

The Canterbury Tales

Author
Geoffrey Chaucer

Years Written
c. 1387–1400

Original Language
Middle English

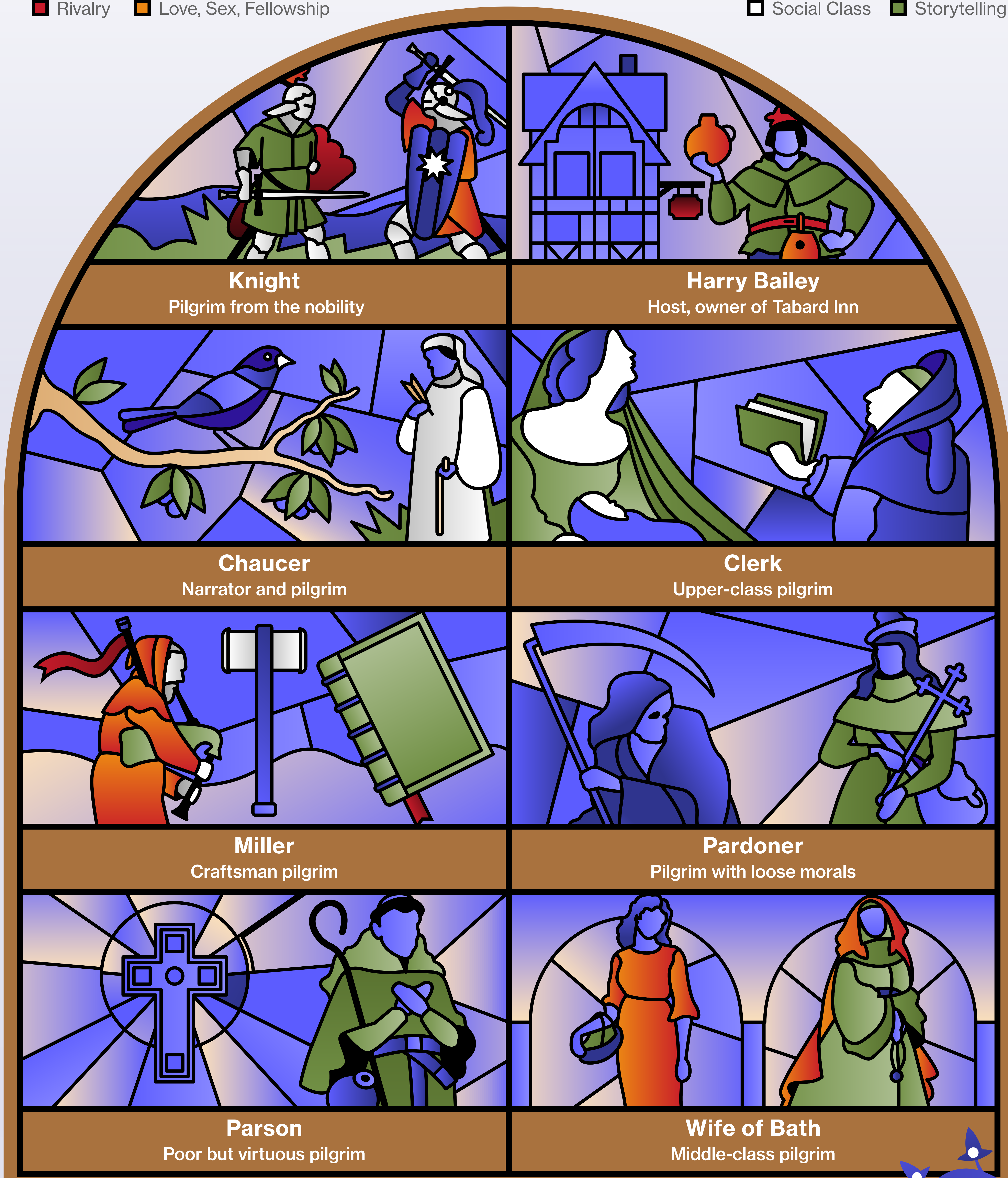
MAIN CHARACTERS

May the Best Storyteller Win!

Spring has come and with it an increase in pilgrims traveling to Canterbury. Gathering at an inn in Southwark, England, 30 pilgrims agree to a tale-telling competition for the long road. *The Canterbury Tales* showcases Chaucer's flair for satire and his ability to create memorable characters with unique voices that explore themes of rivalry; love, sex, and fellowship; social class; and storytelling.

■ Rivalry ■ Love, Sex, Fellowship

□ Social Class ■ Storytelling



Author



GEOFFREY CHAUCER
c. 1343–1400

The poet was a diplomat who served three successive English kings. His wide travels in royal service introduced him to people from all social classes, informing his deeply humorous *The Canterbury Tales*; the 24 short tales rank among the greatest works of English literature.

