently disagree with each other. One political party wears high heels (representing the conservative Tories), while the other wears low heels (representing the liberal Whigs). There is also a split between the Big-Endians and the Little-Endians about which end of a hard-boiled egg should be eaten first. This is a commentary on the conflict between Protestants and Catholics in England.

In Book II, Gulliver makes a voyage to Brobdingnag, a world of giants, where he finds human faults and imperfections hugely magnified. In Book III, Swift satirizes the Royal Society, England's science academy, for what he sees as a misplaced faith in science. In Book IV, Gulliver discovers the Houyhnhms, a race of horses who are gentle and wise but often troubled by rude, ugly, brutal humanoids called Yahoos (the word has come to mean a noisy, rude person). Although Gulliver loves the Houyhnhms, he cannot stay with them because he is just a slightly more civilized Yahoo. He returns to England, a bitter, angry man.



from

Gulliver's Travels

Jonathan Swift

from Chapter I: A Voyage to Lilliput

I lay down on the grass, which was very short and soft, where I slept sounder than ever I remember to have done in my life, and, as I reckoned, above nine hours; for when I awaked, it was just daylight. I attempted to rise, but was not able to stir: For as I happened to lie on my back, I found my arms and legs were strongly fastened on each side to the ground; and my hair, which was long and thick, tied down in the same manner. I likewise felt several slender ligatures across my body, from my armpits to my thighs. I could only look upward; the sun began to grow hot, and the light offended my eyes. I heard a confused noise about me, but in the posture I lay, could see nothing except the sky.

In a little time I felt something alive moving on my left leg, which advancing gently forward over my breast, came almost up to my chin; when bending my eyes downward as much as I could, I perceived it to be a human creature not six inches high, with a bow and arrow in his hands, and a quiver[1] at his back. In the meantime, I felt at least forty more of the same kind (as I conjectured) following the first. I was in the utmost astonishment, and roared so loud, that they all ran back in a fright; and some of them, as I was afterward told, were hurt with the falls they got by leaping from my sides upon the ground. However, they soon returned, and one of them, who ventured so far as to get a full sight of my face, lifting up his hands and eyes by way of admiration, cried out in a shrill, but distinct voice, *Hekinah*

1 **quiver:** case for holding arrows

degul:[2] The others repeated the same words several times, but then I knew not what they meant.

I lay all this while, as the reader may believe, in great uneasiness: At length, struggling to get loose, I had the fortune to break the strings, and wrench out the pegs that fastened my left arm to the ground; for, by lifting it up to my face, I discovered the methods they had taken

2 ***Hekinah degul*:** Scholars have often wondered if there is any meaning to Swift's made-up Lilliputian words. It has been suggested that *Hekinah degul* means "What in the devil!"

to bind me, and at the same time with a violent pull, which gave me excessive pain, I a little loosened the strings that tied down my hair on the left side, so that I was just able to turn my head about two inches. But the creatures ran off a second time, before I could seize them; whereupon there was a great shout in a very shrill accent, and after it ceased, I heard one of them cry aloud, *Tolgo phonac*; when in an instant I felt above an hundred arrows discharged on my left hand, which pricked me like so many needles; and besides, they shot another flight into the air, as we do bombs in Europe, whereof many, I suppose, fell on my body (though I felt them not), and some on my face, which I immediately covered with my left hand. When this shower of arrows was over, I fell a-groaning with grief and pain, and then striving again to get loose, they discharged another volley larger than the first, and some of them attempted with spears to stick me in the sides; but, by good luck, I had on me a buff jerkin,[3] which they could not pierce. I thought it the most prudent method to lie still, and my design was to continue so till night, when, my left hand being already loose, I could easily free myself: And as for the inhabitants, I had reason to believe I might be a match for the greatest armies they could bring against me, if they were all of the same size with him that I saw. But fortune disposed otherwise of me.

When the people observed I was quiet, they discharged no more arrows; but, by the noise increasing, I knew their numbers were greater; and about four yards from me, over against my right ear, I heard a knocking for above an hour, like that of people at work; when turning my head that way, as well as the pegs and strings would permit me, I saw a stage erected, about a foot and a half from the ground, capable of holding four of the inhabitants, with two or three ladders to mount it: From whence one of them, who seemed to be a person of quality, made me a long speech, whereof I understood not one syllable. But I should have mentioned, that before the principal person began his oration, he cried out three times, *Langro dehul san* (these words and the former were afterward repeated and explained to me).

Whereupon immediately about fifty of the inhabitants came and cut the strings that fastened the left side of my head, which gave me the liberty of turning it to the right, and of observing the person and

3 **buff jerkin:** a leather vest

gesture of him who was to speak. He appeared to be of a middle age, and taller than any of the other three who attended him, whereof one was a page who held up his train, and seemed to be somewhat longer than my middle finger; the other two stood one on each side to support him. He acted every part of an orator, and I could observe many periods of threatenings, and others of promises, pity, and kindness.

I answered in a few words, but in the most submissive manner, lifting up my left hand, and both my eyes to the sun, as calling him for a witness; and being almost famished with hunger, having not eaten a morsel for some hours before I left the ship. I found the demands of nature so strong upon me, that I could not forbear showing my impatience (perhaps against the strict rules of decency) by putting my finger frequently on my mouth, to signify that I wanted food. The *Hurgo* (for so they call a great lord, as I afterward learnt) understood me very well. He descended from the stage, and commanded that several ladders should be applied to my sides, on which above an hundred of the inhabitants mounted and walked toward my mouth, laden with baskets full of meat, which had been provided and sent thither by the King's orders, upon the first intelligence he received of me. I observed there was the flesh of several animals, but could not distinguish them by the taste. There were shoulders, legs, and loins, shaped like those of mutton, and very well dressed, but smaller than the wings of a lark. I ate them by two or three at a mouthful, and took three loaves at a time, about the bigness of musket bullets. They supplied me as fast as they could, showing a thousand marks of wonder and astonishment at my bulk and appetite.

