

Please look up any words that you are unfamiliar with in a dictionary. Look up the **words in bold** in *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* for more information.

The Middle Ages

Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales

1. How many pilgrims are there in *The Canterbury Tales*? Where are they going? Why are they traveling together?
2. In the portraits of the pilgrims in "The General Prologue," can you see any examples where Chaucer seems to be gently **satirizing** the institution of the church? Cite an example or two.
3. In the story-telling contest proposed by the Host in "The General Prologue," what are the criteria that will be used to judge the stories told by the pilgrims? If those criteria were used to judge the story told by the Wife of Bath, would it be considered a good story? Why? Use some specific details from the text to support your views.
4. In the "Prologue" to her tale, what does the Wife of Bath reveal to us about her character? What kind of person is she? Use a word, a phrase, or a paragraph—with examples from the text—to describe her.
5. What is the message conveyed in "The Wife of Bath's Tale"? What kind of connections can we make between the prologue, the tale, and the teller of the tale?
4. What is the crime of the knight in "The Wife of Bath's Tale"? What is his punishment? Does the punishment fit the crime? Why?
6. Judging by what Chaucer's text tells us, what do the dominant cultural expectations about women during the medieval period seem to be? Do you see any instances of misogyny in Chaucer's text?

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

1. What does this text tell us about the tradition of knighthood?
2. What is the main symbol that is represented on Sir Gawain's shield? What does it represent?
3. How many "tests" do you see in this text? Which one of them is the most difficult and challenging, in your view?
4. How is the idea of confession represented in the text? Can you see a connection between that religious concept and the trials that Sir Gawain undergoes to prove himself a worthy knight?
5. How are women represented in the text? What does this anonymous text tell us about the dominant cultural expectations about women during the medieval period? Cite some passages from the text and use them to illustrate your view.

Margery Kempe
The Book of Margery Kempe

1. Why was Margery Kempe plunged into a deep depression after the birth of her first child?
2. How does she eventually recover from her illness?
3. Why was Kempe summoned to the ecclesiastical court of the Archbishop? What was she charged with? How did she defend herself?
4. Compare the way in which Kempe portrays herself and the way Chaucer portrays the character of the Wife of Bath. Both the historical person and the fictitious character are placed in a position wherein they must defend themselves against patriarchal notions of women before a male audience, Kempe in the ecclesiastical court of the Archbishop and the Wife of Bath in her "Prologue." Do you see any similarities between the two women? Differences?
5. What are some of the things that we learn about the life of an actual medieval woman from this text? How does this new information shed more light on the stereotypes about women that we gleaned from our first two medieval texts, *The Canterbury Tales* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*?

Everyman

1. What is Everyman's problem at the beginning of the play? What kind of help does he receive, and from whom?
2. Specifically, what are the steps that Everyman takes in order to reach salvation?
3. What religious lessons does Everyman learn through his experience in the play?
4. In Everyman's journey, all of his companions eventually abandon him, in spite of their fair promises-- except one. Who stays with Everyman until the very end? What do you think this means?
5. Does the play assume a high level of sophistication in its audience? Does it assume that the audience is equipped with a high level of familiarity with basic Christian concepts? How can we tell?
6. Is the use of **allegory** to personify abstract qualities in the play an effective device? Why? Does it make the play more or less effective in its **didactic** purpose?

The Renaissance

Sir Thomas Wyatt the Elder, "Whoso List to Hunt"
Edmund Spenser, from *Amoretti*, Sonnet 67

1. How would you describe the **persona** in Sir Thomas Wyatt's poem "Whoso List to Hunt"?
2. How would you describe the **tone** of his voice? Which particular words or phrases in the poem can you cite as examples to support your reading?
3. What is the most compelling **image** in Wyatt's poem? Why is the image effective in conveying the speaker's message?

4. Compare Edmund Spenser's sonnet 67 "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace" with Sir Thomas Wyatt's "Whoso list to hunt." What similarities do you see between the two poems? What differences? Do the two poets use the same images? Do they use them in the same way? Consider the language of the poetry carefully in your discussion.
5. How are the women in the two poems "Lyke as a huntsman after weary chace" and "Whoso list to hunt" represented? Do these two portraits of women give us the same ideas about Renaissance women and how they were perceived? Use some details from the poems to support your views.
6. Both of these poems are translations of one of the Italian poet Petrarch's sonnets. Which English translation do you prefer? Why?