The Canterbury Tales

by the Numbers

4

Tales each pilgrim is supposed to tell: two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back

10

Syllables in each line, using a pattern of five 2-syllable pairs in which the second syllable is stressed

31

People in the company: the narrator, 29 other pilgrims, and the Host

~65

Length, in miles, of the pilgrimage from the Tabard Inn to Canterbury Cathedral

Symbols



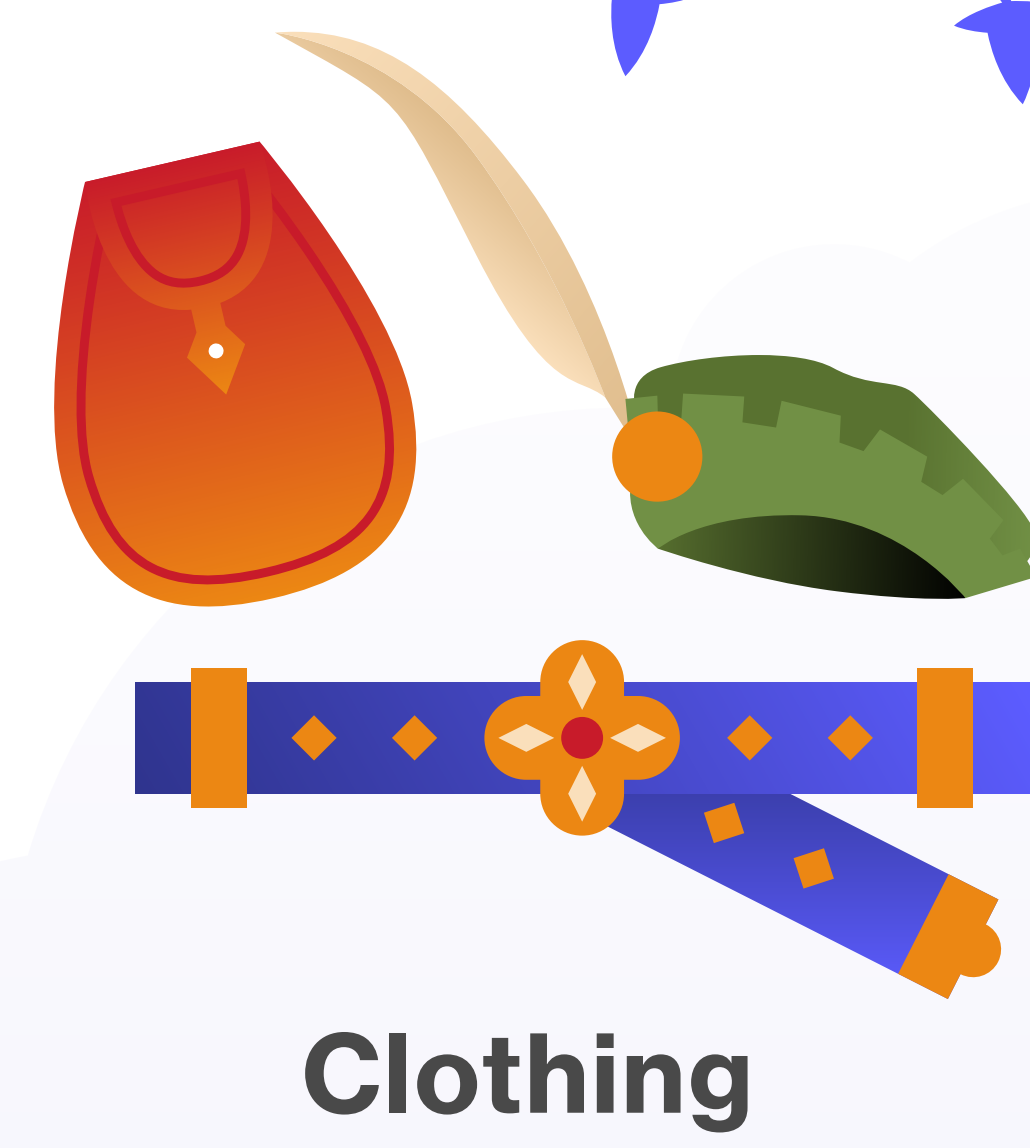
Springtime

The Prologue begins with a famous description of springtime, symbolic of desire, fertility, and rebirth.