I then made another sign that I wanted drink. They found by my eating, that a small quantity would not suffice me; and being a most ingenious people, they slung up with great **dexterity** one of their largest hogsheads,[4] then rolled it toward my hand, and beat out the top; I drank it off at a draft, which I might well do, for it hardly held half a pint, and tasted like a small wine of Burgundy, but much more delicious. They brought me a second hogshead, which I drank in the same manner, and made signs for more, but they had none to give me. When I had performed these wonders, they shouted for joy, and danced upon my breast, repeating several times as they did at first,

dexterity: *skill and grace in physical activity*

4 **hogsheads:** barrels

Hekinah degul. They made me a sign that I should throw down the two hogsheads, but first warned the people below to stand out of the way, crying aloud, *Borach mivola*, and when they saw the vessels in the air, there was an universal shout of *Hekinah degul*. I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backward and forward on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground. But the remembrance of what I had felt, which probably might not be the worst they could do, and the promise of honor I made them, for so I interpreted my submissive behavior, soon drove out those imaginations. Besides, I now considered myself as bound by the laws of hospitality to a people who had treated me with so much expense and magnificence. However, in my thoughts, I could not sufficiently wonder at the **intrepidity** of these diminutive mortals, who durst venture to mount and walk on my body, while one of my hands was at liberty, without trembling at the very sight of so **prodigious** a creature as I must appear to them.

intrepidity: *fearlessness, fortitude, and endurance*

prodigious: *enormous*

After some time, when they observed that I made no more demands for meat, there appeared before me a person of high rank from his Imperial Majesty. His Excellency, having mounted on the small of my right leg, advanced forward up to my face, with about a dozen of his retinue. And producing his credentials under the Signet Royal, which he applied close to my eyes, spoke about ten minutes, without any signs of anger, but with a kind of determinate resolution; often pointing forward, which, as I afterward found, was toward the capital city, about half a mile distant, whither it was agreed by his Majesty in council that I must be conveyed. I answered in few words, but to no purpose, and made a sign with my hand that was loose, putting it to the other (but over his Excellency's head for fear of hurting him or his train) and then to my own head and body, to signify that I desired my liberty. It appeared that he understood me well enough, for he shook his head by way of disapprobation, and held his hand in a posture to show that I must be carried as a prisoner. However, he made other signs to let me understand that I should have meat and drink enough, and very good treatment. Whereupon I once more thought of attempting to break my bonds; but again, when I felt the smart of their arrows, upon my face and hands, which were all in blisters, and many of the darts still sticking in them, and observing likewise that the number of my enemies increased, I gave tokens

to let them know that they might do with me what they pleased. Upon this, the *Hurgo* and his train withdrew, with much civility and cheerful countenances.

Soon after I heard a general shout, with frequent repetitions of the words, *Peplom selan*, and I felt great numbers of people on my left side relaxing the cords to such a degree, that I was able to turn upon my right, and to ease myself with making water; which I very plentifully did, to the great astonishment of the people, who conjecturing by my motions what I was going to do, immediately opened to the right and left on that side, to avoid the torrent which fell with such noise and violence from me. But before this, they had daubed my face and both my hands with a sort of ointment very pleasant to the smell, which in a few minutes removed all the smart of their arrows. These circumstances, added to the refreshment I had received by their victuals and drink, which were very nourishing, disposed me to sleep. I slept about eight hours, as I was afterward assured; and it was no wonder, for the physicians, by the Emperor's order, had mingled a sleeping potion in the hogshead of wine. . . .

My gentleness and good behavior had gained so far on the Emperor and his court, and indeed upon the army and people in general, that I began to conceive hopes of getting my liberty in a short time. I took all possible methods to cultivate this favorable disposition. The natives came by degrees to be less apprehensive of any danger from me. I would sometimes lie down, and let five or six of them dance on my hand. And at last the boys and girls would venture to come and play at hide-and-seek in my hair.

I had now made a good progress in understanding and speaking their language. The Emperor had a mind one day to entertain me with several of the country shows, wherein they exceed all nations I have known, both for dexterity and magnificence. I was diverted with none so much as that of the rope dancers, performed upon a slender white thread, extended about two foot, and twelve inches from the ground. Upon which I shall desire liberty, with the reader's patience, to enlarge a little.

This diversion is only practiced by those persons who are candidates for great employments, and high favor, at court. They are trained in this art from their youth, and are not always of noble birth, or liberal education. When a great office is vacant, either by death

or disgrace (which often happens), five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to entertain his Majesty and the court with a dance on the rope, and whoever jumps the highest without falling, succeeds in the office. Very often the chief ministers themselves are commanded to show their skill, and to convince the Emperor that they have not lost their faculty. Flimnap, the Treasurer, is allowed to cut a caper[5] on the straight rope, at least an inch higher than any other lord in the whole empire. I have seen him do the summerset[6] several times together upon a trencher fixed on the rope, which is no thicker than a common packthread in England. My friend Reldresal, principal Secretary for Private Affairs, is, in my opinion, if I am not partial, the second after the Treasurer; the rest of the great officers are much upon a par.

These diversions are often attended with fatal accidents, whereof great numbers are on record. I myself have seen two or three candidates break a limb. But the danger is much greater when the ministers themselves are commanded to show their dexterity; for, by contending to excel themselves and their fellows, they strain so far, that there is hardly one of them who hath not received a fall, and some of them two or three. I was assured that a year or two before my arrival, Flimnap would have infallibly broke his neck, if one of the King's cushions, that accidentally lay on the ground, had not weakened the force of his fall.

There is likewise another diversion, which is only shown before the Emperor and Empress, and first minister, upon particular occasions. The Emperor lays on the table three fine silken threads of six inches long. One is blue, the other red, and the third green. These threads are proposed as prizes for those persons whom the Emperor hath a mind to distinguish by a peculiar mark of his favor. The ceremony is performed in his Majesty's great chamber of state, where the candidates are to undergo a trial of dexterity very different from the former, and such as I have not observed the least resemblance of in any other country of the Old or the New World. The Emperor holds a stick in his hands, both ends parallel to the horizon, while the candidates advancing one by one, sometimes leap over the stick, sometimes creep under it backward and forward several times,

5 **cut a caper:** leap
6 **summerset:** somersault

according as the stick is advanced or depressed. Sometimes the Emperor holds one end of the stick, and his first minister the other; sometimes the minister has it entirely to himself. Whoever performs his part with most agility, and holds out the longest in leaping and creeping, is rewarded with the blue-colored silk; the red is given to the next, and the green to the third, which they all wear girt twice round about the middle; and you see few great persons about this court, who are not adorned with one of these girdles. . . .

I had sent so many memorials and petitions for my liberty, that his Majesty at length mentioned the matter first in the cabinet, and then in a full council; where it was opposed by none, except Skyresh Bolgolam, who was pleased, without any **provocation**, to be my mortal enemy. But it was carried against him by the whole board, and confirmed by the Emperor. That minister was *Galbet*, or Admiral of the Realm; very much in his master's confidence, and a person well versed in affairs, but of a **morose** and sour complexion. However, he was at length persuaded to comply; but prevailed that the articles and conditions upon which I should be set free, and to which I must swear, should be drawn up by himself. These articles were brought to me by Skyresh Bolgolam in person, attended by two under-secretaries, and several persons of distinction. After they were read, I was demanded to swear to the performance of them; first in the manner of my own country, and afterwards in the method prescribed by their laws; which was to hold my right foot in my left hand, to place the middle finger of my right hand on the crown of my head, and my thumb on the tip of my right ear. But because the reader may perhaps be curious to have some idea of the style and manner of expression peculiar to that people, as well as to know the articles upon which I recovered my liberty, I have made a translation of the whole instrument, word for word, as near as I was able; which I here offer to the public.

provocation: *act of inciting or stirring up*

morose: *sad and gloomy*

GOLBASTO MOMAREN EVLAME GURDILO SHEFIN MULLY ULLY GUE, most mighty Emperor of Lilliput, delight and terror of the universe, whose dominions extend five thousand blustrugs (about twelve miles in circumference) to the extremities of the globe; Monarch of all Monarchs; taller than the sons of men; whose feet press down to the center, and whose head strikes against the sun; at whose nod the princes of the earth shake their knees; pleasant as the

spring, comfortable as the summer, fruitful as autumn, dreadful as winter. His most sublime Majesty proposeth to the Man-Mountain, lately arrived at our celestial dominions, the following articles, which by a solemn oath he shall be obliged to perform.

