Zig Zag Education

English Literature

A Level | Edexcel | 9ETO

Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath*

Comprehensive Teaching Pack for A Level Edexcel English Literature

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POD 6455

Contents

Teacher's Introduction

This resource is designed to support the study of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and* by Geoffrey Chaucer. All references are to the Cambridge University Press editio revised by Sean Kane and Beverly Winny (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1994; **ISBN**

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is an optional text for study for Component English Literature (9ET0/03).

This specification will be taught from September 2015 and will be assessed for th Component 3 is assessed by open-book examination for the following Assessmen

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, usin terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contex written and received.

This resource is divided into the following sections. In each case, after the title, I Assessment Objectives that are supported by that section. A number of worksh develop students' understanding of the text, their ability to analyse the ways Cha understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts of reception and the different sections where relevant.

Section 1: The Background (AO3)
Divided into sub-sections on Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, pilgrimage provides some helpful background information for studying *The Wife of Bath's P* information provided is by no means exhaustive, and should be considered as sim independent or guided study.

Section 2: The Critical Reception of Chaucer over Time (AO3)
This section provides an overview of the way Chaucer's poetry has been received to the present day.

Section 3: *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* (AO1, AO2, AO3)
This section provides a detailed summary of and commentary on *The Wife of Bat* been broken down into a number of manageable sections, reflecting Chaucer's c the summary and analysis of each section of the text, there are a number of trac complete.

Section 4: Themes and Imagery (AO1, AO2)
This section provides a discussion of some of the key themes of *The Wife of Bath* textual authority, social status, women's lives, marriage and antifeminism. It is th two key types of imagery found in the text: bread imagery and marketplace imag

Section 5: Contexts (AO3)
This section situates *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* in some of its historica section on historical contexts addresses three areas: medieval society, women in the Middle Ages. The section on literary contexts is also subdivided into three to fabliau and the Loathly Lady.

Section 6: Literary Approaches (AO1, AO2, AO3)
This section addresses two particular literary approaches – feminism and the car
considering ways of interpreting *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*.

Section 7: Preparing for the Final Assessment
This section prepares students for their formal assessment on *The Wife of Bath's*
of Edexcel Component 3 (Poetry) is provided, along with an explanation of how t
Chaucer's text, is assessed. Tips for success are included, along with some exami
sample essays are also provided along with marker's commentary.

Section 8: Further Reading
A selection of websites that could be used for research and further reading are p

Section 9: Answers to Tracking Questions
Suggested answers to all the tracking questions in Section 3 are included here.

Section 10: Keywords Glossary
Throughout the resource a number of keywords are highlighted in bold; student-
in this glossary.

The resource ends with a list of works consulted in the preparation of this resour

A webpage containing all the links listed in this resource is convenien
website at ***zzed.uk/6455***

You may find this helpful for accessing the websites rather than typi

Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer is the first great poet to have written in English. Although he lived more than 600 years ago, his closeness to the court and members of the royal family, and the number of important positions he occupied in his lifetime, mean that we actually know a surprising amount about this important figure of English Literature.

Born in London at some point between 1340 and 1345 to John Chaucer, a wealthy wine merchant, and Agnes de Copton, the first record we have of Chaucer is of his being in the service of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster (wife of Prince Lionel, son of Edward III) in 1357. He was probably a page (a knight's servant), a relatively lowly position but one which allowed him to enter a system of royal **patronage**[1] which supported him for the rest of his life.

He is next recorded as a member of the army of Edward III that invaded France in 1359: Edward, who held King John of France prisoner, hoped to capture Reims and have himself crowned king in the Cathedral there. Chaucer was captured in France in the winter of 1359/60 and held captive until Edward paid his £16 ransom.

In 1367 Chaucer became a member of Edward's royal court and began to receive Chaucer (Chaucer's wife) is recorded as a lady-in-waiting of the royal household; 1366. While little is known for certain of Philippa's family origins, one theory is th Katherine Swynford, the mistress and later the third wife of John of Gaunt, Duke and uncle of Richard II. Philippa and Geoffrey Chaucer are thought to have had th (who was knighted), possibly a daughter Elizabeth who became a nun; Agnes, wh coronation of Henry IV, and a son, Lewis, to whom Chaucer dedicated his 1391 w Records of Chaucer's grand-daughter Alice marrying the Duke of Suffolk, and his Pole, being nominated heir to the throne by Richard III prior to his deposition, m his family, are a prime example of the social mobility that was beginning to oper fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[2]

Chaucer's experience of being captured by the French army in 1359 clearly did n he is known to have travelled to Italy (Genoa and Florence in 1372–1373, Lomba 1381). This could explain the wide range of French and Italian literary sources th

Writers in the fourteenth century were often dependent on a patron – a wealthy them with financial support and, in return, would have works dedicated to him. Chaucer having a patron, or who that patron might have been, it has been sugge above) might have acted in that capacity. Chaucer's poem *The Book of the Duche* for Blanche of Lancaster, first wife of Gaunt; furthermore, in 1374 Gaunt provide fixed sum of money paid to someone each year, usually for the duration of their granted Chaucer a pitcher of wine every day for the rest of his life; this was possi of his writing.

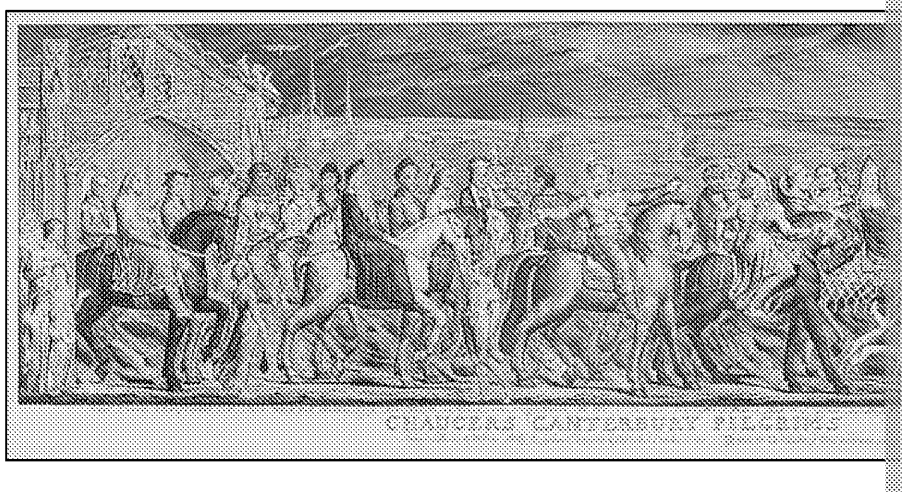
[1] Words in bold are defined in the key words glossary (Section 10).
[2] See the discussion of Medieval Society in Section 5 of this resource.

Chaucer was also granted a number of official posts which provided him with a g additional benefits. In 1374 he was appointed controller of the customs in the po for 12 years. In the same year he was granted the lease for life on accommodatio He seems to have moved to Kent in the 1380s; he became a Member of Parliame 1385 and 1389 was a Justice of the Peace for the county. From 1389–1391 he wa giving him responsibility for organising the king's building projects; this included jousting enclosures for the Smithfield tournament of 1390. He appears to have g 1391, when he began working as deputy forester for the forest of North Petherto granted an annual pension of £20 by Richard II, which was subsequently renewe recorded as taking a lease on a residence in the vicinity of Westminster Abbey or thought to have died on 25th October 1400; he was buried in Westminster Abbey moved to a new tomb in the area now known as Poets' Corner.

In his lifetime Geoffrey Chaucer composed a number of poetic works ranging fro poems. In the latter category come a number of dream visions, at the beginning referred to as Geoffrey) falls asleep and begins dreaming. In the course of the dr (usually human, though on one occasion his guide is an eagle) that either takes h something or teaches him a lesson. Into this category fall *The Book of the Duches of Fowls* (c. 1373–1377), *The House of Fame* (c. 1379–1380) and *The Legend of G* long verse works include his translation of parts of the French allegorical poem, *L* 1360s/70s); his technical work on astronomy, *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (c. 1391), 1380s), his Middle English retelling of the tragic story of the lovers set against th and, of course, the work for which he is best known, *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 13

The Canterbury Tales

The Canterbury Tales is Chaucer's best known, and most widely studied, work. It the collection of stories in the late 1380s, while he was living in Kent, and the wo unfinished on his death in 1400.



The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories which are held together by a frame pilgrims (plus Chaucer, the pilgrim) travelling from the Tabard Inn in Southwark, Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. To pass time on the journey the pilgrims are inv the Tabard Inn, to participate in a storytelling competition, with the teller of the free meal when they return to Southwark at the end of the pilgrimage. Each pilg way to Canterbury and two on the way back. Had Chaucer carried this project th would comprise 116 separate stories. However, there are only 25 tales, with not story. While this could suggest that the work is unfinished, other critics have arg clear shape to the order of the tales, which begin with the **secular** Knight's tale o the Parson's prose sermon on virtuous living, followed by a short leave-taking by finished by Chaucer even if he did not stick to his original plan.

The Canterbury Tales opens with the *General Prologue* in which the pilgrimage, t
competition are introduced. The scene is set as the narrator describes how in Ap
people 'longen... to goon on pilgrimages' (l. 12).[3] While some travel to far-flung c
way to Canterbury to visit the tomb of St Thomas Becket. The narrator then desc
Tabard Inn in Southwark (an area in London, south of the River Thames), a group
one evening on their way to Canterbury.[4] They welcome him into their company
start the next morning.

Chaucer proceeds to give a detailed, and frequently **satirical**, description of each
the Knight, who also tells the first tale, and can be considered as representing th
society, describing his **chivalric** virtues, his experiences on the battlefield, and cl
his appearance.[5] This **tripartite** description of appearance, personality and life ex
other 28 pilgrims. The pilgrims come from different walks of medieval society, in
friar, a pardoner, a parson), learned professions (a lawyer, a scholar, a doctor) ar
miller). There are only three women on the pilgrimage: a prioress, a nun and the
have been introduced, Harry Bailey introduces the storytelling competition. Afte
should begin, lots are drawn with the honour of initiating the storytelling falling

The rest of *The Canterbury Tales* comprises the pilgrims' tales. Many, though not
in which either the storyteller introduces him or herself or the tale, or there is a
between the pilgrims, either in response to the preceding tale or regarding who
of Bath, however, stands out, as her prologue – at 828 lines – is the longest by fa
Bath's Prologue is also unique because it is more than double the length of her ta
no other pilgrim tells a tale which is shorter than its introduction!

The pilgrims' tales encompass a range of **genres**, including romance, saints' lives,
tales except two are in verse. Much critical attention, particularly in the past, has
teller and tale. In some cases there is a clear correspondence between teller and
love; the vulgar and dishonest Miller's tale of deception and adultery; the Priore
martyr killed by the Jews); in other cases, however, the link is not so clear.

The Wife of Bath's Tale opens as an Arthurian romance, set 'in th'olde days of th
the fairy-tale opening may seem to be at odds with the earthy and blunt-talking
quickly turns into an exploration of male versus female power reflects the Wife's
Prologue.

[3] All quotations from the *General Prologue* are taken from Geoffrey Chaucer, *The General Prologue*
Winny (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
[4] The narrator-figure is a particularly clever device: named Geoffrey Chaucer, he is clearly not the i
The Canterbury Tales, but rather a persona created for effect: naive, foolish and somewhat overwh
himself, he turns out to be the worst storyteller on the route!
[5] For some discussion of the structure of medieval society, see Section 5 of this resource.
[6] Other pilgrims' prologues average between 30 and 70 lines; only five other pilgrims manage a pro

Pilgrimage

The Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories told by a group of pilgrims undertak (an area of London immediately to the south of the River Thames – nowadays th greatest art centres, such as Shakespeare's Globe, the Royal Festival Hall and the in Kent, a distance of approximately 60 miles.

Pilgrimage – a journey to a holy site – was an extremely popular activity in the M coming from all walks of life. The time and effort required to undertake such a jo significance of the place visited, made pilgrimage into a spiritual act.[7] People mig **penance** for sins committed, to seek healing for an illness or generally to improv heaven after death.