Sir Philip Sidney, from *Astrophil and Stella*, Sonnet 1
William Shakespeare, Sonnets 3, 18, and 130

1. In Sidney's Sonnet 1, "Loving in truth, and fain in verse my love to show," what is the speaker trying to say? Try to paraphrase, or state the speaker's message in your own words.
2. How would you describe the tone of Sidney's poem? Cite a word, phrase, or line from the text to support your view.
3. How is the woman in Sidney's poem portrayed? Is the portrayal positive or negative? What words or images used to describe her are the most compelling to you? Why are these choices in poetic diction effective?
4. In Shakespeare's Sonnet 3, who is the speaker addressing? What is the speaker's argument? Is it effective?
5. In Sonnet 18, "Shall I compare thee to a summer's day," one of the most prominent ideas is the concept of change. What images does the poet use to explore the idea? What answer does the speaker offer for the problem of the inevitability of change and death?
6. In Sonnet 18 the speaker pays the recipient of the poem some fairly elaborate compliments, by using various comparisons-- so what does the addressee look like? Try to describe the person in your own words.
7. How would you describe the tone of the speaker in Sonnet 130, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun"? Cite a word, phrase, or line to support your view.
8. Who do you think is the intended audience of Shakespeare's Sonnet 130? Why?

Christopher Marlowe
The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus

1. In the Prologue of the play, Faustus is described in the following manner:
 . . . swollen with cunning, of a self-conceit,
 His waxen wings did mount above his reach,
 And melting heavens conspired his overthrow.
 For falling to a devilish exercise,
 And glutted more with learning's golden gifts,
 He surfeits upon cursed necromancy:
 Nothing so sweet as magic is to him,

Which he prefers before his chiefest bliss.

Is the play giving us clues about how we should understand Faustus' character? What are the most compelling images in the passage? What ideas do they convey?

2. What is Faustus' problem? To what extent is he responsible for his troubles?
3. What does Faustus sell his soul for? Does he get a good deal in the bargain?
4. What elements of the **morality play** can you identify in this play?
5. Contrast the ending of this play with the ending of *Everyman*. Do the differences in the conclusions tell us something about the cultural differences between the medieval age and the Renaissance?

Ben Jonson

"To the Memory of My Beloved, The Author, Mr. William Shakespeare,
and What He Hath Left Us"

1. How would you describe the tone of the poem? Do you think Ben Jonson is sincere in his praise of his greatest professional rival? Why? Use some passages in the poem to support your reading.
2. Cite some lines which would serve as good examples of Jonson praising Shakespeare.
3. Cite some lines which would serve as good examples of Jonson betraying some professional jealousy of Shakespeare.
4. What does Ben Jonson say about Shakespeare's work and his method of composition? Describe the ways in which Jonson represents those ideas, paying special attention to his choice of diction and images. According to Ben Jonson, what is the proper relationship between natural genius and hard work?

John Donne

"The Flea," "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," and Holy Sonnet 14

1. What is the speaker's argument in "The Flea"? Is it convincing or persuasive? Why or why not?
2. What is the most compelling image that you see in this poem? Why is it effective?
3. How would you describe the relationship that you think the speaker of "The Flea" enjoys with the woman to whom this poem is addressed?
4. What is the most effective image in "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning"? What ideas does it successfully convey?
5. Why does this love poem begin with a deathbed scene? Is the image appropriate? What feelings does the opening scene evoke in the reader?
6. One of the most striking aspects of Donne's poetry is the use of **paradoxes**. What is a paradox? Can you identify any paradoxical ideas in Holy Sonnet 14?
7. How would you describe the relationship between the speaker of Holy Sonnet 14 and his God? Use some examples from the poem to support your reading.

George Herbert
"Redemption," "The Pulley," and "Love (3)"

1. In the sonnet "Redemption," how does the speaker describe the relationship between God and mankind? What is the most effective image in the poem? What aspect of God or the Christian faith does the image succeed in conveying?
2. The poem "The Pulley" evokes a scene that we have already encountered at the beginning of the morality play *Everyman*. Please compare these two works in terms of how they treat similar themes. Which work is more effective? Why?
3. In "Love (3)," we get an image of God from the way the speaker describes him and his actions. Describe this image of God in your own words. Cite some specific details that were particularly effective.
4. Compare Herbert's representation of Christianity with Donne's. Do their speakers use the same types of images or focus on the same kinds of ideas and religious experiences? Which poet's work do you prefer? Why?