First, The Man-Mountain shall not depart from our dominions, without our license under our great seal.

Secondly, He shall not presume to come into our metropolis, without our express order; at which time the inhabitants shall have two hours' warning, to keep within their doors.

Thirdly, The said Man-Mountain shall confine his walks to our principal high roads; and not offer to walk or lie down in a meadow, or field of corn.

Fourthly, As he walks the said roads, he shall take the utmost care not to trample upon the bodies of any of our loving subjects, their horses, or carriages, nor take any of our said subjects into his hands, without their own consent.

Fifthly, If an express require extraordinary dispatch, the Man-Mountain shall be obliged to carry in his pocket the messenger and horse, a six days' journey once in every moon, and return the said messenger back (if so required) safe to our Imperial Presence.

Sixthly, He shall be our ally against our enemies in the island of Blefuscu, and do his utmost to destroy their fleet, which is now preparing to invade us.

Seventhly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, at his times of leisure, be aiding and assisting to our workmen, in helping to raise certain great stones, towards covering the wall of the principal park, and other our royal buildings.

Eighthly, That the said Man-Mountain shall, in two moons' time, deliver in an exact survey of the circumference of our dominions by a computation of his own paces round the coast.

Lastly, That upon his solemn oath to observe all the above articles, the said Man-Mountain shall have a daily allowance of meat and drink sufficient for the support of 1,728 of our subjects; with free access to our Royal Person, and other marks of our favor. Given at our palace at Belfaborac the twelfth day of the ninety-first moon of our reign.

I swore and subscribed to these articles with great cheerfulness and content . . . whereupon my chains were immediately unlocked,

and I was at full liberty: the Emperor himself in person did me the honor to be by at the whole ceremony. I made my acknowledgements by prostrating myself at his Majesty's feet: but he commanded me to rise; and after many gracious expressions, which, to avoid the censure of vanity, I shall not repeat, he added, that he hoped I should prove a useful servant, and well deserve all the favors he had already conferred upon me, or might do for the future.

The reader may please to observe, that in the last article for the recovery of my liberty, the Emperor stipulates to allow me a quantity of meat and drink, sufficient for the support of 1,728 Lilliputians. Some time after, asking a friend at court how they came to fix on that determinate number, he told me, that his Majesty's mathematicians, having taken the height of my body by the help of a quadrant,[7] and finding it to exceed theirs in the proportion of twelve to one, they concluded from the similarity of their bodies, that mine must contain at least 1,728 of theirs, and consequently would require as much food as was necessary to support that number of Lilliputians. By which, the reader may conceive an idea of the ingenuity of that people, as well as the prudent and exact economy of so great a prince. One morning, about a fortnight after I had obtained my liberty, Reldresal, Principal Secretary (as they style him) of Private Affairs, came to my house, attended only by one servant. He ordered his coach to wait at a distance, and desired I would give him an hour's audience; which I readily consented to, on account of his quality, and personal merits, as well as of the many good offices he had done me during my solicitations at court. I offered to lie down, that he might the more conveniently reach my ear; but he chose rather to let me hold him in my hand during our conversation. He began with compliments on my liberty, said he might pretend to some merit in it; but, however, added, that if it had not been for the present situation of things at court, perhaps I might not have obtained it so soon. For, said he, as flourishing a condition as we appear to be in to foreigners, we labor under two mighty evils; a violent faction at home, and the danger of an invasion by a most potent enemy from abroad. As to the first, you are to understand, that for above seventy moons past, there have been two struggling parties in the empire, under the names of *Tramecksan*, and *Slamecksan*, from the high and

7 **quadrant:** an instrument used to measure height

low heels on their shoes, by which they distinguish themselves.

It is alleged indeed, that the high heels are most agreeable to our ancient constitution: but however this be, his Majesty hath determined to make use of only low heels in the administration of the government and all offices in the gift of the crown; as you cannot but observe; and particularly, that his Majesty's imperial heels are lower at least by a *drurr* than any of his court; (*drurr* is a measure about the fourteenth part of an inch). The animosities between these two parties run so high, that they will neither eat nor drink, nor talk with each other. We compute the *Tramecksan*, or High-Heels, to exceed us in number, but the power is wholly on our side. We apprehend his Imperial Highness, the heir to the crown, to have some tendency towards the High-Heels; at least we can plainly discover one of his heels higher than the other, which gives him a hobble in his gait. Now, in the midst of these intestine disquiets, we are threatened with an invasion from the island of Blefuscu, which is the other great empire of the universe, almost as large and powerful as this of his Majesty.

For as to what we have heard you affirm, that there are other kingdoms and states in the world, inhabited by human creatures as large as yourself, our philosophers are in much doubt; and would rather conjecture that you dropped from the moon, or one of the stars; because it is certain, that an hundred mortals of your bulk would, in a short time, destroy all the fruits and cattle of his Majesty's dominions. Besides, our histories of six thousand moons make no mention of any other regions, than the two great empires of Lilliput and Blefuscu. Which two mighty powers have, as I was going to tell you, been engaged in a most obstinate war for six and thirty moons past. It began upon the following occasion.

It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown. These civil commotions

were constantly **fomented** by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed, that eleven thousand persons have, at several times, suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy: but the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden, and the whole party rendered incapable by law of holding employments. During the course of these troubles, the emperors of Blefuscu did frequently expostulate by their ambassadors, accusing us of making a **schism** in religion, by offending against a fundamental doctrine of our great prophet Lustrog, in the fifty-fourth chapter of the *Brundecral* (which is their Alcoran).[8] This, however, is thought to be a mere strain upon the text: for the words are these; *That all true believers shall break their eggs at the convenient end:* and which is the convenient end, seems, in my humble opinion, to be left to every man's conscience, or at least in the power of the chief magistrate to determine. Now the Big-Endian exiles have found so much credit in the Emperor of Blefuscu's court, and so much private assistance and encouragement from their party here at home, that a bloody war hath been carried on between the two empires for six and thirty moons with various success; during which time we have lost forty capital ships, and a much greater number of smaller vessels, together with thirty thousand of our best seamen and soldiers; and the damage received by the enemy is reckoned to be somewhat greater than ours. However, they have now equipped a numerous fleet, and are just preparing to make a descent upon us; and his Imperial Majesty, placing great confidence in your valor and strength, hath commanded me to lay this account of his affairs before you.

fomented: *stirred up*

schism: *division*

I desired the Secretary to present my humble duty to the Emperor, and to let him know, that I thought it would not become me, who was a foreigner, to interfere with parties; but I was ready, with the hazard of my life, to defend his person and state against all invaders.