By the Middle Ages the most famous and popular pilgrimage sites included Santi Spain (the burial site of St James), Cologne in Germany (which allegedly contains visited the infant Christ), Boulogne in France (to visit the statue of the Virgin of th both Saint Peter and Saint Paul were believed to be), Jerusalem (the site of Chris Canterbury. In the *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer presents th participant in pilgrimages:

> *And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;*
> *She hadde passed many a straunge strem;*
> *At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,*
> *In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne. (ll. 463–466)*

While the Wife's pilgrimages are the subject of fiction, pilgrimages were a reality Ages. The fifteenth-century King's Lynn housewife and mother of 14, Margery Ke the first autobiography in English, gives accounts of pilgrimages she went on to b describes how, because many of her fellow-pilgrims found her devotion excessiv despite the many dangers and difficulties that this involved.[8]

It is to Canterbury that Chaucer's pilgrims are bound. They, like many others in th to visit the tomb of St Thomas Becket, the Archbishop of Canterbury assassinate II, on 29 December 1170. Becket had enjoyed a close friendship with Henry in his Chancellor, but once appointed by Henry to the top church position his new role relationship. The two men came into conflict over the rights and privileges of the following a period in exile, Becket returned to England in 1170 only to be murder on his way to say Vespers (the evening service). Historians have argued that Hen murder, but rather that a complaint uttered about Becket's actions was misinter command to kill Becket.

Soon after Becket's death he began to be **venerated** as a **martyr**, and a little ove 1173, he was canonised (made a saint) by the Pope. In that same year pilgrims b visit his tomb, and in 1174 Henry II made public penance at Becket's tomb.

[7] A modern parallel would be the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, in Saudi Arabia, which is one of the
[8] *The Book of Margery Kempe*, translated by Barry Windeatt, (London: Penguin, 2000).

Chaucer's Verse

It is important when studying Chaucer to remember that he writes in verse; an a
verse will be rewarded for AO2 at A Level. There are two principal features of Ch
pentameter and **rhyming couplets**.

Chaucer is frequently attributed with inventing the iambic pentameter, the poeti
widely used in English poetry. An iamb is composed of one unstressed followed b
examples of English words with this stress pattern are 'alone', 'unsure', 'afraid' a
is a line of verse which comprises five of these iambs. An example from *The Wife*
syllables are underlined):

> *To speke of wo that is in mariage; (l. 3)*

In this example, the use of the iambic pentameter allows the Wife to emphasise
Prologue: she will speak – at length – on a favourite topic, the sufferings of marri
syllables in the three syllable word 'mariage' – are all stressed).

However, Chaucer, like all good poets, does not stick rigidly to the iambic pentam
creates a pleasing sound but also allows additional emphasis in places where cha
a varied rhythm can be found at lines 820–821 where the defeated Jankin, the W
the power in the marriage to her, saying:

> *Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;*
> *Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn estaat.*

The change to the poetic rhythm at this point emphasises the change that has be
relationship.

Chaucer's other key poetic feature is his use of rhyming couplets. He deploys an
within this choice of poetic form, rarely repeating the same rhyme twice; for exa
frequently appears at the end of a poetic line (perhaps not surprising given the W
100 lines it is coupled with 'auctoritee' (l. 1), 'Galilee' (l. 11), 'he' (l. 32 and l. 38),
62). This lack of repetition creates momentum and contributes to the onward th
couplets are also typically used to create a sense of conclusion or finality – hence
to sum up the argument, and to signal a scene ending in Shakespeare. This is sign
of them by the Wife of Bath – particularly when 'me' is one of the rhyming words
combative forceful tone and to creating a sense that she is right and cannot be s

Students should be encouraged to study short extracts from *The Wife of Bath's P*
aspects of Chaucer's verse style and comment on the effects created.

Section 2: The Critical Reception of Ch

Geoffrey Chaucer was famed for his writing in his own lifetime. As noted in his bi occupied a privileged position at the royal court and received some form of patr court also probably provided Chaucer with a ready, immediate audience. On the century manuscript of *Troilus and Criseyde*, there is an image of what appears to a courtly audience, and the same idea is depicted four hundred years later by the Madox Brown in his painting *Chaucer at the Court of Edward III* (1856–68). Both the literary work as being delivered **orally** to a communal audience of listeners, r by an individual, and it may well be that much of Chaucer's initial reception was written, were expensive, and even if people were literate (and one would assum were), there was probably much greater aural consumption of literature than the *Canterbury Tales* read aloud as a communal experience would have provided a s presented within the work itself as the pilgrims listen to one another's tales as th

However, we do not know if the paintings depict a historical reality and, even if t also consumed by private readers. At the very end of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chau apologises for any offence his writing may have caused and attributes all its virtu audience as 'hem all that herkne this litel tretys or rede', that is to say all who bo showing he understands his writings to have two audiences: communal listeners that existing manuscripts of Chaucer's work are frequently annotated, often in La readership, and the ornateness of a manuscript such as the Ellesmere manuscrip 'costly decorations and marginal illustrations' suggests it 'cannot have been prep a public reader'.[10]

Chaucer's contemporary readers were almost certainly a diverse group and, whi nobility, probably also comprised churchmen, scholars, the emerging middle clas popularity in his lifetime is evident from the number of contemporary manuscrip 83 of all or part of *The Canterbury Tales* and 16 of *Troilus and Criseyde*; this prob number in existence in the fifteenth century.

The popularity of *The Canterbury Tales* with fifteenth century readers is also clear principal text to be produced by William Caxton at his printing press in Westminste *The Canterbury Tales* in 1478, with a second following shortly afterwards. Other pr based on Caxton's text, though with some variations taken from different manusc

Chaucer was not just popular with readers, but also with his fellow poets. Their p to focus on him as a poet writing in English, a religious and moral poet, and a poe order to elevate their own reputation. Thomas Hoccleve, in his long poem *The Re* describes Chaucer as 'the first fyndere of our fair langage', acknowledging Chauc English as a language worthy for poets (rather than the more common Latin and two decades later, in *The Fall of Princes* referred to Chaucer as the 'lodesterre... star that is used to guide the course of a ship). Little attention is paid to his lingu radical thinking and challenging of institutional structures.

During the Tudor period, Chaucer continued to be celebrated as a national poet, began to decline and by the end of the seventeenth century, his works were bare attributed to the difficulty people were experiencing in reading his English, as the and that of his readers grew. Furthermore, medieval culture had become unfash to read literature from that period.

[9] See Section 1 above.

[10] This discussion in this paragraph summarises and directly quotes from Stephen Penn, 'Literacy a (ed.), *Chaucer*, pp. 113–129.

However, Chaucer's reputation began to improve in the early eighteenth century
In 1700, Dryden published *Fables Ancient and Modern, Translated into Verse, fro*
Chaucer. By grouping Chaucer with the classical poets Homer and Ovid, Dryden w
the status of Chaucer as a poet. In his preface, Dryden explains his desire to pro
he includes him in the collection for 'the Honour of my Native Country'. As did hi
he attributes to Chaucer the role of improving the status of the English language
idea that Chaucer was the 'father of English poetry'. He praised Chaucer for his r
particularly in *The Canterbury Tales* – which set him apart from his medieval con
romance and chivalry and other fantastical matters) and connected him to both c
that sense, it was Chaucer's non-medievalism that Dryden liked. However, there
Chaucer was a medieval poet, and Dryden, like other readers from the period, vi
deficient. A key problem was that eighteenth-century readers did not realise tha
English words needs to be pronounced. They thus thought that Chaucer's poetry
Dryden describing it as 'not Harmonious'. Elsewhere he described Chaucer as 'a r
be polish'd e'er he shines'. Dryden could thus justify his non-literal translation of
improving on the original. Dryden also argued that, in places, Chaucer's writing w
translate only *The Knight's Tale, The Nun's Priest's Tale* and *The Wife of Bath's To*

Despite the **prevailing** view of Chaucer's verse as being deficient, from the eighte
maintained his reputation as the first English poet. And in the latter stages of the
from a **resurgence** of interest in medieval culture and literature. In 1775, Thoma
edition of *The Canterbury Tales*. Tyrwhitt was the first to propose that the final –
showing Dryden was wrong to describe Chaucer as metrically deficient, and he a
a range of manuscripts to inform his edition. Unlike his eighteenth-century prede
appreciated the comedy in Chaucer's poetry, though many translations from the
elements of the tales.

From the last decades of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century
the revival of an interest in all things medieval. His frequent inclusion in general
made him readily available to general readers, not just the poetic **elite** who had
centuries. The Victorian idealisation of the Middle Ages as a time of social harmo
to a similar idealisation of Chaucer: rather than linking him to the classics and re
Shakespeare, Victorian critics and writers reconstructed him as a quiet, modest,
persona in *The Canterbury Tales*. For Victorian critics Chaucer had two key qualit
nature. The former was attributed to his ability to sit and observe real life, while
be explained as a reaction against the forces of industrialisation that were under
and a nostalgia for a pre-industrial England. All these factors contributed to the i
by the end of the nineteenth century, a popularity which seems unwavering now
second decade of the twenty-first century.

The twentieth century witnessed a profound growth in the critical and academic
became the object of both linguistic analysis and literary/historical/biographical
work, while dismissed by modern-day critics, is still influential today – was the H
(1860–1941). In his book *Chaucer and His Poetry* (published 1915), Kittredge pro
had a clear overarching structure, that of a Human Comedy, in which the pilgrim
because they reveal aspects of the speaker's character and opinions and their re
He also argued – which is of particular relevance to the reception of *The Wife of*
four of the tales comprise what he termed a 'marriage group', with the storytelle
the Merchant and the Franklin – all offering a different view on marriage and rel
The 'marriage group' is **initiated** by the Wife's narration of her own experiences
that all women desire the upper hand ('sovereynetee'), while the Clerk's story of
almost beyond endurance by her husband (he pretends both to kill her children
it all, remains uncomplaining and dutiful, presents a very different kind of wifely
a different type of classic misogynistic tale of a young adulterous wife deceiving
while the Franklin's tale of mutual love, trust and sacrifice provides, according to
of marriage. Kittredge's approach is a typical early twentieth-century response w
Canterbury Tales as a unified work, with a clear overarching intention and tales r
However, in the latter half of the twentieth century, such harmonious and unifie
to be challenged by the new emerging critical theories, theories that included fe
and postmodernism.

The Wife of Bath in the *General Prologue*

(A) The *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*

1. Before beginning *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, read the description *Prologue* (ll. 447–478; reproduced at the beginning of James Winny's Camb *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*). Here she is introduced to the audien and unworldly Geoffrey Chaucer the pilgrim.[11]
   a. What impression is created of the Wife of Bath from this description? Co
      - ❖ the significance of how she is referred to (her title/'name')
      - ❖ her behaviour at church
      - ❖ her social status
      - ❖ her appearance, including her clothing (on both Sundays and the pil
      - ❖ her past
      - ❖ her lifestyle
   b. Look at the two images of the Wife of Bath on **Resource 1** – annotate th her description in the *General Prologue*.

Like the other pilgrims in the *General Prologue* the Wife is presented in terms of

- her appearance
- her personality
- her life experiences

Appearance

Only a few of the Wife's physical features are mentioned in the *General Prologue* clear and detailed picture of her. The reader learns only that she is partly deaf, g and a reddish complexion. The reason for her partial deafness – 'she was somde fully explained at the end of her *Prologue* to her tale. The gap between her teeth have been immediately understood by a medieval audience as a sign of the wife's hue will be mentioned by the Wife herself: she refers to it as 'Martes mark' (l. 61 whose planetary influence she was born and which she claims gives her boldness in the description of the Wife's clothing that Chaucer really goes into detail. Havi in cloth-making, and surpassing the cloth-makers of 'Ypres and of Gaunt' (l. 448), cloth-making at this time, he describes her Sunday clothing. She wears fine, elab stockings and new leather shoes. This outfit signals the Wife's wealth and high so material used to adorn her head would have been expensive, and the red dye ne have been costly because it was made from insect blood.

Another of the Wife's outfits is also described: what she wears to go on pilgrimage, h her to dress sensibly and comfortably.[12] She wears a broad-brimmed hat and a wimp the sun), an overskirt to protect her clothing from the dust of the road, and spurs to

Personality

As well as being signalled through her clothing, the Wife's desire for her high soc also communicated through her behaviour in church at the collection. Nowadays their seats and a collection plate is offered around, but in the Middle Ages the co priest with their offerings in order of social rank. Chaucer portrays the Wife's ins anger if any woman tried to go before her. The Wife is also depicted as an outgo has good knowledge of matters of the heart.