Andrew Marvell
"To His Coy Mistress"

1. Read "To His Coy Mistress" out loud. Notice the rhythm of the poem-- sometimes you have to speed up and sometimes you have to slow down, due to the length of certain syllables, the punctuation within the lines, etc.
2. What is the speaker's argument in "To His Coy Mistress"? Is it a convincing or persuasive one? Why?
3. What do you think the poem is really about?
4. What is the most compelling image or idea in the poem? Why is it effective?

Aemilia Lanyer
Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum

1. Who is the speaker in Aemilia Lanyer's "Eve's Apology in Defense of Women"?
2. What is Lanyer's argument? What are its main points? Try to state it in your own words in one to three sentences.
3. What are the most convincing parts of her argument?
4. What are the weakest parts?
5. Overall, do you find Lanyer's argument persuasive? Why or why not?

John Milton
Paradise Lost

*This reading assignment is fairly long and difficult. Please set aside plenty of time for the reading; and read ahead if you can.

1. Consider Milton's portrayal of Satan. How would you describe this character? Please use some lines from the text to illustrate your view.
2. In Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, Milton dramatizes the point when Eve succumbs to Satan's temptation. Consider the argument that Satan uses to tempt Eve to eat the fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Which parts of the argument do you find persuasive? Why? Analyze some specific lines from the text to support your views.
3. In your view, why does Eve succumb to Satan's temptation? And later on, why does she decide to offer the fruit to Adam?
4. Why does Adam sin? Do you sympathize more with Eve or Adam? Why?
5. Compare Milton's version of the story of The Fall with Lanyer's version. Do they seem to be emphasizing different aspects of the story? If you see a difference, do you think it has to do with the difference in the **genders** of the writers?

The Eighteenth Century

Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, "The Introduction"
Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, "Epistle from Mrs. Yonge to Her Husband"

1. How would you characterize the tone of Finch's poem? Does it sound optimistic or pessimistic about women's future?
2. What is the most important idea in Finch's poem?
3. In Montagu's poem, the persona is a woman wronged by society. How would you describe the speaking voice in this poem?
4. What is the most important idea in Montagu's poem?
5. Both Anne Finch, Countess of Winchilsea, and Lady Mary Wortley Montagu could be described as early **feminists**. Compare and contrast the ways in which each author argues for the rights of women. Which writer's argument is more persuasive? Why? What rhetorical strategies does each writer use?

Jonathan Swift
"A Modest Proposal"

1. Please try to restate Swift's "modest proposal" in your own words.
2. What is the most compelling idea in Swift's essay?
3. What is the funniest idea? What clues can you find in the text which signal to you that the speaker is being **ironic**?

4. What is the main social evil that Swift is writing about?
5. Do you think his argument is persuasive? Why or why not?
6. What do you think is Swift's purpose in making his argument? Who or what is the main target of his satire? How is this 18th-century text written about social problems in Ireland still relevant to our society today?

Alexander Pope
An Essay on Criticism

1. What does Pope say about the idea of "judgment" in his poem? Please cite some lines in your response.
2. What does he say about the idea of "**wit**" in the poem? Please cite some lines in your response.
3. According to Pope, what is the ideal relationship between creative work and literary criticism?
4. Can you see some differences between texts written in the Renaissance and the 18th century? What are they?
5. What significant eighteenth-century ideals does the poem introduce us to? Are these ideas outdated, or would they work equally well in our society today?

Samuel Johnson
The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia

1. Describe the main characters in *The History of Rasselas, Prince of Abyssinia*. Which character is the most interesting? Why?
2. In your opinion, what is the moral lesson in Johnson's **fable**? Compare it to the moral lessons taught in medieval texts: what similarities do you see? Differences? Use some details and examples from the text to support your view.
3. What does the text say about poets? Cite some details from the text to support your view.
4. Who or what do you think is the main target of Johnson's satire? Why?
5. How are the women represented in this text? Use some examples to support your view.