8 **During the course . . . Alcoran):** The Lilliputians' enemies in Blefuscu are accusing them of violating the command of egg breaking found in their own holy book, the *Alcoran*.

A Modest Proposal

FOR PREVENTING THE CHILDREN OF POOR PEOPLE IN IRELAND FROM BEING A BURDEN TO THEIR PARENTS OR COUNTRY, AND FOR MAKING THEM BENEFICIAL TO THE PUBLIC

Jonathan Swift

1 It is a melancholy object to those, who walk through this great town,[1] or travel in the country, when they see the streets, the roads, and cabin doors, crowded with beggars of the female sex, followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags, and importuning every passenger for an alms. These mothers instead of being able to work for their honest livelihood, are forced to employ all their time in strolling, to beg **sustenance** for their helpless infants, who, as they grow up either turn thieves for want of work, or leave their dear native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbadoes.[2]

sustenance: *means of support or nourishment*

2 I think it is agreed by all parties, that this prodigious number of children, in the arms, or on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and frequently of their fathers, is in the present deplorable state of the kingdom, a very great additional **grievance**; and therefore whoever could find out a fair, cheap, and easy method of making these children sound and useful members of the commonwealth would deserve so well of the public, as to have his statue set up for a preserver of the nation.

grievance: *a cause for distress or complaint*

1 **great town:** Dublin, Ireland

2 **Pretender . . . Barbadoes:** "The Pretender" refers to James Edward, the son of the deposed King James II, who wanted to seize the throne of England from abroad. The Irish poor often immigrated to the Barbados in the West Indies, where they became little better than slaves.

A Modest Proposal

Jonathan Swift

Parallel Text

1 People who walk through this great town or travel in the country witness a sad sight. The streets, roads, and cabin doors are crowded with female beggars followed by three, four, or six children, all in rags. They beg every passerby for charity.

These mothers cannot work for an honest living. Instead, they are forced to use all their time walking and begging to support their helpless infants. As these babies grow up, they must become thieves for lack of work. Or else they must leave their dear, native country to fight for the Pretender in Spain, or sell themselves to the Barbados.

2 I think everybody can agree on one thing. There are far too many children in the arms, on the backs, or at the heels of their mothers, and often of their fathers. In the present sad state of the kingdom, this situation is a great, added shame.

Surely someone can find a fair, cheap, and easy method of making sound and useful members of society of these children. Whoever does so will deserve much from the public, and might have his statue set up as a savior of the nation.

3 But my intention is very far from being confined to provide only for the children of professed beggars; it is of a much greater extent, and shall take in the whole number of infants at a certain age, who are born of parents in effect as little able to support them, as those who demand our charity in the streets.

4 As to my own part, having turned my thoughts, for many years, upon this important subject, and maturely weighed the several schemes of other projectors, I have always found them grossly mistaken in their computation. It is true a child, just dropped from its dam, may be supported by her milk, for a solar year with little other nourishment, at most not above the value of two shillings,[3] which the mother may certainly get, or the value in scraps, by her lawful occupation of begging, and it is exactly at one year old that I propose to provide for them, in such a manner, as, instead of being a charge upon their parents, or the parish, or wanting food and raiment for the rest of their lives, they shall, on the contrary, contribute to the feeding and partly to the clothing of many thousands.

5 There is likewise another great advantage in my scheme, that it will prevent those voluntary abortions, and that horrid practice of women murdering their bastard children, alas! too frequent among us, sacrificing the poor innocent babes, I doubt, more to avoid the expense, than the shame, which would move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

6 The number of souls in Ireland being usually reckoned one million and a half, of these I calculate there may be about two hundred thousand couples whose wives are breeders, from which number I subtract thirty thousand couples, who are able to maintain their own children, although I apprehend there cannot be so many under the present distresses of the kingdom, but this being granted, there will remain an hundred and seventy thousand breeders. I again subtract fifty thousand for those women who miscarry, or

3 **shillings:** A shilling was a coin worth twelve English pence. There were 240 pence in an English pound.

3 But I mean to do much more than provide for children of admitted beggars. I intend to go much further. There are many other poor infants of a certain age. They are born to parents who can't support them any better than parents who demand charity in the streets. I want to deal with these children too.

4 For my part, I've thought long and hard for many years about this important subject. I've seriously considered several schemes of other planners. But I have always found that they simply didn't add up.

It is true that a newborn child can be supported by its mother's milk for a year with little other nourishment. At most, such a child needs two shillings for food. A mother can lawfully get this much in money or scraps by begging.

It is exactly at one year old that I have a plan for them. They need not be a burden to their parents or the parish, lacking food and clothing for the rest of their lives. Instead, they shall contribute to feeding and partly to clothing many thousands.

5 There is another great advantage to my scheme. It will prevent voluntary abortions and the horrid practice of women murdering their illegitimate children. Alas, poor, innocent babes are too frequently sacrificed among us. I suspect that mothers do this more to avoid expense than shame. It is enough to move tears and pity in the most savage and inhuman breast.

6 The number of people in Ireland is usually figured at one million and a half. Of these, I calculate that there may be about 200,000 couples whose wives are breeders. From this number, I subtract 30,000 couples who are able to support their own children.

I doubt that there are really 30,000 under the present troubles in the kingdom. But even so, let there remain 170,000 breeders. I then subtract 50,000 for women who miscarry, or whose children die by accident or disease within the first year. There remain only 120,000 children born to poor parents each year.

whose children die by accident, or disease within the year. There only remain an hundred and twenty thousand children of poor parents annually born: The question therefore is, how this number shall be reared, and provided for, which, as I have already said, under the present situation of affairs, is utterly impossible by all the methods hitherto proposed, for we can neither employ them in handicraft, or agriculture; we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land: They can very seldom pick up a livelihood by stealing until they arrive at six years old, except where they are of towardly parts, although, I confess they learn the rudiments much earlier, during which time, they can however be properly looked upon only as probationers, as I have been informed by a principal gentleman in the county of Cavan, who protested to me, that he never knew above one or two instances under the age of six, even in a part of the kingdom so renowned for the quickest proficiency in that art.

7 I am assured by our merchants, that a boy or girl, before twelve years old, is no saleable **commodity**, and even when they come to this age, they will not yield above three pounds, or three pounds and half a crown[4] at most on the exchange, which cannot turn to account either to the parents or the kingdom, the charge of nutriment and rags having been at least four times that value.

commodity: *a good or product offered for sale*

8 I shall now therefore humbly propose my own thoughts, which I hope will not be liable to the least objection.

9 I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed is at a year old a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled, and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricassee, or ragout.