Life Experiences

Pre-eminent amongst the Wife's experiences is marriage: she has been married marital experience is a fundamental part of her identity is clear from the referen description as a 'good wif' (l. 445); further detail is provided 15 lines later:

> *Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,*
> *Withouten oother compaignye in youthe (ll. 460–461)*

The places she has visited on pilgrimage and her cloth-making skill are also refer

[11] I have used the word 'audience' rather than 'reader' since many original fourteenth-century 'readers' read aloud rather than read it to themselves, a reflection of both the lower literacy rates of the time but would have limited their circulation and ownership. The text is also presented as an oral storytelling con pilgrims) inside the text.

[12] See the section on Pilgrimage (Section 1).

[13] The spurs also symbolise how she drives on and controls her husbands in her marriages.

Resource 1: The Wife of Bath: Visua

Annotate the two pictures with relevant quotations from the Wife's description in the *Genera*

1. The Wife of Bath on pilgrimage

Resource 2: The Bible on Ma

Reading these passages on marriage before you begin your study of Chaucer's te
overview of some of the key discussions of marriage in the Bible that the Wife m
passages are all taken from the Douay Version of the Bible; translated from the L
closely resembles the version of the Bible known to medieval readers. In each ca
the book of the Bible and the chapter number, and the superscript numbers indi

In the first 162 lines of her *Prologue*, the Wife refers to quotations from
Biblical passages. Highlight or underline the phrases or sentences spoke
Wife and annotate with the relevant line number of the *Prologue*.

GENESIS 1

[27] And God created man to his image; to the image of God he created him. Male
he created them.
[28] And God blessed them, saying: Increase and multiply, and fill the earth and sub

GENESIS 2

[20]And Adam called all the beasts by their names, and all the fowls of the air, and
Adam there was not found a helper like himself. [21]Then the Lord God cast a deep
was fast asleep, he took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. [22]And the Lord G
from Adam into a woman: and brought her to Adam. [23]And Adam said: This now
my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man. [24]Where
mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they shall be two in one flesh.

JOHN 4

[6]Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, being wearied with his journey, sa
the sixth hour. [7] There cometh a woman of Samaria to draw water. Jesus saith to

[16] Jesus saith to her: Go, call thy husband, and come hither. [17]The woman answe
Jesus said to her: Thou hast said well, I have no husband; [18]For thou hast had five
now hast is not they husband. This thou hast said truly.

1 CORINTHIANS 7

[1] Now concerning the things whereof you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to
fornication, let every man have his own wife; and let every woman have her own h
the debt to his wife; and the wife also in like manner to the husband. [4] The wife ha
but the husband. And in like manner, the husband also hath not power of his own
one another, except, perhaps, by consent, for a time, that you may give yourselves
again, lest Satan tempt you for your incontinency. [6] But I speak this by indulgence,
would that all men were even as myself. But every one hath his proper gift from G
another after that. [8] But I say to the unmarried and to the widows; it is good for th
[9]But if they do not contain themselves, let them marry. For it is better to marry tha

[25] Now, concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord; but I give couns
the Lord, to be faithful. [26]I think therefore that this is good for the present neces
to be. [27]Art thou bound to a wife? Seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a
thou take a wife, thou hast not sinned. And if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned.
tribulation of the flesh. But I spare you.

[32] But I would have you to be without solicitude. He that is without a wife is solic
the Lord; how he may please God. [33]But he that is with a wife is solicitous for the
please his wife. And he is divided. [34]And the unmarried woman and the virgin thi
that she may be holy both in body and spirit. But she that is married thinketh on
may please her husband. [35]And this I speak for your profit, not to cast a snare up
decent and which may give you power to attend upon the Lord, without impedi
he seemeth dishonoured with regard to his virgin, for that she is above the age, a
what he will. He sinneth not, if she marry. [37]For he that hath determined, being s
necessity, but having power of his own will; and hath judged this in his heart, to
[38]Therefore, both he that giveth his virgin in marriage doth well; and he that give
woman is bound by the law as long as her husband liveth; but if her husband die,
whom she will; only in the Lord. [40]But more blessed shall she be if she so remain,
think that I also have the Spirit of God.

The Wife of Bath's Prol

The Wife of Bath is the sixth pilgrim to tell her tale, after the Knight, the Miller, t
of Law; perhaps not surprisingly she is the first of the three female pilgrims to sp

The Wife's *Prologue* to her tale is the longest of any of the pilgrims, and at 856 li
length of her tale. In it, the Wife presents herself to her fellow pilgrims (and the r
married life and her thoughts on celibacy, marriage and relationships between m
General Prologue has presented her from an external perspective, through the e
Prologue and *Tale* present the Wife in her own voice through her own understan

The Wife's *Prologue* can be sub-divided into six principal sections:

Lines 1–162: The Wife sets out her thoughts on marriage – and remarriage
teachings on the subject

Lines 163–193: The interruption by the Pardoner

Lines 194–451: The Wife narrates her experiences of marriage with her first t

Lines 452–502: The Wife's fourth marriage

Lines 503–828: Husband number five, why the Wife is deaf and how she reso

Lines 829–856: The argument between the Friar and the Summoner

Lines 1–162: The Wife sets out her thoughts o remarriage – taking issue with the Church's teac

The Wife opens her *Prologue* by setting up a **dichotomy** between her personal e textual authorities on the subject. With her first word being 'Experience', the Wi experience as granting her the authority to speak of the 'wo that is in mariage' (l speak in this way by telling her audience: 'Housbondes at chirche dore I have hac century the marriage ceremony was commonly held at the door of the church, w celebrated inside the building. The Wife describes all five of her husbands as 'wo Ages the word 'worthy' could be translated as 'costly', 'wealthy', 'important', 'gc ambiguity, particularly as the Wife takes great delight in profiting from the wealt

At line 9 the Wife immediately introduces the conflict between her own persona Church's teachings on it, by citing the story of the Samaritan woman who, like th times and was reprimanded by Jesus for living with a man who was not her husb that nowhere is it recorded how many times it is lawful to marry, the Wife estab medieval church that encouraged widows to take vows of **chastity**, rather than r

The Wife proceeds to defend her actions by referring to a number of Biblical figu partners: King Solomon, Lamech, Abraham and Jacob, all of whom kept more tha case, seven hundred. Here, and elsewhere, the Wife's argument becomes slightl **bigamy**, but is using these bigamous characters to endorse her right to remarry a the Wife's argument are striking: firstly her reference to textual authorities to su when she began the *Prologue* by claiming her experience could override textual a of male figures to support her behaviour as a woman. She cheekily expresses he meaning refreshed sexually) half as many times as King Solomon was, and says th husband number six. She also very knowingly cites St Paul's writings on chastity, Corinthians,[17] pointing out that while Paul recommends chastity he admits he ha subject: 'precept therof hadde he noon' (l. 65).

The Wife uses St Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 7 that **celibacy**, while prefera her wish to marry – and remarry:

> *And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve*
> *Of indulgence (ll. 83–84).*

Using the **analogy** of houseware (plates, vessels), she points out that while some occasions), others will be made of a more ordinary material, such as wood, and w adequately. Likewise, not all humans are called to be gold vessels (virgins) for Gc

> *...everich hath of God a propre yifte,*
> *Som this, som that, as hym liketh shifte. (ll. 103–104)*

The Wife is clear that marriage is where she can best use her talents:

> *I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age*
> *In the actes and in fruyt of mariage. (ll. 113–114)*

As well as using the Bible to support her argument, the Wife also adopts a very l At lines 71–72 for example she points out that were everyone to adopt the ideal cease to be populated, thus depriving it of new virgins:

> *And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,*
> *Virginitee, thane wherof sholde it growe?*

Similarly, she argues that since God created sexual organs, he must therefore au humans. As she notes, using her favourite word, 'experience' (l. 124) proves that simply created to purge urine and differentiate between the sexes, and this is pr

[14] This is a repetition – though now in the first person – of line 462 from the *General Prologue*.
[15] In the *General Prologue* Chaucer describes the Wife as a 'worthy womman al hir lyve' (l. 461).
[16] For definitions see the online *Middle English Dictionary*: **http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/**
[17] For selected extracts from Paul's Letter to the Corinthians see Resource 2 in Section 3.

The marriage debt – described by St Paul – states that the husband and wife are
through marriage, and that they owe one another bodily union:

> *Let the husband render the debt to his wife; and the wife also in*
> *the husband. The wife hath not power of her own body; but the h*
> *in like manner, the husband also hath not power of his own body*
> *(1 Corinthians 7: 3–4)*[18]

That being so, the Wife points out that we need our sexual organs in order to pa

The Wife's concern to tread a fine line between asserting her right to marry, and
Church's teachings, is demonstrated at many points in the *Prologue*. Not wanting
(l. 125) – with her, she concludes that sexual organs were created both for bodily
However, she also points out that, even though we all have sexual organs which
follow that all of us should use them for that purpose, as is clear from the examp

> *Crist was a mayde, and shapen as a man,*
> *And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;*
> *Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee. (ll. 139–141)*

At the same time the Wife is determined that she will not behave in such a way:
This then leads into the Wife's assertion of her desires and needs (ll. 147–162), a
determination to remarry and to continue having sex, quoting Paul's first Letter
claiming that she has the power over her husband's body and not he (ll. 158–159
that likewise, 'The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband'. Like
quoted – and misquoted – the Bible for their own ends to assert their views on w
inferiority, the Wife also picks and chooses what sections to use to support her a

Tracking Questions

The tracking questions that follow each section of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue* and
read and discuss the text. They are designed to check your comprehension of the t
the ways in which meanings are shaped (AO2). Suggested answers can be found in

The Wife of Bath's Prologue Lines 1–162

1. Explain the significance of the reference to both 'experience' and 'auctorite
of the *Prologue*.
2. Describe the Wife's immediate concern in the first 13 lines of her *Prologue*.
3. Explain how the Wife immediately sets herself up in opposition to the Churc
the first 34 lines of the *Prologue*.
4. Identify the Wife's most persuasive point about remarriage in these lines. Exp
5. Explain how the Wife draws on the Bible to justify her position.
6. How does the Wife attempt to balance respect of the Church and its textual
her needs and rights as a sexual being?
7. The Wife uses a number of images from everyday life in this section of her *P*
below. In each case, describe the image used, explain how the Wife uses it t
evaluate its effectiveness:
   a. *For wel ye knowe, a lord in his household,*
      He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
      Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servise. (ll. 99–101)
   b. *I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age*
      In the actes and in fruit of mariage. (ll. 113–114)
   c. *Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,*
      And lat us wives hoten barly-breed;
      And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
      Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man. (ll. 143–146)
8. Describe how Chaucer portrays the Wife of Bath in lines 1–162 of her *Prolog*

[18] All Bible references are to the Douay-Rheims version, a translation of the Latin Vulgate text whic
Middle Ages (*The Holy Bible: Douay Version*. London: Catholic Truth Society, 1956).

Lines 163–193: The interruption by the

At this point in her *Prologue*, the Wife is interrupted by one of her fellow pilgrim talent for preaching, calling her a 'noble prechour' (l. 165), saying that what she rethink his upcoming marriage. Reprimanding him for his interruption, the Wife bigonne' (l. 169), and that when she has told her story 'Of tribulacion in mariage is an 'expert' (l. 174), he'll have an even nastier taste in his mouth.[19] At that poin whether he wishes to marry or not.

The suitably **chastened** Pardoner urges the Wife to continue with her tale, and sh caveat to her fellow pilgrims that they should not be offended by what she says s pleye' (l. 192).[20]

Chaucer presents the Pardoner as one of the least attractive characters in *The Co* Ages pardoners occupied an ambiguous position in society. They were church of activities: preaching, selling indulgences and selling relics. Indulgences were pap or partial remissions of punishment for sins. The Catholic theology of the Mediev death, the soul could go to one of three places: Heaven, Hell or Purgatory. For m good Christian lives the destination was Purgatory, a place where sins were puni pure enough to enter Heaven. Indulgences would shorten the time the soul spen journey to eternal bliss. Relics were parts of a dead holy person's body or clothin qualities.[21] The money raised by the sale of indulgences and relics would fund va of churches, hospitals, schools, leper colonies and so on.