Blood

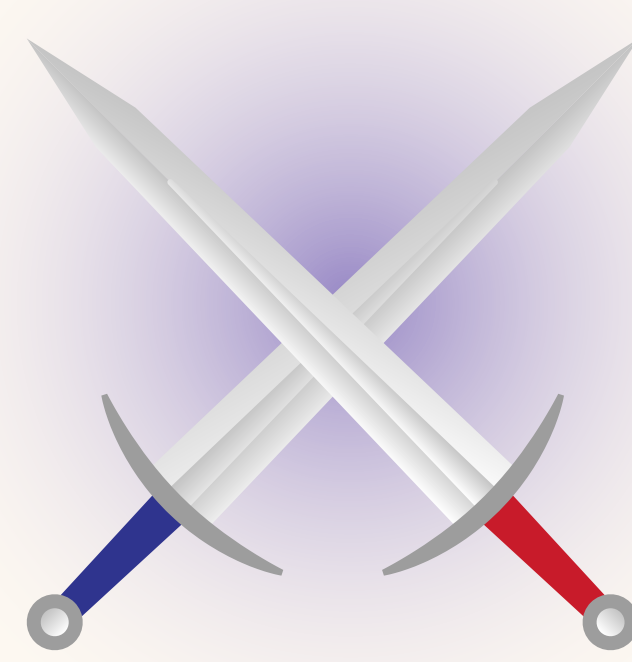
Blood is a metaphor for family lineage and class; it also signifies Christ's blood.



Clothing

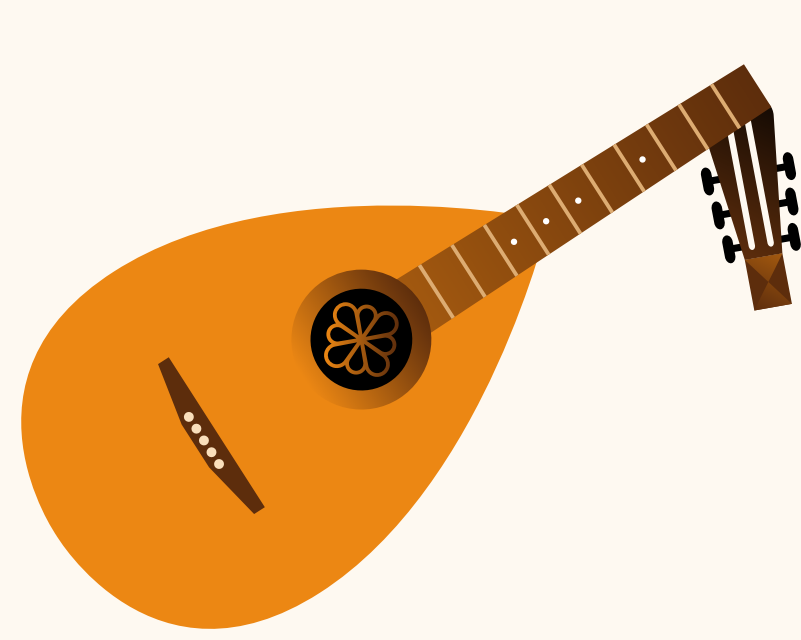
Clothes, simple or elaborate, reflect the personality of the wearer.

Themes



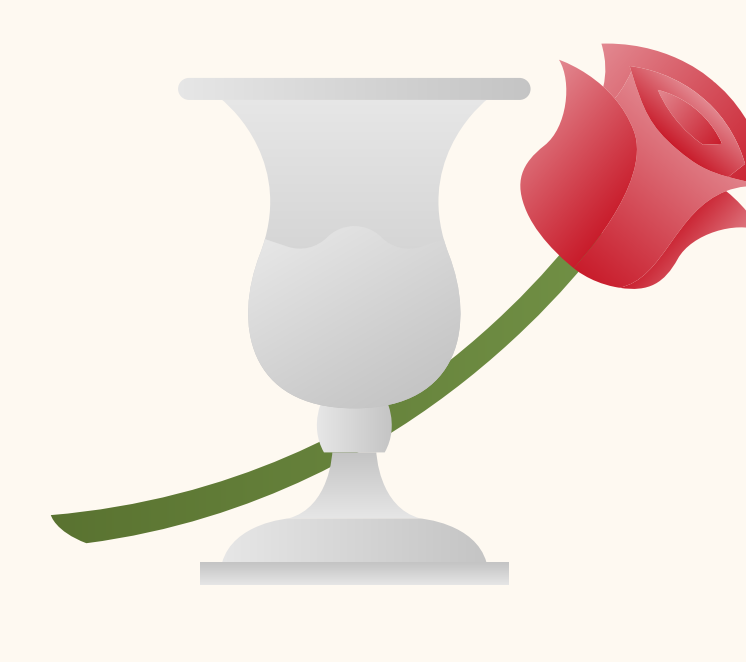
Rivalry

The pilgrims engage in a friendly competition to pass the long hours, and competitions figure in the stories.



Storytelling

The stories are as varied as the perspectives and voices of the storytellers.



Love, Sex & Fellowship

Human relations from lofty to lusty pervade the tales, told among friendly company.



Social Class

Each character represents a social class, and Chaucer makes fun of them all.

though there was nowhere one so busy as he, He was less busy than he seemed to be.

Chaucer, Prologue