10 I do therefore humbly offer it to public consideration, that of the hundred and twenty thousand children, already computed, twenty thousand may be reserved for breed, whereof only one-fourth part to be males, which is more than we allow to sheep, black cattle, or swine, and my reason

4 **crown:** a coin worth five shillings

So the question is, how shall this number be raised and provided for? As I have already said, this is utterly impossible by all the methods so far suggested. We can't employ them in construction or agriculture, for we neither build houses (I mean in the country) nor cultivate land.

They can seldom make a living by stealing until they are six years old, unless they are very advanced for their age—although I admit that they do learn the basics much earlier. But during this time, they can only be regarded as apprentices.

This has been explained to me by a notable gentleman in Cavan county, a place well known for able thieves. He said he has not heard of more than one or two good thieves under the age of six.

7 Merchants have told me that a boy or girl under 12 years old is simply not salable. And even when they reach that age, they won't bring more than three pounds—or three pounds and half a crown—in any market. This won't bring a profit either to parents or the kingdom. The cost of food and rags is at least four times that much.

8 So now I humbly propose my own thoughts. I hope they will not meet the least objection.

9 I have a very knowing American acquaintance who lives in London. He assures me that a young, well-nursed, healthy child is, at a year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome food. A child can be stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled. And I do not doubt that it will serve just as well chopped up in gravy or in a thick stew.

10 So I humbly suggest the following for public discussion. Of the 120,000 children already figured, we should save 20,000 for breeding. Of these, only one-fourth need be male, which is more than we allow for sheep, black cattle, or swine.

is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage, a circumstance not much regarded by our savages; therefore one male will be sufficient to serve four females. That the remaining hundred thousand may at a year old be offered in sale to the persons of quality, and fortune, through the kingdom, always advising the mother to let them suck plentifully in the last month, so as to render them plump, and fat for a good table. A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends, and when the family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish, and seasoned with a little pepper or salt will be very good boiled on the fourth day, especially in winter.

11 I have reckoned upon a medium, that a child just born will weigh twelve pounds, and in a solar year if tolerably nursed increaseth to twenty-eight pounds.

12 I grant this food will be somewhat dear, and therefore very proper for landlords, who, as they have already devoured most of the parents, seem to have the best title to the children.

13 Infant's flesh will be in season throughout the year, but more plentiful in March, and a little before and after, for we are told by a grave author, an eminent French physician, that fish being a prolific diet, there are more children born in Roman Catholic countries about nine months after Lent, than at any other season,[5] therefore reckoning a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual, because the number of popish infants, is at least three to one in this kingdom, and therefore it will have one other collateral advantage by lessening the number of papists among us.

14 I have already computed the charge of nursing a beggar's child (in which list I reckon all cottagers,[6] laborers, and four-fifths of the farmers) to be about two shillings per annum, rags included, and I believe no gentleman would

5 **Infant's flesh . . . any other season:** The physician/author Francois Rabelais (c. 1494–1553) made this suggestion in his great comic novel *Gargantua and Pantagruel.* Lent is a period of forty weekdays before Easter; it is traditionally observed with fasting and repentance.

6 **cottagers:** tenant farmers who work land owned by someone else

My reason is that these children are seldom the fruits of marriage. This institution is not much respected by our savages. So one male will be enough to serve four females.

The remaining 100,000, at a year old, can be sold to well-off people throughout the kingdom. The mother will always be advised to let them suck plentifully in the last month. This will leave them plump and fat for a good table.

A child will make two dishes at an entertainment for friends. And when a family dines alone, the fore or hind quarter will make a reasonable dish. Seasoned with a little pepper or salt, it will be very good boiled four days later, especially in winter.

11 On the average, I figure that a newborn child will weigh 12 pounds. If well-nursed, it will grow to 28 pounds in a year.

12 I admit this food will be somewhat expensive. So it is very proper for landlords, who have already eaten up the earnings of most of the parents. They seem to have the best right to eat the children too.

13 Infants' flesh will be in season throughout the year. But it is more plentiful in March, and a little before and after. This has been explained by a serious author, a well-known French physician. In Roman Catholic countries, where fish is the main diet, more children are born nine months after Lent than in any other season.

So a year after Lent, the markets will be more glutted than usual. This is because the number of Catholic infants is at least three times greater in this kingdom than that of Protestants. So my plan will have the extra advantage of decreasing the number of Catholics among us.

14 I have already figured the cost of nursing a beggar's child to be about two shillings a year, rags included. (I come up with the same figure for the children of most farmers, cottagers,and laborers.) I believe no gentleman would refuse to pay ten shillings for the carcass of a good, fat child.

repine to give ten shillings for the carcass of a good fat child, which, as I have said will make four dishes of excellent nutritive meat, when he hath only some particular friend, or his own family to dine with him. Thus the squire will learn to be a good landlord, and grow popular among his tenants, the mother will have eight shillings net profit, and be fit for work until she produceth another child.

15 Those who are more thrifty (as I must confess the times require) may flay the carcass; the skin of which, artificially dressed, will make admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen.

16 As to our city of Dublin, shambles may be appointed for this purpose, in the most convenient parts of it, and butchers we may be assured will not be wanting, although I rather recommend buying the children alive, and dressing them hot from the knife, as we do roasting pigs.

17 A very worthy person, a true lover of his country, and whose virtues I highly esteem, was lately pleased, in discoursing on this matter, to offer a refinement upon my scheme. He said, that many gentlemen of this kingdom, having of late destroyed their deer, he conceived that the want of venison might be well supplied by the bodies of young lads and maidens, not exceeding fourteen years of age, nor under twelve, so great a number of both sexes in every country being now ready to starve, for want of work and service: and these to be disposed of by their parents if alive, or otherwise by their nearest relations. But with due **deference** to so excellent a friend, and so deserving a patriot, I cannot be altogether in his sentiments, for as to the males, my American acquaintance assured me from frequent experience, that their flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our schoolboys, by continual exercise, and their taste disagreeable, and to fatten them would not answer the charge. Then as to the females, it would, I think with humble submission, be a loss to the public, because they soon would become breeders themselves: And besides it is not improbable that some **scrupulous** people might be apt to censure such a practice (although indeed very unjustly) as

deference: *respect given to an elder*

scrupulous: *acting with strict regard for what is moral and proper*

As I have said, this will make four dishes of excellent, nutritious meat, as long as one is only dining with one's family or some special friend. So a gentleman will learn to be a good landlord and grow popular among his tenants. And the mother will make a profit of eight shillings, then be fit to work until she produces another child.

15 I confess that the times demand a certain thrift, and thrifty folk may choose to skin the carcass. The skin, carefully tanned, will make fine gloves for ladies and summer boots for gentlemen.

16 Here in certain parts of Dublin, slaughterhouses may be put to this use. We can be sure that there will be no lack of butchers. But I really recommend buying the children alive. Then they can be prepared hot from the knife, as we do in roasting pigs.

17 I have talked of this matter with a very worthy person, a true lover of his country whose virtues I greatly respect. He added a suggestion to my scheme.