By the late fourteenth century, the practices of relics and indulgences had becom abused the system, selling forged pardons and making impossible promises of as money. They then pocketed the money themselves, instead of handing it on to C were also increasingly dubious.

In the *General Prologue* Chaucer presents his Pardoner as an expert in his field:

> *But of his craft, from Berwik into Ware*
> *Ne was ther swich another pardoner. (ll. 694–695)*

However, the Pardoner's expertise lies in his ability to deceive and defraud peop he claims is 'Oure Lady veil' (l. 697), and a collection of 'pigges bones' (l. 702) to a notes his ability to **swindle** poor clergymen out of huge amounts of money:

> *But with thise relikes, whan that he fond*
> *A povre person dwellinge upon lond,*
> *Upon a day he gat him moore moneye*
> *Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;*
> *And thus, with feyned flaterie and japes,*
> *He made the person and the peple his apes. (ll. 703–708)*

It is this distasteful character who interrupts the Wife's *Prologue*, and his interru a number of functions. One function of the interruption is simply to remind the r 29 pilgrims travelling to Canterbury; with the Wife's *Prologue* being the length it and to overlook that the *Prologue* is presented as an oral delivery to a listening a has a structural purpose, as when the Wife begins speaking again – at line 194 be narrative of her first three husbands; that being so, the Pardoner's interruption t

[19] The Wife's lines here echo the opening three lines of her *Prologue*.
[20] The Wife's claim that her intention is only to entertain and amuse, and that readers should not t comments in *The Canterbury Tales* about how these tales should be read, and whether what is ent morality: such questions are raised in the prologue to the *Cook's Tale* and at the end of the *Nun's P*
[21] They can still be widely seen in Catholic churches in mainland Europe.

justification in theological terms of her many marriages. However, the fact that t
and immoral character lessens the impact of his interruption. In the *General Pro*
effeminate, and possibly homosexual, so his comment that he is about to marry
said that, his fears about what marriage may be like after hearing the Wife speak
speaker, and as a wife, and allow the reader to imagine the effect she might have
extremely good preacher himself, illustrated through the rhetorical power of his
Pardoner's praise of the Wife's preaching ability suggests her rhetorical power. F
ecclesiastical authority, and a repellent one at that, he presents the Church in a n
interrupts the Wife may symbolise the Church's attempts to silence women's voi
at the end of the Wife's *Prologue*, before she begins her *Tale* – when the Friar an
distasteful representatives of ecclesiastical authority, interrupt her; the reader in
these points, and is thus encouraged to support her in her battles against the Ch
about women and marriage.

Lines 163–193

1. Explain the thrust of the Pardoner's interruption of the Wife of Bath.
2. How does the Wife respond to the Pardoner's interruption?
3. Invited by the Pardoner to resume her storytelling, the Wife says that peopl
she says since her 'entente is nat but for to pleye' (l. 192). What do you und
how does it affect your response to what you have read so far?
4. What function does the Pardoner's interruption serve? You might consider t
   a. The description of the Pardoner in the *General Prologue* (see below).
   b. The structural function of the interruption – how does it help to structu
   c. The Pardoner as a representative of ecclesiastical authority that the Wi
   previous 162 lines of her prologue.

Further reading activity:
After reading the Pardoner's interruption of the Wife of Bath's *Prologue* (ll. 163–1
of the Pardoner in the *General Prologue* (ll. 671–716).

- How is he presented by Chaucer? What kind of a man is he?
- Consider the effect of his portrayal in the *General Prologue* on your respons

Lines 194–451: The Wife narrates her experienc her first three husbands

Following the Pardoner's interruption, the Wife says she will 'now... telle forth [h proper does not come for another 650 lines, what the Wife does embark on is a history. She begins with her first three husbands whom she groups together as a and olde' (l. 197). In this long section of the *Prologue*, the Wife both sets out her husbands and describes how she treated them. Through this Chaucer alerts the r **misogynistic** views of medieval **patriarchal** society, thereby encouraging our sym time, however, the Wife discloses her often cruel and pitiless treatment of her h behaviour as a wife; in so doing she conforms – perhaps unwittingly – to some o women that fourteenth-century **anti-feminist** society **perpetuated**.

Having been alerted at the beginning of the *Prologue* to the fact that the Wife's when she was only 12 (l. 2), the reader may well feel sympathy at this point whe husbands were so old that '[u]nnethe mighte they the statut holde' (l. 198); they their marital obligations, namely have sexual intercourse. However, the Wife's a work hard – 'swinke' (l. 202) – at night, and the scorn she shows them, may well her opinion. She points out that, since these husbands had given her 'hir lond an need to be kind to them, and she thus heaped sufferings upon them: tormenting that they were grateful when she spoke kindly. This is one turning point in the *Pr* conform to negative medieval stereotypes of women.

This anti-feminist stereotype is reinforced when the Wife appeals to 'wise wives' (l to speak to and deceive their husbands.[22] Referring to a medieval folk tale – a vers the pilgrimage by the Manciple – the Wife says that 'A wys wyf shal... Bere him [he [bird] is wood' (ll. 231–232), basically that a wise wife should be able to convince h

This introduces a long section (running from line 235 to line 381) in which the Wife husbands; however, the way in which she does this is so clever, and her rhetorical reader almost forgets what she is doing. She reports – as direct speech – what she husbands. This monologue, while directed at one husband, 'Sire old kaynard' (l. 23 understood as what she said to all three. At its most basic it is a rant against the h them of mistreating her, of making **derogatory** comments about women in genera She accuses her husband of denying her new clothes, and of engaging in flirtatious wife and maid, while scolding her if she dares to go and spend time with a male fri

From line 247 to line 302 the Wife articulates what she claims are the husband's is quoted by her as saying reflects medieval anti-feminist thought, which drew o thinking. These complaints about wives condemn every kind of woman: poor (ll. beautiful (ll. 253–256), and ugly (ll. 265–272). Specific images are used to descri women: the beautiful wife who is the object of desire for countless men is likene men lay siege to; the ugly wife will leap on any man 'as a spaynel' (l. 267), but wi noon so grey goos gooth ther in the lake... wol been without make' (ll. 269–270).

As well as grouping women in various categories the husbands are also presente Wife as complaints about women in general. Such generalised comments are fre

> *Thow seist that dropping houses, and eek smoke,*
> *And chiding wives maken men to flee*
> *Out of hir owene hous; (ll. 278–280)*
>
> *Thow seist we wives wol oure vices hide*
> *Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe (ll. 282–283)*

[22] Since the Wife is the only married woman on the pilgrimage, she is clearly at this point speaking immediate fellow pilgrims.

The voice of the husband in these examples reflects the way in which medieval a about women, criticising them simply because they were women.

Throughout this section – and seen in the two examples cited above – the Wife c accusations against her husband(s) with the phrase 'Thow seist' or 'Thus seistow' impression of a dominant and accusatory husband, constantly wagging his finger one crime or another. At the same time her reiteration of the phrase presents he accusations and complaints.

Intermingled with the Wife's reports of what her husbands apparently said to he demonstrate her fine line in insults, most of which address their age. She calls he (l. 235) and 'olde lecchour' (l. 242), 'lorel' (wretch, l. 273), 'shrewe' (scoundrel, ll. of lies!' (l. 302). She describes him coming home 'as dronken as a mous' (l. 246), s ('Moote thy welked nekke be tobroke!', l. 277) and refers disparagingly to his old man for to chide', l. 281).

At line 303 the Wife accuses her husband of wrongly suspecting her intentions w However, Jankin will appear later in the *Prologue* as the Wife's fifth husband, sug well have had grounds for his suspicions. Furthermore the Wife is obviously attra with delight 'his crispe [curly] heer, shininge as gold so fyn' (l. 304), the reference her hope that he might enrich her financially. This should leave the reader in no from truthful when she claims 'I wol him noght' (l. 307).

The Wife's concern with financial matters continues when she berates her husba chest – and thus to his wealth and possessions – from her, arguing that what is h going to be master of her goods, he must give up any claim to be master of her b go where she likes, for as she points out – talking generally for all women – 'We l charge / Wher that we goon; we wol ben at oure large' (ll. 321–322). There is a c husband – to the Wife's annoyance – groups all women together in his accusatio groups together all women, claiming to speak on their behalf.

The Wife's desire to have freedom in her marriages leads into a section in which from the *Almagest* of the Greek astronomer, Ptolemy, the Wife cites his proverb

> *Of alle men his wisdom is the hyeste*
> *That rekketh nevere who hath the worlde in honde. (ll. 326–327)*[23]

Translating as 'He is wisest who does not care how much another's wealth excee by the Wife to argue her point that provided her husband is sexually satisfied he having access to her. She then translates this into a more homely image:

> *He is to greet a nigard that wolde werne*
> *A man to lighte a candle at his lanterne;*
> *He shal have never the lasse light, pardee. (ll. 333–335)*

The rational logic of the Wife's argument cannot be disputed, but both medieval and denounce her view of sex; Christian morality aside, the reference to a miser ('nigard' connotations, and there is certainly a sense in which the Wife perceives sex as a **tran**

The next 30 lines or so are devoted to more of the husband's complaints about t His complaints address women's vanity, and include another animal image wher to a cat (l. 348): like a cat, a wife will only go out if she is dressed well; otherwise from view. He then throws a number of insults at his wife in the form of generali describes a 'hateful wyf' as one of the four things that 'troublen al this erthe' (ll.

[23] The Wife earlier cites Ptolemy at line 182.

women's love to 'helle' (l. 371), to 'bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle' (l. 3
(l. 373). Just as insects destroy a tree, 'Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde

In response the Wife shows only defiance. She treats his comments on women's

After thy text, ne after thy rubriche,
I wol nat wirche as muchel as a gnat. (ll. 346–347)

She also boasts of her ability to outwit her husband, despite any attempt he mak

'Yet koude I make his berd, so moot I thee!' (l. 361).

A modern reader in particular may be feeling a certain amount of sympathy for t
Prologue because of what she had to endure from her husbands. It can therefore
reminded (from line 379 onwards) that, as she had previously admitted (ll. 224–2
part of her advice to wives about how to deceive their husbands:

Thus shulde ye (wise wives) speke and bere hem wrong on honde

At lines 379–381 the Wife reminds her audience (both the pilgrims and readers t
her husbands into thinking they had said such things when they were drunk – 'A
marks a shift in the presentation of the Wife, and the reader's response to her: s
negative light, as more and more of the unattractive personality traits that are d
tracts of the period are revealed: deceit, nagging, adultery, infidelity and pride in
the forefront of the Wife's presentation. She boasts of the suffering she piled on

O Lord! the peyne I dide hem and the wo,
Ful giltelees, by Goddes sweete pine! (ll. 384–385)

This marks the beginning of a full and detailed account by the Wife of her mistre
husbands. She accounts for her behaviour by citing a proverb – 'Whoso that first
(l. 389) – explaining that she pre-empted her husbands' complaints about her by
and in so doing prevented domestic strife. Her husbands, likewise keen to avoid
opportunity to be absolved for something they had not actually done.

In her confessional narrative, the Wife admits how she concealed her own adulte
her own husbands, by claiming that all her night-time wanderings were simply to
husbands were having affairs with. She clearly takes pride in her ability to deceiv
shame comments about women that might normally be expected to issue from t

Deceite, weping, spinning God hath yive
To women kindely, whil that they may live. (ll. 401–402)

What to men is a negative trait of women is transformed by the Wife into an **ass**

She then proceeds to boast of her success in her marriages, namely her ability to
means were employed: 'By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thing, / As by con
(ll. 405–06). She admits she mistreated her husbands, denying them sexually unt
wanted, and continually nagging them. The image she uses to describe her old h
meaning old meat – shows the contempt in which she held them.

