The Canterbury Tales: Pilgrim Presentation Project

Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales is quite possibly the most important poem from the Middle Ages. It’s a narrative poem about a pilgrimage of characters who travel to the shrine of Canterbury. Along the way, Chaucer offers detailed descriptions of each of his characters and gives great insight into their personalities, attitudes, and societal positions.

Your task is to create a modern tale which mimics the structure and purpose of Chaucer’s tale. Write from the point of view of a contemporary traveler, heading for a destination of worship (not necessarily religious) with a group of friends and acquaintances. You will create your own journey and characters in detail and then describe what you have learned about your pilgrims to the rest of the class during an oral presentation.

Before creating your own pilgrims, be sure to look for subtle nuances in the text and literary techniques that reveal irony, sarcasm, and criticism in Chaucer’s writing. Chaucer was a master of implication and subtlety and he provides criticism of his contemporary society through some of his characters; so should you!

Instructions:

1. Choose two pilgrims to create for your own pilgrimage. Look back to the “Prologue” and pay close attention to the details and description Chaucer uses to characterize his group of characters as a guiding example. Assume a persona you can relate to – the jock, construction worker, lawyer, etc.
2. Using a sheet of poster paper illustrate your 2 pilgrims. Since your objective is to teach the class about the characterization of these pilgrims, include any criticisms present in the writing. All physical characteristics, clothing, and equipment should be clearly visible on your poster.
3. Clearly label your poster with other important details related to your characters. Be sure to include personality traits and other characteristics that are meant to stand out.
4. Chaucer tended to criticize many of the characters on the pilgrimage. Be sure you do the same – read what he wrote as an example. In addition, many of his pilgrims were guilty of one or more of the “Seven Deadly Sins.” Label anything your pilgrims are guilty of clearly on your poster. Briefly describe how the pilgrim is guilty of that particular sin.
5. Now that you have two pilgrims they need to go somewhere --- you will then write a “prologue” for your pilgrims describing them and their journey like Chaucer did in the General Prologue. You must introduce the circumstances of the journey and the two characters involved! You could add more to your prologue if you want, but the two you chose should be your main focus!
6. Your tale should have some moral truth, value, or advice to offer.
7. Your prologue should be at least 24 total lines (does not have to be 12 for each pilgrim). It should rhyme in the same fashion presented by Chaucer in the text (iambic pentameter rhyming couplets). Do not use too many slang terms or clichés!
8. You will be required to present your pilgrims and your prologue to the rest of the class. You need to present the following:
   a. Read the full text of the pilgrim’s description and prologue.
   b. The name of the pilgrims and an explanation of his or her role or function in society.
   c. The prominent physical features of the pilgrims, including equipment and clothing.
   d. The prominent mental, emotional, and spiritual characteristics of the pilgrims.
   e. Any criticism exhibited toward the pilgrims, noting irony and sarcasm.
   f. Your presentation should last roughly five minutes.

You will be scored on the accuracy and quality of your information, the overall quality of your poster, and the quality of your oral presentation.