He pointed out that many gentlemen in this kingdom have killed off their deer lately. So he thought the bodies of boys or girls might make up for the lack of venison. They should not be more than 14 years old, nor under 12.

In all countries, there are a great number of boys and girls now ready to starve because they cannot find jobs. Their parents, if they are alive, could sell them. Otherwise, they could be sold by their nearest relatives.

But with due respect to so fine a friend and so good a patriot, I cannot altogether agree. Based on frequent experience, my American friend has told me that the flesh of males is tough and lean. Like our schoolboys, they get too much exercise, so their taste is disagreeable. To fatten them would not make any difference.

As for the females, I must humbly argue that eating them would be a loss to the public. Soon, they could become breeders themselves.

Besides, it is possible that some strict people might criticize such a practice (however unjustly) as being almost cruel. I must confess that I have always found this the

a little bordering upon cruelty, which, I confess, hath always been with me the strongest objection against any project, how well soever intended.

18 But in order to justify my friend, he confessed that this **expedient** was put into his head by the famous Sallmanaazor, a native of the island Formosa,[7] who came from thence to London, above twenty years ago, and in conversation told my friend, that in his country when any young person happened to be put to death, the executioner sold the carcass to persons of quality, as a prime dainty, and that, in his time, the body of a plump girl of fifteen, who was crucified for an attempt to poison the emperor, was sold to his imperial majesty's prime minister of state, and other great mandarins of the court, in joints from the gibbet, at four hundred crowns. Neither indeed can I deny, that if the same use were made of several plump young girls in this town, who, without one single groat to their fortunes, cannot stir abroad without a chair, and appear at the playhouse, and assemblies in foreign fineries, which they never will pay for; the kingdom would not be the worse.

expedient: *something useful; an advantage*

19 Some persons of a desponding spirit are in great concern about that vast number of poor people, who are aged, diseased, or maimed, and I have been desired to employ my thoughts what course may be taken, to ease the nation of so grievous an encumbrance. But I am not in the least pain upon that matter, because it is very well known, that they are every day dying, and rotting, by cold, and famine, and filth, and vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected. And as to the younger laborers they are now in almost as hopeful a condition. They cannot get work, and consequently pine away for want of nourishment, to a degree, that if at any time they are accidentally hired to common labor, they have not strength to perform it, and thus the country and themselves are in a fair way of being soon delivered from the evils to come.

7 **Sallmanaazor . . . Formosa:** *Sallmanaazor* refers to George Psalmanazar (c. 1679–1763), a Frenchman who claimed to be a native of Formosa (now Taiwan). He wrote a book titled *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa*. In fact, he had never been there.

strongest objection against any project, however well-intended.

18 But to be fair to my friend, he confessed that he had gotten this idea from the famous Psalmanazar, a native of the island Formosa. He came to London from there more than 20 years ago.

He told my friend what was done in his country when any young person happened to be put to death. The executioner would sell the carcass to wealthy people as a fine treat.

Psalmanazar knew of a 15-year-old girl who was crucified for trying to poison the emperor. Her plump body was sold to the emperor's prime minister of state and other great court officials. Cut in pieces right off the gallows, it sold for 400 crowns.

And I cannot deny that the same use might be made of several plump young girls in this town. Though they don't have any money, they cannot go outside without being carried by servants in a chair. And they always appear at the playhouse and at dinners in fine, foreign clothes, which they never pay for. The kingdom would be better off if they were eaten.

19 Some people are very depressed about the great number of poor people who are old, sick, or crippled. I have been asked to consider what course might be taken to ease the nation of such a serious problem.

But I am not the least bit worried about the matter. It is very well known that they are dying and rotting every day from cold, hunger, filth, and lice. They cannot be expected to die any faster.

And as for younger laborers, their situation is almost as hopeful. They cannot get work, and so they fade away for lack of food. And if, by accident, they are hired for common labor, they do not have the strength for it. So the country and the young men are both better off, freed from future evils.

digressed: *turned aside from the main subject*

20 I have too long **digressed**, and therefore shall return to my subject. I think the advantages by the proposal which I have made are obvious and many as well as of the highest importance.

21 For first, as I have already observed, it would greatly lessen the number of papists, with whom we are yearly overrun, being the principal breeders of the nation, as well as our most dangerous enemies, and who stay at home on purpose with a design to deliver the kingdom to the Pretender, hoping to take their advantage by the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen rather to leave their country, than stay at home, and pay tithes against their conscience, to an idolatrous Episcopal curate.[8]

22 Secondly, the poorer tenants will have something valuable of their own, which by law may be made liable to distress, and help to pay their landlord's rent, their corn and cattle being already seized, and money a thing unknown.

23 Thirdly, whereas the maintenance of an hundred thousand children, from two years old, and upwards, cannot be computed at less than ten shillings apiece per annum, the nation's stock will be thereby increased fifty thousand pounds per annum, besides the profit of a new dish, introduced to the tables of all gentlemen of fortune in the kingdom, who have any refinement in taste, and the money will circulate among ourselves, the goods being entirely of our own growth and manufacture.

24 Fourthly, the constant breeders, besides the gain of eight shillings sterling per annum, by the sale of their children, will be rid of the charge of maintaining them after the first year.

25 Fifthly, this food would likewise bring great custom to taverns, where the vintners will certainly be so prudent as to procure the best receipts for dressing it to perfection, and consequently have their houses frequented by all the fine gentlemen, who justly value themselves upon their knowledge in good eating, and a skillful cook, who understands how to oblige his guests will contrive to make it as expensive as they please.

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8 **hoping . . . curate:** Swift attacks Protestant reformers who thought the established Episcopal Church was too similar to the Catholic Church. A tithe is money given to support the church, usually a tenth of a person's income.

20 I have strayed from the subject too long, and will now get back to it. I think the advantages of my proposal are many, obvious, and extremely important.

21 First: As I have already said, it would lessen the number of Catholics, who overrun us yearly. They are the main breeders of the nation as well as our most dangerous enemies.

They stay at home for the purpose of turning the kingdom over to the Pretender. They hope to take advantage of the absence of so many good Protestants, who have chosen to leave the country. It is against the conscience of these Protestants to stay home and pay tithes to an irreligious bishop.

22 Second: The plan will give poorer tenants something valuable of their own, which may be taken from them by law. The payment they get for their children may help to pay their landlords. Their corn and cattle have already been seized, and they have no money.

23 Third: The care for 100,000 children, two years of age and older, cannot be less than 10 shillings apiece each year. So the nation's overall wealth will increase 50,000 pounds per year.

Besides, a new dish will be profitable. It will be popular on the tables of rich, refined gentlemen throughout the kingdom. And the money will circulate among ourselves, since the goods are grown right here in our own country.

24 Fourth: By selling their children, repeated breeders will earn eight shillings per year. They will also be rid of the burden of caring for their children after the first year.