The Wife brings to an end her account of her first three marriages by citing – in c
calm and appease them after so shamelessly mistreating them. Referring to the
patiently bore the sufferings heaped upon him, never once renouncing his faith i
husband to similarly endure his sufferings without complaint. Pointing out that 'i
(l. 439), she argues – very logically – that the husband, as the more rational and
should make the necessary concessions to achieve this:

Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees;
And sith a man is moore reasonable
Than woman is, ye moste been suffrable. (ll. 440–442)

1. Describe how the Wife treated her first three husbands.
2. Summarise the complaints about women that the Wife alleges her husband
   378). To what extent does the Wife's behaviour, as described so far in the *P*
3. Explain how the Wife's choices of language, phrasing and structure serve to
   her husband and his complaints.
4. Summarise the Wife's complaints about her first three husbands.
5. Identify three images the husbands use to talk about women. Explain what
   what they suggest about views of women in the Middle Ages.
6. Identify three terms the Wife uses to refer to her husbands, e.g. 'olde kayna
   reveal about her opinion of them.
7. Describe how both the Wife and her husbands use textual authority to asser
8. Who is Jankin (ll. 303–307) and why is he causing problems between the Wi
9. Explain the proverb by Ptolemy at lines 326–327: 'Of alle men his wisdom is
   who hath the world in honde'. How does the Wife use this saying to her adv
   husbands?
10. What is the significance of the cat analogy between lines 348 and 356?
11. How does the Wife's admission at line 382 that all these accusations she ma
    'fals' affect the reader's sympathy for the Wife?
12. Explain how the Wife conforms to medieval antifeminist stereotypes of wor
    Prologue.
13. Between lines 413 and 417 and lines 447 and 449 the Wife refers to sex usin
    transaction. Explain what she says in each case, and explore what her langu
    view of sexual relationships and the nature of later 14th century English soci

Lines 451–502: The Wife's fourth m

At line 451 the Wife brings her narrative of life with her first three husbands to a
account of her fourth and fifth husbands, the two 'badde' men that she mention
very different from the first three. She describes her fourth husband, who kept a
and this triggers a moment of reminiscence in the Wife as she recalls her behavi
'yong and ful of ragerie' (l. 455). She describes how she used to dance and sing, p
drinking, which subsequently generated a desire for sex. The Wife describes with
youthful behaviour and the wealth of experiences she enjoyed, but her tone bec
acknowledges the passing of time that has stripped her of her 'beautee and [her

This more vulnerable side is developed further when the Wife admits that her fo
and upset her and that, to requite him, she flirted with other men:

> *That in his owene grece I made him frie*
> *For angre and for verray jalousie (ll. 487–488)*

Describing herself as his 'purgatorie' (l. 489) on earth, the Wife expresses a hope
now 'in glorie' (l. 490), an acknowledgement of the extent of the sufferings she p

The fourth husband is the only husband whose death the Wife explicitly refers to
with the beginnings of her relationship with her fifth and most beloved husband.
her pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and is buried 'under the roode beem' of the church
that his tomb is a simple one, as 'It nis but wast to burye him preciously' (l. 500).
her fourth husband and moves on in her narrative.

Lines 451–502

1. Describe what the reader learns about the Wife's fourth husband. Explain h
   from her first three husbands.
2. Explain the significance of this image used by the Wife:

   > *The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;*
   > *The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle; (ll. 477–478)*

3. When did the Wife's fourth husband die?
4. What is the significance of the fourth husband's burial place?
5. Despite the sympathy we might feel for the Wife, Chaucer still allows her to
   her character. What unappealing features emerge at this point in her narrat

[24] For an explanation of purgatory see the discussion of lines 163-93 on page 16.
[25] In the *General Prologue* the Wife is described as having been to Jerusalem three times (line 465)
medieval churches, is a beam of timber which spans the arch dividing the chancel (the area aroun
thus the most holy part of the church) from the nave (the main body of the church, where the con
is usually a 'rood' (a large crucifix), bearing Christ, with the figures of Mary and St John the Evange
beam would have been less costly than burial in the chancel, reflecting the wife's financial pruden

Lines 503–828: Husband number five, why the W she resolved her marital difficul

The Wife's attention turns now to her fifth husband. He is clearly the one she lov account by declaring 'God lete his soule nevere come in helle' (l. 504); however, noting that, of all her husbands, he was the most 'shrewe' – wicked – (l. 505). Th victim of domestic abuse, saying that she can still feel the blows he inflicted on h myn ending day' (ll. 506–507). However, because he was such a good lover, and always win her back, whatever torment he had inflicted on her.

But in oure bed he was so fressh and gay,
And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,
What that he wolde han my bele chose,
That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
He koude winne again my love anon. (ll. 508–512)

Once again the Wife mentions her *bele chose*, but this time it can be won not wit right words. The Wife's use of the word 'glose' is interesting here; she uses the w 119, referring to the interpretative work of biblical scholars who pore over texts they seek to understand what the Bible says about marriage, remarriage and wo flattering language her husband uses in order to get his own way. Just as the sch in the Bible to endorse their view of women's inherent wickedness and natural in fifth husband seeks what he wants in the obliging text of his wife's body.

The Wife relates to the reader how she met her fifth husband – Jankin – and the Jankin, who had studied at Oxford University, had taken lodgings with the Wife's called Alisoun.[26] This mention of her friend – who appears to have died, since the (l. 530) – leads the Wife into one of her customary **digressions** as she begins talk than Jankin. The two women were such close friends that the Wife used to revea husbands' secrets, whether it was something minor or a capital offence:

For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,
Or doon a thing that sholde han cost his lyf
To hire, and to another worthy wyf,
And to my nece, which that I loved weel,
I wolde han toold his conseil every deel (ll. 534–538)

Returning to the topic in question, namely Jankin, the Wife tells of how her husb London one Lent, which gave her the opportunity to spend time with her best fri day period before Easter, traditionally (and even more so in the Middle Ages) a t The Wife's admission, therefore, that she spent Lent walking 'Fro hous to hous, t taking the opportunity 'to se, and eek for to be seye / Of lusty folk' (ll. 552–553), have earned the condemnation of the medieval church. While between lines 556 of religious events she attended – saints' days **vigils**, processions, preaching, pilg weddings – her insistence on wearing her 'gaye scarlet gites' (her fine red dresse signalling her wealth and desire to be noticed, suggests a tension between the C that women behave in a modest and seemly manner, and the reality of the Wife'

The Wife's subversive behaviour continues as she recounts her flirtations with Ja taught by her 'dame' (l. 576). The identity of this dame is unclear: the Wife may b (though she makes no reference to her elsewhere in the *Prologue*); she may be r she calls 'dame Alis' at line 548; or she may be talking more generally, about eith body of knowledge that women have access to.

[26] This duplicating of names could suggest a lack of interest in individuals and individuality in the M pilgrims are given names, they are known primarily by their professions.

[27] The mystery plays told the 'Biblical history of the world' from Creation to Last Judgement, and c some of the most famous include Noah's Ark, the Birth of Christ, the Crucifixion. Each play was en town (the medieval version of a trade union) on a cart that would be pulled around the town or cit points in the town, and someone standing at one point for the duration of the whole performance known mystery cycles, manuscripts of which are still extant today, originated in York, Chester and

Her flirting includes telling Jankin he would marry her were she a 'widwe' (l. 568), giving her a love potion, and narrating a dream that he had killed her and her be explains, according to medieval teachings on dreams, blood symbolises gold (thu hinting at the wealth she can bring into a fifth marriage, owing to her inheritance Then, in an echo of line 382 where she admitted that all the accusations she leve old husbands were actually false, here she says, of the dream, 'And al was fals' (l serves to forward the Wife's ends.

The Wife's inappropriate behaviour continues as she describes her behaviour on 'wept but smale' because she was already 'purveyed of a make' (ll. 591–592), an how she only had eyes for Jankin:

> *As help me God! whan that I saugh him go*
> *After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire*
> *Of legges and of feet so clene and faire*
> *That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold. (ll. 596–599)*

The comic tension between the funeral procession and the Wife's lustful though creates another impression of the Wife undermining patriarchal and ecclesiastica

The Wife then proceeds to describe her marital relationship with Jankin, beginni ages. Jankin was half her age – 'He was, I trowe, a twenty winter oold, / And I wa 600–601) – but the Wife claims to have been very youthful, illustrated through th tooth' (l. 602), regarded in the Middle Ages as symbolising youthful desires and i herself being '[g]at-tothed' (l. 603), echoing her description in the *General Prolog* of the medieval belief that having a gap between one's front teeth **connoted** lust

The Wife develops this exploration of her youthful, lusty side by describing the p character. In the Middle Ages astrology was held in high esteem, and was not co Christianity, as is the case nowadays. It was widely believed that astrological forc character and destiny, reflecting a world in which personality traits were regarde control of the individual – whether that be owing to planetary influences or to th woman. The Wife explains that at the moment of her birth she came under the i planets: Venus, which gave her 'lust' (l. 611) and Mars, which provided her 'sturd The combination of these two influences creates a woman who is aggressive and sexual pleasure. As she notes:

> *I folwed ay myn inclinacioun*
> *By vertu of my constellacioun;*
> *That made me I koude noght withdrawe*
> *My chambre of Venus from a good felawe. (ll. 615–618)*

The image 'chambre of Venus' that the Wife uses to refer to her genitalia is a mu description than the word 'queynte' used earlier in the *Prologue* (l. 332). At line 6 part as her '*quoniam*', a Latin word meaning 'since, whereas, because', and that edition translates as 'thingummebob'. However, arguably of greater significance used in the medieval Latin liturgy that the Wife would have heard recited every S the final sentence of the Gloria, the great hymn of praise to God:

> *Quoniam tu solus Sanctus, tu solus Dominus, tu solus Altissimus, gloria Dei Patris. Amen.*[30]
> *[For you alone are the Holy one, you alone are the Lord, you alon High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit to the glory of God the Fat*

Contemporary readers and listeners could well have recognised the word, and m liturgical usage. By using the word 'quoniam' the Wife is firstly **titillating** her aud sound would make them assume that she is about to say 'queynte' again, but the highlights her easy, even downright blasphemous, mingling of the secular (sexua already done on a number of occasions.

[28] See J Winny, note on line 602, Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, ed. Winny, pp. 96–
[29] Page 10.
[30] http://www.preces-latinae.org/thesaurus/Trinitas/Gloria.html

Returning to her planetary influences, the Wife informs her audience that she ha
both her face and elsewhere (presumably her genitalia); as Winny notes, 'Martes
Wife's ruddy complexion, already mentioned in her description in the *General Pr*
probably a reddish mark on her genitalia. The Wife's body signals her character t
this belief in physiognomy (that physical features revealed one's character and ic
Wife never questions her unquenchable sexual appetite, but just regards it as an
describes without shame her undiscriminating sexual appetite:

> *For God so wys be my savacioun,*
> *I ne loved nevere by no discrecioun,*
> *But evere folwede myn appetit,*
> *Al were he short, or long, or blak, or whit;*
> *I took no kep, so that he liked me,*
> *How poore he was, ne eek of what degree. (ll. 621–626)*

Having digressed, the Wife of Bath returns to the subject in hand: her marriage t
married 'at the monthes ende' (l. 627) of her fourth husband dying. At that point
land and possessions to him:

> *And to him yaf I al the lond and fee*
> *That evere was me yeven therbifoore. (ll. 630–631)*

This provides a contrast to her previous marriages, where she complained when
their wealth (ll. 308–309). At the time of her marriage to Jankin, the Wife is a rich
wealth, land and property of her previous four husbands; blinded by her love for
him and, as she notes, afterwards she 'repented... ful soore' (l. 632), because he
anything that she wanted.