25 Fifth: This food would bring great profits to taverns. Wine sellers will certainly be wise enough to get the best recipes for serving children to perfection. As a result, their taverns will be visited by fine gentlemen who rightly think they know how to eat well. And skillful cooks, who know how to please their guests, will take care to make children as expensive as they please.

26 Sixthly, this would be a great inducement to marriage, which all wise nations have either encouraged by rewards, or enforced by laws and penalties. It would increase the care and tenderness of mothers toward their children, when they were sure of a settlement for life to the poor babes, provided in some sort by the public to their annual profit instead of expense, we should soon see an honest emulation among the married women, which of them could bring the fattest child to the market, men would become as fond of their wives, during the time of their pregnancy, as they are now of their mares in foal, their cows in calf, or sows when they are ready to farrow, nor offer to beat or kick them (as is too frequent a practice) for fear of a miscarriage.

The parallel text version ends here. Summaries are included in the original version of the text.

26 Sixth: This would make marriage very appealing. All wise nations have encouraged marriage by offering rewards or enforcing laws and penalties.

The care and tenderness of mothers toward their children would increase. Mothers would feel sure that their poor babies will be supported for life. And in a way, this would be done by the public, providing mothers with profit instead of expense.

We would soon see healthy competition among married women, who would try to bring the fattest children to market. And men would become as fond of their pregnant wives as they now are of their pregnant mares, cows, or sows. Nor would they beat or kick their wives (as they do too often) for fear of a miscarriage.

Swift explains other advantages to his plan. He says that children will taste better than pork and estimates how many children could be sold a year in Ireland.

enumerated: *explained one by one*

27 Many other advantages might be **enumerated**. For instance, the addition of some thousand carcasses in our exportation of barreled beef. The propagation of swine's flesh, and improvement in the art of making good bacon, so much wanted among us by the great destruction of pigs, too frequent at our tables, which are no way comparable in taste, or magnificence to a well-grown, fat yearling child, which roasted whole will make a considerable figure at a Lord Mayor's feast, or any other public entertainment. But this, and many others I omit being studious of brevity.

28 Supposing that one thousand families in this city, would be constant customers for infants' flesh, besides others who might have it at merry meetings, particularly weddings and christenings, I compute that Dublin would take off annually about twenty thousand carcasses, and the rest of the kingdom (where probably they will be sold somewhat cheaper) the remaining eighty thousand.

Swift says that he cannot think of any objections to his plan except that it will decrease the number of people in the country, but after all the point is to have less mouths to feed. He refuses to entertain other possible solutions, such as taxing English landowners who do not live in Ireland, promoting the sale of Irish-made goods as opposed to goods from other countries, putting political differences aside for the common good, or encouraging people to work hard and live within their means.

29 I can think of no one objection, that will possibly be raised against this proposal, unless it should be urged that the number of people will be thereby much lessened in the kingdom. This I freely own, and it was indeed one principal design in offering it to the world. I desire the reader will observe, that I calculate my remedy for this one individual kingdom of Ireland, and for no other that ever was, is, or, I think, ever can be upon earth. Therefore let no man talk to

me of other expedients: *Of taxing our absentees at five shillings a pound; of using neither clothes, nor household furniture, except what is of our own growth and manufacture; of utterly rejecting the materials and instruments that promote foreign luxury; of curing the expensiveness of pride, vanity, idleness, and gaming in our women; of introducing a vein of parsimony, prudence, and temperance;*[9] *of learning to love our country, wherein we differ even from Laplanders, and the inhabitants of Topinamboo; of quitting our animosities, and factions, nor act any longer like the Jews, who were murdering one another at the very moment their city was taken;*[10] *of being a little cautious not to sell our country and consciences for nothing; of teaching landlords to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants. Lastly of putting a spirit of honesty, industry, and skill into our shopkeepers, who, if a resolution could now be taken to buy only our native goods, would immediately unite to cheat and exact upon us in the price, the measure, and the goodness, nor could ever yet be brought to make one fair proposal of just dealing, though often and earnestly invited to it.*

30 Therefore I repeat, let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients, till he hath at least a glimpse of hope, that there will ever be some hearty and sincere attempt to put them in practice.

With tongue-in-cheek, Swift says he is weary of offering outlandish solutions to the problems of Ireland. His current solution is forward-thinking and practical, plus it will not offend England. If anyone has a better solution than his, they should consider how they will feed and clothe 100,000 people. He asserts that if the parents were asked, they would say it would have been better if they themselves had been sold for food when one year old and thus avoided a life of mistreatment and poverty. Finally, Swift assures the reader that he is only thinking of the good of his country. He has nothing to gain from his scheme since his youngest child is nine years old and his wife is too old to have more children.

9 ***parsimony, prudence, and temperance:*** thrift, carefulness, and self-control

10 **of quitting our . . .city was taken:** The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D., taking advantage of quarrels among Jewish citizens.

31 But as to myself, having been wearied out for many years with offering vain, idle, visionary thoughts, and at length utterly despairing of success, I fortunately fell upon this proposal, which as it is wholly new, so it hath something solid and real, of no expense and little trouble, full in our own power, and whereby we can incur no danger in disobliging England. For this kind of commodity will not bear exportation, the flesh being of too tender a consistence, to admit a long continuance in salt, although perhaps I could name a country, which would be glad to eat up our whole nation without it.

32 After all I am not so violently bent upon my own opinion, as to reject any offer, proposed by wise men, which shall be found equally innocent, cheap, easy, and effectual. But before something of that kind shall be advanced in contradiction to my scheme, and offering a better, I desire the author, or authors will be pleased maturely to consider two points. First, as things now stand, how they will be able to find food and raiment[11] for a hundred thousand useless mouths and backs. And secondly, there being a round million of creatures in human figure, throughout this kingdom, whose whole subsistence put into a common stock would leave them in debt two millions of pounds sterling, adding those who are beggars by profession to the bulk of farmers, cottagers, and laborers, with their wives and children, who are beggars in effect;[12] I desire those politicians, who dislike my overture, and may perhaps be so bold to attempt an answer, that they will first ask the parents of these mortals, whether they would not at this day think it a great happiness to have been sold for food at a year old, in the manner I prescribe, and thereby have avoided such a perpetual scene of misfortunes, as they have since gone through, by the oppression of landlords, the impossibility of paying rent without money or trade, the want of common sustenance, with neither house nor clothes to cover them from inclemencies of weather, and the most

11 **raiment:** clothing

12 **there being . . . in effect:** Swift is saying that when the number of poor farmers and laborers are added to those who beg for a living, the number of people living in poverty is over one million.

inevitable prospect of entailing the like, or great miseries, upon their breed forever.

33 I profess in the sincerity of my heart that I have not the least personal interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary work, having no other motive than the public good of my country, by advancing our trade, providing for infants, relieving the poor, and giving some pleasure to the rich. I have no children, by which I can propose to get a single penny; the youngest being nine years old, and my wife past childbearing.