Jankin's mistreatment of her was also physical – as she has already stated at line
alludes to a specific episode where Jankin 'smoot [her] ones on the list, / For tha
leef' (ll. 634–635). In her description in the *General Prologue* Chaucer describes t
(l. 448), but it is only now that the reader is told of the cause of this deafness: Jan
a page out of his book. To modern readers, any episode of physical abuse against
shocking; however, in the Middle Ages not only was domestic abuse tolerated, b
expensive items so a fourteenth-century audience might have sympathised with
mistreatment of his valuable possession. As usual, the Wife does not immediatel
page; instead she digresses, recounting aspects of her behaviour that used to an
talkative and went outside without a **chaperone**, although Jankin forbade her to
his **injunctions**, even when he quoted from textual authorities:

> *But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe*
> *Of his proverbs n'of his olde sawe,*
> *Ne I wolde nat of him corrected be. (ll. 659–661)*

At last the Wife turns to the **crux** of her *Prologue*: explaining why she tore a page
termed 'Valerie and Theofraste' (l. 671) by Jankin – appears to have been an anth
anti-feminist works, including the Bible and classical and medieval authors; the W
Ovid, and various Greek legends and Bible stories, amongst others. She describes
stories for entertainment in his free time. She complains that he knew more stor
good wives, for as she notes:

> *For trusteth wel, it is an impossible*
> *That any clerk wol speke good of wives*
> *But if it be of hooly seintes lives,*
> *Ne of noon oother woman never the mo. (ll. 688–691)*

The **antagonism** of early Christian, classical and medieval authors towards wome
relate does serve to prove her point: little positive is written about women by su

This is immediately followed by a passage which strikes at the heart of the Wife's
Referring to one of Aesop's fables, in which a lion responds to a sculpture of a m

pointing out that, had the lion produced the sculpture it would have shown the o
conquering a man - she asks 'Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?' (l. 692), imm

By God! if women hadde writen stories,
As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse
Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (ll. 693–696)

The problem with the medieval negative view of women is that it has all been au
been able to have their say. Had women had the chance to speak and write – as
have produced a rather different view of men, which is precisely what the Wife i
the same time, there is clearly an irony that however **radical** and **subversive** she
creation of a male author rather than a genuine female voice.

This inability of men to speak well of women is, according to the Wife, caused by
While scholars are the 'children of Mercurie' (l. 697) and love learning and know
planetary influence of Venus and 'loveth riot and dispence' (l. 700). Ironically, jus
all women together and made sweeping judgements about them, so the Wife be
of scholars, and of women, in one phrase. There is no room for individuality or va

Realizing she has again digressed, the Wife returns to her topic:

But now to purpos, why I tolde thee
That I was beten for a book, pardee! (ll. 711–712)

The Wife's use of the familiar singular 'thee' is significant here; she is presented
making the reader or listener feel privileged with the Wife's confidences.

Turning her attention to the specific occasion on which Jankin hit her, the Wife d
sat by the fire, he read to her of various women from the Bible and classical texts
them distress: Eve (ll. 715–720); Delilah who caused the downfall of Samson (ll. 7
produced the Minotaur through her **deviant** lust (ll. 733–736) and so on. Throug
techniques the Wife creates the sense of the relentlessness of Jankin's anti-femi
accumulation – 'eek' (l. 740), 'forthermo' (l. 783) – convey the many examples of
also illustrated through the simile used by Jankin as the Wife tells of how he kne
proverbes/ Than in this world ther growen gras or herbes' (ll. 773–774). The repe
me' (ll. 721, 724), 'tolde me' (ll. 740, 757) and 'quod he' (ll. 775, 778) all create th
narration of these stories, paralleling the episode in which the Wife recounts ho
three husbands by nagging them about their misdemeanours (ll. 235–378). Her r
she flings accusations at her first three old husbands, is mirrored here by the rep
he' – that describe how Jankin used the antifeminist tales to fling accusations at
the impression that the Wife's own nagging of her first three husbands is now re

In these final 40 lines of her *Prologue*, the Wife reaches the climax of her narrati
that led to her partial deafness. She tells of how, when she realized that Jankin w
from his book of wicked wives, she took action in two ways:

Al sodeynly thre leves have I plight
Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke
I with my fest so took him on the cheke
That in our fyr he fil backward adoun. (ll. 790–793)

The attack on the book, by plucking out three pages (not the one page she claims
accompanied by a physical assault on Jankin, its force shown by the fact he ends u
two actions the Wife symbolically overturns Jankin's authority over her, both his
in the book) and his physical superiority. However, Jankin retaliates physically, str
his fist (the action that causes her partial deafness), so that the Wife 'in the floor
796). If the battle between husband and wife is dependent on physical force, the
what Alisoun lacks in physical strength, she makes up for in cunning.[31] By **feigning**

[31] See line 401.

Wife manipulates the situation to her benefit: horrified at the thought he has kille
away, but the Wife rises up and accuses him of murder and theft, while also offer

> *'O hastow slain me, false theef?' I seyde,*
> *'And for my land thus hastow mordred me?*
> *Er I be deed, yet wol I kisse thee.' (ll. 800–802)*

Kneeling by her **prone** body, Jankin apologises for his actions, while pointing out t
she hits him again, the Wife then describes how they reached a mutual agreemer
she was given the control: 'He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond' (l. 813). The word
Wife's control over Jankin: over their house, their land, everything he says and ev
'brenne his book' (l. 816) and gains '[b]y maistrie, al the soverainetee' (l. 818). The
marriage, 'by maistrie', that is to say by proving her superiority, which she does in
intellectually and through sheer determination. This word 'maistrie' will play a ke
concept that she considers to lie at the heart of women's desires. While the Wife
the marriage, she also appears to have made some concessions, admitting that '[s
any wyf from Denmark unto Inde' (ll. 823–824), and that '[a]fter that day we hadd
Rounding off her *Prologue* with a prayer for Jankin's soul, the Wife then promises

Lines 503–828

1. How does the Wife make it clear that her fifth husband was the one she lov
2. Why does the fact that her fifth husband 'Was of his love daungerous' to her, m
3. Identify the marketplace image used between lines 515 and 523 and describ
reader's understanding of, and response to, the Wife.
4. Describe two ways in which the Wife's behaviour between lines 524 and 62
expected behaviour for Christian women in the Middle Ages.
5. The Wife takes a very pragmatic approach to sexual relationships and marri
between lines 524 and 626 to support this assertion?
6. Explain the significance of the Wife's references to Mars and Venus betwee
7. Throughout the *Prologue* the Wife uses a number of different terms to refe
three, describe the context in which each one is used and explain the signifi
8. Look again at lines 627–633. Explain how the Wife's behaviour in her marria
behaviour in her previous marriages.
9. Give three reasons why Jankin has more power than the Wife at the beginn
10. Explain what caused the Wife's partial deafness.
11. How – and why – might modern readers' response to Jankin's treatment of
response of medieval readers?
12. What aspects of the Wife's behaviour – that she describes between lines 63
what is his response?
13. Explain the nature of the book, described between lines 669 and 685, that J
14. Explain the meaning and significance of the Wife's question at line 692; 'Wh
15. Why, according to the Wife, will scholars never write good things about wo
16. Choose four examples of 'wicked wives' from Jankin's book and explain thei
17. Identify and evaluate the effects of three different rhetorical strategies the
relentlessness of Jankin's antifeminist diatribe between lines 711 and 787.
18. Explain how Jankin's onslaught on the Wife mirrors her verbal assault on he
lines 235 and 378 of her *Prologue*).
19. What two actions does the Wife take against Jankin when he persists in rea
20. Explain how the Wife symbolically overturns Jankin's authority through thes
21. Explain how the Wife manages to gain 'maistrie' (the upper hand) in her ma
22. Explain how the Wife also changes in her behaviour in her marriage.
23. Explain how the Wife's account of her battle with Jankin provides a fitting c
might consider:
    - the opening of the *Prologue*
    - the Wife's account of her marriages
    - the Wife's wrestling with authorities (textual and otherwise)
    - the Wife's self-presentation throughout the *Prologue*

Lines 829–856: The argument between the Friar

Before the Wife begins her tale, Chaucer **interpolates** an **altercation** between tw
the Summoner. The Friar begins the argument by joking about the length of the

> *'Now dame,' quod he, 'so have I joye or blis,*
> *This is a long preamble of a tale!' (ll. 830–831)*

This jovial comment is met by an angry response from the Summoner who critici

Through his presentation of the Friar and the Summoner, Chaucer, as with the P
satire, satirising here particular ecclesiastical professions.[32]

Friars, like monks, are a religious order: men who devote themselves to the Chris
poverty, chastity and obedience. However, whereas monks are linked to a partic
and are supported, friars are dependent on their own work – often working with
offerings from others; they are *mendicant orders*, from the Latin *mendicans* mea
orders were founded in the early Middle Ages, in response to a belief that even c
monks did – could prevent salvation. The two best-known orders in the Middle A
(founded by St Francis) and the Dominicans (founded by St Dominic). Friars trave
preaching and helping others. In the *General Prologue* Chaucer describes the Fria
lover of women, fine clothes, food and money, not the expected characteristics o
that is supposed to abide by the principles of obedience, chastity and poverty.

Summoners were officials who summoned people to church courts to be tried –
pardoners, the occupation of summoner was particularly open to bribery and co
clear in his description of him in the *General Prologue*, in addition to describing h
friends and companions (with clear suggestions of homosexuality). In response t
the Friar says he will '[t]elle of a somonour swich a tale or two / That alle the folk
842–843). The Summoner responds similarly, offering 'tales two or thre / Of frère
the Host to silence them and allow the Wife to tell her tale.

This interruption could be interpreted in a number of ways. Firstly it reminds the
picture, namely that we are on a pilgrimage to Canterbury in the company of twe
storytelling competition. It also prepares the reader for the two tales that will fo
tells a story which depicts a summoner in a negative light, and then the Summon
satirising friars. In this way the reader is made aware of the links between the ta
choices made by Chaucer. The argument – in effect a battle for power between t
continues the idea of power struggles that the Wife's *Prologue* is so preoccupied
for power between the Wife and the Church, the Wife and textual authorities or
husbands. The negative depictions of the Friar and the Summoner, representativ
authority that the Wife is fighting against, may also present her in a more sympa
her readers and her pilgrim audience.

Lines 829-856

1. Summarise the nature of the Friar and Summoner's interruption and argum
2. Account for the inclusion of their interruption at this point in the text.
3. Compare and contrast the Friar and Summoner's interruption with that of t
   and 193. Think about:
   - the nature of the interrupting characters: the Pardoner, the Friar and th
   - the structural significance of their interruptions
   - the content of their interruptions
   - any symbolic interpretation of the interruptions

Further reading:
Read the descriptions of the Friar and Summoner in the *General Prologue* (Friar, ll. 2
- ❖ How are they presented by Chaucer?
- ❖ Consider the effects of their portrayal in the *General Prologue* on your respo
  the Wife.

[32] See Section 5 of this resource.

At last the Wife begins her story, a tale which, 407 lines in length, is less than hal narrative it does not fall naturally into distinct sections in the way that the *Prolo* reference I have sub-divided it into five sections, as follows:

Lines 857–918: Setting the scene; the Knight's crime and punishment

Lines 919–982: The Knight's journey

Lines 983–1072: A wise woman, the correct answer and the consequences

Lines 1073–1227: Married life begins and the old wife takes control

Lines 1228–1264: A happy ending

Lines 857–918: Setting the scene; the Knight's cri

The Wife begins by setting the scene – 'In th'olde days of the King Arthour' (l. 85 tale beginning for a speaker who, in her *Prologue*, has presented herself as a wo late fourteenth-century context. The Wife compares the England of King Arthur's faierie' (l. 859) – to its present state, a country without any supernatural beings. owing to the **ubiquity** of friars, which she compares to the number of specks of d motes in the sonne-beem' (l. 868). She then lists all the places that they can be fo

> *Blessinge halles, chambers, kitchens, boures,*
> *Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,*
> *Thropes, bernes, shipnes, daieries – (ll. 869–871)*

This listing suggests a desperate seeking out of **alms**, rather than a patient accep recognisable feature of the Wife's narrative style, appearing in her *Prologue,* for recurrence of narrative techniques across *Prologue and Tale* is a key method use teller and the tale.

The Wife's anti-**ecclesiastical** satire becomes harsher as she comments on friars' chastity. She observes that, with the disappearance of fairies, women can now w common myth that male supernatural beings would kidnap young women and fo forest and bear their children – as the only threat to them nowadays is the friar w on them (l. 881). This digression on friars, which takes us away from the onward another typical feature of the Wife's narrative style; digressions recur throughou approaches its climax, namely the account of why she tore a page out of her fifth 710; lines 721–787.