After You Read *Gulliver's Travels and "A Modest Proposal"*

Literary Lens: Verbal Irony

Create a graphic organizer like the one below in which you list examples of verbal irony found in "A Modest Proposal." In the second column, explain what Swift really means.

What the Narrator Says	What Swift Really Means

Explore Context: Ireland in the Eighteenth Century

Research the conditions in Ireland in the early Eighteenth Century to find out more about the reasons for Swift's satire. How were Roman Catholics in Ireland treated? What were the penal laws? Who could own land, and how did absentee landlords behave? Write a summary of your research.

Apply and Create: Satire

Write your own "Modest Proposal" for solving a problem you see in your school, city, or country. First, think about something you feel is an injustice that needs to be corrected. Next, devise an outlandish solution to the problem as a way to call people's attention to it. In your prewriting, present at least three reasons why you believe your solution is the best one. Finally, write an essay explaining your proposal. Be sure to use verbal irony to make your point.

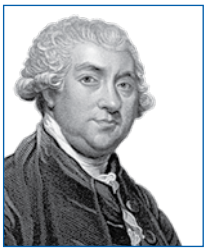
Read Critically

Reread this passage from *Gulliver's Travels*, and answer the questions that follow.

> It is allowed on all hands, that the primitive way of breaking eggs before we eat them, was upon the larger end: but his present Majesty's grandfather, while he was a boy, going to eat an egg, and breaking it according to the ancient practice, happened to cut one of his fingers. Whereupon the Emperor his father published an edict, commanding all his subjects, upon great penalties, to break the smaller end of their eggs. The people so highly resented this law, that our histories tell us there have been six rebellions raised on that account; wherein one emperor lost his life, and another his crown. These civil commotions were constantly fomented by the monarchs of Blefuscu; and when they were quelled, the exiles always fled for refuge to that empire. It is computed, that eleven thousand persons have, at several times, suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at the smaller end. Many hundred large volumes have been published upon this controversy: but the books of the Big-Endians have been long forbidden. . . .

1. What events in England is the quarrel between Big- and Little-Endians and the quarrel with Blefuscu meant to satirize? What is Swift's opinion of these quarrels?
2. Although it relates specifically to eighteenth-century politics, what is the passage saying more generally about human beings and their quarrels?
3. Compare and contrast the tone, style, and content of *Gulliver's Travels* and "A Modest Proposal." In your opinion, which one is more effective? Which one will actually motivate people to change?

Before You Read *The Life of Samuel Johnson*



Born and educated in Scotland, **James Boswell** (1740–1795) went to London in 1760 to study law and take part in the city's intellectual life. When he was twenty-two, he met Samuel Johnson, who was then fifty-three. Johnson, who compiled the first major dictionary of the English language, was a brilliant wit whose circle included most of the leading writers, artists, and intellectuals of the day. Boswell became Johnson's friend. After twenty-one years of recording their friendship, Boswell wrote and published Johnson's biography in 1791. In the book, Boswell purposely portrays himself as naïve and foolish in order to make Johnson appear even more brilliant. In the twentieth century, however, Boswell's personal diaries were discovered and published, revealing him to be a remarkable intellect in his own right.

Literary Lens

Biography *The Life of Samuel Johnson* is considered the first great modern biography in English. A work of nonfiction, a biography recounts the story of a real person's life as truthfully as possible. Biographers often have strong opinions about their subjects, and although they have a responsibility to try to remain unbiased, they sometimes reveal prejudices by choosing to include or omit certain material, perhaps unwittingly.

Characterization How a person is conveyed in writing is called *characterization*. In direct characterization, the writer clearly tells the reader what a person is like through description. In indirect characterization, the writer shows what the person is like by providing details about his or her speech, actions and interactions with others, leaving the reader to infer what the person is like—much as you do when you meet a person in real life.

Boswell's Language

Early in their friendship, Boswell knew he would write a biography of Johnson, so he began writing down their conversations. When recording dialogue, or the words actually spoken, Boswell sometimes uses the obligatory quotation marks alone. At other times he also includes names followed by colons to indicate who is speaking, like the format of a play. In both cases, the dialogue helps create a vivid firsthand portrait of Johnson. Sometimes Boswell inserts his own thoughts and feelings about various events. Consider how Boswell's impressions influence your own opinion of Johnson as you read the selection.

Think Critically

Before you read, use critical thinking to deepen your understanding.

1. If you were going to pick someone to write your biography, would you choose a close friend or a famous writer whom you've never met? Why?
2. How does Chaucer develop his characters in *The Canterbury Tales*? Does he use direct characterization, indirect characterization, or both?
3. Recall the biographies you have read or seen. Categorize the author's attitude toward his subject as overly admiring, balanced, or overly negative. In what category do you expect *The Life of Samuel Johnson* to fall?

from The Life *of* Samuel Johnson

James Boswell

Boswell Meets Johnson 1763

This is to me a memorable year; for in it I had the happiness to obtain the acquaintance of that extraordinary man whose memoirs I am now writing; an acquaintance which I shall ever esteem as one of the most fortunate circumstances in my life. Though then but two-and-twenty, I had for several years read his works with delight and instruction, and had the highest reverence for their author, which had grown up in my fancy into a kind of mysterious **veneration**, by figuring to myself a state of solemn elevated abstraction, in which I supposed him to live in the immense metropolis of London. . . .

veneration: *respect or awe inspired by the wisdom or abilities of a person*

Mr. Thomas Davies the actor, who then kept a bookseller's shop in Russel Street, Covent Garden, told me that Johnson was very much his friend, and came frequently to his house, where he more than once invited me to meet him; but by some unlucky accident or other he was prevented from coming to us.

At last, on Monday the 16th day of May, when I was sitting in Mr. Davies's back parlor, after having drunk tea with him and Mrs. Davies, Johnson unexpectedly came into the shop; and Mr. Davies having perceived him through the glass door in the room in which we were sitting, advancing towards us—he announced his aweful approach to me, somewhat in the manner of an actor in the part of Horatio, when he addresses Hamlet on the appearance of his father's ghost,

"Look, my Lord, it comes,"[1] I found that I had a very perfect idea of Johnson's figure, from the portrait of him painted by Sir Joshua Reynolds[2] soon after he had published his *Dictionary*, in the attitude of sitting in his easy chair in deep meditation, which was the first picture his friend did for him, which Sir Joshua very kindly presented to me, and from which an engraving has been made for this work. Mr. Davies mentioned my name, and respectfully introduced me to him. I was much agitated; and recollecting his prejudice against the Scotch, of which I had heard much, I said to Davies, "Don't tell where I come from." "From Scotland," cried Davies roguishly. "Mr. Johnson," said I, "I do indeed come from Scotland, but I cannot help it." I am willing to flatter myself that I meant this as light pleasantry to sooth and conciliate him, and not as an humiliating

Oliver Goldsmith, Boswell, and Johnson at the Mitre Tavern.

1 **"Look, my Lord, it comes":** Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Act I, Scene iv, line 42

2 **Sir Joshua Reynolds:** portrait painter (1723–1792)