The Wife now returns to her setting of King Arthur's court, and tells how one of h (l. 883) – was riding along one day when he saw a young virgin and raped her:

> *And happed that, allone as he was born,*
> *He saugh a maide walking him biforn,*
> *Of which maide anon, maugree hir heed,*
> *By verray force, he rafte hire maidenhed; (ll. 885–887)*

Here we find again one of the Wife's favourite topics: the struggle for power betw scenario, however, the power is all the man's, and he exercises it in the most desp so, it is interesting that the Wife does not comment at all on the Knight's actions. I 'lusty' – the definitions of which in the Middle Ages include 'pleasant', 'handsome' loving', 'lustful' – could suggest, even if not a favourable attitude to the Knight, at

[33] For definitions see the online *Middle English Dictionary*: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/

But **ambivalence** is not the reaction of others:

> *For which oppressioun was swich clamour*
> *And swich pursute unto the king Arthour,*
> *That dampned was this knight for to be deed (ll. 889–891)*

However, the death sentence is postponed, at the perhaps surprising request of – who beg for mercy to be shown. What is perhaps less surprising though, consid is that King Arthur grants the women's request, handing over the Knight to the C wheither she wolde him save or spille' (ll. 897–898). Here the Wife's desire to ex in her account of her marriages in the *Prologue* – is taken to a new level with a w authority and then being given power over a man's life. The Queen addresses th Arthurian tales of chivalric romance, sets him a **quest:**

> *I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me*
> *What thing is it that women moost desiren. (ll. 904–905)*

While setting a knight a quest is a common occurrence, what is not common is th Placing women's desire at the centre of the tale is a radical move by Chaucer; it i punishment for a man who, through the rape, placed his own desires at the fore consider the woman's feelings. The question – what do women most desire? – is heart, and it is thus possible to read her desires as being played out in the tale sh month and a day' (l. 909) to find the answer to the question and, overcome by sc sets out on the quest.

Lines 857–918

1. Describe the thrust of what the Wife says about friars in the opening lines o significance.
2. What aspects of the opening of the *Tale* seem surprising coming from the m
3. Where do the Wife's concerns and preoccupations feature in the opening 6
4. What is the significance of the quest the Knight is sent on by the Queen?
5. What features of the Wife's narrative style that have appeared in the *Prolog* opening 60 lines of her *Tale*?

Lines 919–982: The Knight's jour

In this next section of her *Tale*, the Wife recounts the journey the Knight goes on but rather a journey mapping out women's desires. However, while the Knight h he fails to find any agreement about what women most desire, demonstrated th differing opinions: 'Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse, / Somme seyde (ll. 925–926); here she echoes the listing in the *Prologue* where she quotes her h desirable in women (ll. 257–261).

The Wife's involvement in the subject of her tale becomes apparent again from l suggestion that women most like being flattered and pleased, she firstly shifts fr 'oure hertes ben moost esed / Whan that we been yflatered and yplesed' (ll. 92 opinion: 'He gooth ful ny the soothe, I wol nat lie' (l. 931). The use of the first pe lines with the Wife elaborating on the comments that women most desire freed reprimanded for misdeeds and to be considered virtuous. However, while she ag made, she rejects out of hand the idea that women like to be considered **discree** stele' (l. 949). Presumably aware of her own indiscretions, she almost boasts 'we (l. 950).[34] To illustrate this she narrates the story of King Midas from Ovid, not th was granted his wish that everything he touched turn to gold – with disastrous c he had donkey ears bestowed upon him by Apollo, god of music, as a punishmen better musician. Horrified at his appearance, Midas attempted to keep his new e (some versions say a hat, some a turban), but his barber knew of his secret and, out into the fields, dug a hole into which he whispered the secret, and then cove clump of reeds grew up in the same spot; as the wind blew through them they w a donkey's ears'. The Wife, however, makes an important change to her version between lines 952 and 982 – substituting Midas's wife for the barber, in order to no conseil hide' (l. 980).

Lines 919–982

1. List five different answers that are given to the Knight in his quest to find wh
2. Identify points at which the Wife begins to intrude into the *Tale*.
3. Explain the significance of the reference to King Midas at this point in the *Ta* Wife makes to the story.

[34] See lines 533–542 in the *Prologue* where the Wife boasts of revealing all her husbands' secrets t

Lines 983–1072: A wise woman, the correc the consequences

A year has passed, and the Knight has failed to find any two people who agree on he begins his sorrowful journey back to King Arthur's court. As he makes his way ladies dancing in a clearing. They all disappear as he draws close, with the except seated and is described as 'A fouler wight ther may no man devise' (l. 999). As th up and asks him what he is seeking. When she hears the question she promises t word that the next thing she asks of him he will grant her. The knight agrees and life is safe, whispers the answer in his ear.

A year and a day after the Queen's **edict**, the knight, accompanied by the old lad packed out with women, including 'many a widwe, for that they been wise' (l. 10 Wife herself – and presided over by the Queen. The knight tells the court the ans

> *Wommen desiren to have sovereinetee*
> *As wel over hir housbond as hir love,*
> *And for to been in maistrie him above. (ll. 1038–1040)*

All the women agree with the Knight's statement that all women desire to have with their husbands, and the Knight is thus granted his life. His assertion is precis her fifth husband Jankin, at the climax of her *Prologue*, where she uses the same **maistrie** to describe her success: '... I hadde geten unto me, / By maistrie, al the 'Sovereinetee' means having supreme power or authority, which is clearly what the definition of 'maistrie' is, however, more complex. According to the *Middle E* of 'maistrie' include 'control,' 'authority', 'upperhand', 'physical force', 'great skil would seem that the way the Knight uses the word – as the answer to his quest[women want to have power over their husbands; but when the Wife uses it in th talking about either the skill – or the cunning – she deployed in order to gain the

At this point in the tale the old woman gets up and appeals to the Queen to liste the knight this answer, she explains that she told it to him on condition that he g agreed (without knowing what her request was). In front of the court she now u

> *'Bifore the court thanne preye I thee, sir knight,'*
> *Quod she, 'that thou me take unto thy wyf;' (ll. 1054–1055)*

The knight's response is one of despair and repulsion: he begs her to make anot wealth instead. The old woman refuses, and the Knight is obliged to keep his wo

> *But al for noght; the ende is this, that he*
> *Constreined was, he nedes moste hire wedde;*
> *And taketh his olde wyf, and gooth to bedde. (ll. 1070–1072)*

In being denied his desires, and forced to meet those of the old lady instead, the when he allowed his own desires to override those of the young woman.

Lines 983-1072

1) What is the correct answer to the Queen's question, 'What thing is it that w Why is the answer of such significance to the Wife?
2) How is women's power over men demonstrated in the episode following th correct answer to the court?

[35] For definitions see the online *Middle English Dictionary*: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/

Lines 1073–1227: Married life begins and the ol

The Wife explains why she does not describe the wedding celebrations: there we 'hevinesse and muche sorwe' (l. 1079), with the Knight marrying the old lady in s himself out of shame.

After the wedding ceremony the couple are 'abedde ybroght' (l. 1084), a mediev guests accompanied the newly-married couple to their bedroom. However, inste his marriage the Knight lies in bed, tossing and turning, while his wife looks on, s disdainful behaviour, when she has saved his life and done him no wrong, the old abuse from the Knight, as he criticises her ugliness, her low social status and her

> *Thou art so loothly, and so oold also,*
> *And therto comen of so lough a kinde,*
> *That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and winde.*
> *So wolde God myn herte wolde breste! (ll. 1100–1103)*

The Loathly Lady[36] responds to her husband's complaints in a long speech – 221 This digression is typical of the Wife's narrative style, as is the preaching tone ad references which do not really correspond to the folk-tale character of the Loath lady argues against the Knight's attack on her ugliness, low social status and age, poverty.

The bulk of her speech is devoted to attacking the Knight's assumption that her l human. The keyword here is 'gentillesse', a word which has no precise equivalen definitions in the *Middle English Dictionary* include 'nobility of birth or rank' but manners; generosity, kindness, gentleness'.[37] 'Gentillesse' was a topic of great in about it in his *Romaunt of the Rose* and in a short poem, 'Balade of Gentillesse'.[3] fourteenth-century poet Dante Alighieri who wrote the long religious poem, *The* argues that true nobility has nothing to do with birth or ancestry: 'vileyns sinful c Rather, nobility is defined by noble and virtuous acts, with Christ being the ultim

Having dismissed as baseless the Knight's accusation that she is of low birth, the complaints about her poverty. She argues that poverty, far from being a curse, m God chose to live on earth in human form in poverty; poverty is liberating, since and poverty encourages self-knowledge and wisdom. She next argues for the vir authorities state that old age should be respected – and points out that her ugli security since he will not have to fear being made a **cuckold**. However, in her clo Loathly Lady offers him a choice: he can have her old and ugly, but true and faith have her young and beautiful, but with the risk that this may bring admirers to h will not be guaranteed.

Lines 1073–1227

1. Why does the Wife not go into detail about the marriage celebrations betw Knight?
2. What accusations does the Knight level against his new wife when she ques consummate their marriage?
3. What, according to the Loathly Lady, is true 'gentillesse'?
4. Distil the content of the Loathly Lady's speech to the Knight into five key po
5. What features of the Wife's narrative style can be identified in the Loathly L
6. What choice does the Loathly Lady offer her husband at the end of her spee

[36] For more detailed discussion of the figure of the loathly lady in medieval literature see Section 5
[37] For definitions see the online *Middle English Dictionary*, http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/
[38] The 'Balade of Gentillesse' is included in Appendix 1 of Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and*

Torn between these two options, the Knight hands the decision over to his wife. by her speech on 'gentillesse' is shown by the way he addresses her: 'My lady, an (l. 1230). In the Middle Ages 'lady' was a term of respect; the Knight addressed th 1037. His newfound respect for his wife is also reflected in his use of the formal 'y me in youre wise governance' (l. 1231). This contrasts with his use of the informa show contempt, when he insulted her before her speech: 'Thou art so loothly, an Secondly the Knight calls his wife, '[his] love', his lover, and finally he acknowled mode of address thus symbolises his change of heart, as does the fact that he as submits to her wisdom. He realizes the truth of the answer he gave the Queen, n have sovereinetee / As wel over his housbond as hir love, / And for to been in ma

The Loathly Lady then asks the Knight the key question to make sure she has obt wommen moost desiren' (l. 905):

> *'Thanne have I gete of yow maistrie,' quod she,*
> *'Sin I may chese and governe as me lest?' (ll. 1236–1237)*

Once the Knight assures her that she has gained the upper hand over him, in a m the Wife's *Prologue*, the Loathly Lady kisses her young husband and promises hi exactly what he wants: she will be 'bothe fair and good' (l. 1241). This signals he a young and beautiful woman able to give the knight all the pleasure he demand area of their lives.

The conclusion to her *Tale* is thus a fitting one for the Wife, and provides a paral *Prologue*; in both cases older women succeed in gaining the upper hand over yo a marriage of mutual love and service. What the *Tale* offers in addition is an ele ageing Wife of Bath, in the figure of the Loathly Lady who, through an incredible permit, becomes the young and beautiful lady that the Wife can never again be.

In her final lines the Wife moves from her *Tale* – granting the knight and his lady herself and her fellow women, offering up a prayer with very worldly demands:

> *...and Jhesu Christ us sende*
> *Housbondes meeke, yonge, and fressh abedde,*
> *And grace t'overbide hem that we wedde;*
> *And eek I praye Jhesu shorte hir lives*
> *That wol nat be governed by hir wives;*
> *And olde and angry nigardes of dispence,*
> *God sende hem soone verray pestilence! (ll. 1258–1264)*

In these seven lines the Wife, through the use of the **imperative**, issues three co her, and other women, young and sexually lively husbands that they can domina die prematurely; and that miserly ones be struck down with the plague. It is with sign off this compelling work of literature.

Lines 1228–1264

1. What is the significance of the way the Knight addresses the old lady at line
2. How does the Knight respond to the choice that his wife offers him at lines 1 significance of his response?
3. How does the ending of the *Tale*:
    - provide a parallel with the ending of the Wife's *Prologue*?
    - contain an element of wish-fulfilment for the Wife?
4. What three requests does the Wife make in the prayer that she utters follo

Resource 3: Making Connections between *The Wife of Bath's Tale*

Complete the table identifying similarities between the voice in the *Prologue* and the *Tale*.

	The Wife of Bath's Prologue
Sexual relationships and marriage	
Women's desires	
Battle for power between men and women	
Listing	
Reference to textual authorities	
Use of household/everyday imagery	
Digressions	
Juxtaposition of the spiritual and the worldly	

Resource 4: The Wife of Bath's

In *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer develops voices for a range of characters from all walks of life. The Wife of Bath is one of his most successful creations, evidence of his great imagination and empathy; he creates the voice of a middle-aged, outspoken, sexually-obsessed woman, with some rather vulgar and distasteful opinions, yet still encourages feelings of both sympathy and admiration for her from his readers.

Answering these questions will provide you with a good overview of Chaucer's narrative and characterisation techniques, and with examples to illustrate your points:

1. Choose a section of the *Prologue* of about 25–30 lines in length. Count up the number of times the first person pronoun appears (whether in the form of I, me, my or mine). What does this suggest about the Wife?

2. From the moment she opens her mouth, the Wife of Bath presents herself as mounting a challenge against other prominent voices in medieval society: she challenges traditional beliefs, she challenges men, she challenges the Church, she challenges textual authorities. For each of these find examples from the *Prologue* and explain (a) how the Wife is challenging this other prominent voice (i.e. what the grounds of her challenge are); (b) how the Wife's language shows her to be mounting a challenge and; (c) what impression of her the reader forms as a consequence.

3. As well as challenging voices of authority, the Wife also draws on them to u frequently married woman at a time when widows were encouraged to rem where the Wife supports her position through reference to authoritative so

4. The Wife is presented as an eminently knowledgeable figure: knowledgeabl the ways and opinions of men; knowledgeable of various written sources fr beyond. For each of these three categories find examples in the *Prologue*, e Wife's knowledge and how she uses them to forward her own argument.

5. The Wife is also presented as aware of her audience (perhaps both the audi Canterbury, but also her contemporary and future readers). Find examples appealing to her audience, referring to them or confiding in them and comm

6. Chaucer also presents the Wife as able to put forward a compelling and logi this and trace the way in which she argues her case.

7. On other occasions Chaucer presents the Wife as illogical and contradictory appears to contradict herself or where her line of argument is confused and

8. At times the Wife is presented as treading a thin line between asserting her the other side of the argument (particularly where the Church is concerned) particularly the *Prologue*, where she is shown as desirous to show respect t even if she does not agree with it.

9. The Wife of Bath is, at times, presented as undermining women and confor female behaviour that prevailed at the time. Find examples of this.

Resource 5: Describing the Wife

Listed below are a number of distinctive features of the Wife of Ba
examples from the text to illustrate this feature. At the end there is
further characteristics you have noted in your reading of the text:

She is wealthy

“

She has been married frequently

“

She has substantial experience of marriage and of sexual relationships

“

She is argumentative

“

She is knowledgeable of textual authorities (both Biblical and non-Biblical)

“

She is not afraid to express her opinion, even when it flies in the face of acc

“

She fulfils the negative stereotypes of women expressed by medieval patria

“

She is a complex and contradictory figure

“

She is a woman who is aware that her best days are behind her

“

She desires to have the upper hand in her dealings with men

“

Any further observations

“

Resource 6: Chaucer's Presentation of

This resource is divided into two sections:
A) A series of quotations to analyse
B) Discussion of Chaucer's narrative techniques to create character

A) Analysis of Quotations
Listed below are a number of quotations from the *Wife of Bath's Prologu* different ways in which Chaucer presents the complex identity of the Wi what the quotation shows about the Wife's character:

1. *Experience, though noon auctoritee / Were in this world, is right ynogh for m mariage.* (ll. 1–3)

   .....

   .....

2. *lordinges, sith I twelve yeer was of age, / ... / Housbondes at chirche dore I h*

   .....

   .....

3. *What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn; / But that I axe, why that the fift to the Samaritan? / How many mighte she have in mariage?* (ll. 20–23)

   .....

   .....

4. *As helpe me God, I laughe whan I thinke / How pitously a-night I made hem*

   .....

   .....

5. *A wys wyf shal, if that she kan hir good, / Bere him on honde that the cow is*

   .....

   .....

6. *For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve, / Ye shul have queynte right ynogh a that wolde werne / A man to light a candle at his lanterne; He shal have nev thou ynogh, thee thar nat pleyne thee.* (ll. 331–336)

   .....

   .....

7. *Winne whoso may, for al is for to selle; / With empty hand men may none h al his lust endure, / And make me a feyned appetit;* (ll. 414–417)

   .....

   .....

8. *And al was fals; I dremed of it right naught, / But as I folwed ay my dames lo thinges moore.* (ll. 582–584)

.....

.....

9. *Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me weel;* (l. 603)

.....

.....

10. *For certes, I am al Venerien / In feeling, and myn herte is Marcien.* (ll. 609–6

.....

.....

11. *Stibourn I was as is a leonesse, / And of my tonge a verray jangleresse, / And biforn, / From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;* (ll. 637–640)

.....

.....

12. *And whan I saugh he wolde never fine / To redden on this cursed book al nig plight / Out of his book, right as he radde, and eke / I with my fest so took hi he fil bakward adoun.* (ll. 788–793)

.....

.....

13. *He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond, / To han the governance of hous and lo hond also; / And made him brenne his book anon right tho.* (ll. 813–816)

.....

.....

14. *And whan that I hadde geten unto me, / By maistrie, al the soverainetee, / .. never debaat.* (ll. 817–822)

.....

.....

B) Chaucer's Narrative Techniques to create character

Listed below are a number of narrative techniques used by Chaucer to cr
the Wife of Bath. Explain how Chaucer's use of each technique helps to c
Wife of Bath's identity; refer closely to the text to support your commen

1. Establishing an opposition/conflict between individual personal experience
patriarchal authority

.....

.....

.....

2. The use of Biblical/classical references – sometimes taken out of context – to

.....

.....

.....

3. Appeals to the audience/readers

.....

.....

.....

4. Anecdotes recounting personal experience

.....

.....

.....

5. Verbatim (word for word) citation of what other people have said to the Wi

.....

.....

.....

6. Digressions

.....

.....

.....

7. Blunt sexual language

.....

.....

.....

8. References to tangible objects that would be familiar to most, if not all, peopl

.....

.....

.....

9. The use of astrological references to explain aspects of personality and beha

.....

.....

.....

10. Moments where the speaker (possibly unwittingly) reveals a side of herself t
she seems to be trying to project, thereby creating irony

.....

.....

.....

11. Bold emphatic statements in which the speaker expresses her opinion

.....

.....

.....

12. Moments when the Wife reports verbatim conversations she had with her h

.....

.....

.....

13. The use of listing

.....

.....

.....

In this section some of the key themes and recurring images in *The Wife of Bath'* discussed. Themes and imagery are also discussed in Section 3, the section-by-se here the material is gathered together into coherent passages to enable student poem as a whole.

Themes

The principal themes in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* discussed here are women's lives, marriage and anti-feminism.

Textual Authority

With the opening lines of her *Prologue* the Wife of Bath sets up an opposition be personal experience, which lies at the heart of the whole poem:

> *Experience, though noon auctorite*
> *Were in this world, is right ynogh for me*
> *To speke of wo that is in mariage; (ll. 1–3)*

In a culture that prized the written word, whether it was the Bible, early Christia authors, the Wife's assertion that her own personal experience of marriage gives authority is controversial. The fact that she is a woman – unlike the male author increases the shock value of what she is saying.

This tension between the masculine written word and the spoken female voice i 162 lines of the *Prologue*, where the Wife sets out to use rational argument and many of the Church's teachings on marriage, particularly on the remarriage of w She will also, as she herself admits, deploy her feminine guile in her arguments w who often refer to the Bible or popular proverbs and maxims in their attempt to wayward spouse:

> *Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive*
> *To wommen kyndely, whil that they may lyve.*
> *And thus of o thing I avaunte me:*
> *Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,*
> *By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,*
> *As by continueel murmur or grucchyng. (ll. 401–06)*

The Wife's battle with male textual authorities reaches a climax in her fifth marr is half her age and who, in addition, is university educated. Jankin owns a 'booke medieval compilation of stories of badly behaved women from the Bible and pag takes delight in reading to the Wife in the evenings. Not surprisingly, the Wife ob diatribe, pointing out the unfairness of the situation women find themselves in w over the written word:

> *For trusteth wel, it is an impossible*
> *That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,*
> *But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,*
> *Ne of noon oother womman never the mo*
> *Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?*
> *By God, if wommen hadde writen stories,*
> *As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,*
> *They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse*
> *Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.* (**ll.** 688–696)

Realising she stands no chance against Jankin in a battle of words, the Wife reso 'thre leves' (l. 790) out of the book and punching Jankin in the face. And when Ja Wife has feigned death following his hitting her – she makes him 'brenne his boo textual authority that caused her so much grief.

But while this ending to the *Prologue* – which results in a happy and equal marria – might suggest that Chaucer is prioritising liberating personal experience over c not that simple. Particularly in the *Prologue's* opening discussion about remarria authority to challenge the Church's teachings, repeatedly referring to the Bible t chosen lifestyle:

> *Wher can ye seye, in any manere age*
> *That hye God defended mariage*
> *By expres word? I pray yow, telleth me.*
> *Or where comanded he virginitee?*
> *I woot as wel as ye, it is no drede*
> *Th' apostel, whan he speketh of maydenhede,*
> *He seyde that precept therof hadde he noon.* (ll. 59–65)

In fact she uses the Biblical teachings so well that one of her fellow pilgrims, the saying, 'Ye been a noble prechour in this cas' (l. 165). Like the Loathly Lady in her Seneca and Boethius in her speech on 'gentillesse' that converts the Knight, so th she can play the Church and the male world at their own game by drawing on th shaping them to her own ends.

Social Status

From the moment she is introduced in the *General Prologue* it is clear that the W the importance of social status. Like Chaucer's family – see Section 1 above – she the ranks of society, in her case through both her work (she is a skilled cloth-mak accumulated from her marriages, particularly the first three. The description of h identifies her as a woman who uses clothing to signal her wealth and high social s of Section 3. On Sundays she wears elaborate headdresses, red stockings (red dy brand-new leather shoes. Her insistence on being the first in the congregation to way in which the Wife signals her high social rank in her community.

The Wife's desire to be of high social status manifests itself particularly in her de together her first three husbands as 'goode men, and riche, and olde' (l. 197), an three men of such a description, whom it is clear she did not love or find any del must have been a motivating factor. She admits that since through marriage she wealth, she did not make any effort to get them to love her:

> *They had me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor;*
> *Me neded nat do lenger diligence*
> *To wynne hir love, or doon hem reverence. (ll. 204–06)*

The Wife's repeated references to making money and to financial transactions th the fact that the Wife's wealth is acquired, and her social status earned, as they s anxious about her wealth and aware of how easily it could disappear.[39] Perhaps h husband, Jankin, to whom she 'yaf... al the lond and fee' (l. 630) in the first flush o lesson.

The Wife's battle with her husbands throughout the *Prologue* and her desire to g could be interpreted as a metaphor for the social mobility of the period, the Wife Chaucer's sympathy with those who seek to improve their position in society. Th message of *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, where the knight is severely punished for be status grants him the right to behave as he likes. Through the long corrective spe wife, the knight is educated into an understanding that true nobility has nothing since 'vileyns sinful dedes make a cherl' (l. 1158). It is your actions that define yo truly revolutionary argument – socially speaking – that, to crown it all, Chaucer p When Chaucer uses a poor, ugly, old woman to transform the behaviour of a kni cannot be questioned.

[39] References include ll. 447–448, 477–478, ll. 521–523

Women's Lives

Through his creation of the Wife of Bath, Chaucer gives his audience an insight in
of ordinary middle-class women in the Middle Ages. The Wife is one of only thre
Canterbury, along with a prioress and a nun, and with these latter two being me
Wife is the only character who can speak about life in the world outside the con
women in the Middle Ages in the next section provides some background social
Chaucer's text can also be read as a historical document detailing some of the re
fourteenth-century England.

The fact that the Wife of Bath is known first and foremost as a wife – we do not
('dame Alys') – and in fact proudly proclaims her many marriages to the world in
'Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fyve' – highlights how women in the Mid
by their marital status. This fact is reflected in the *Tale* when the Knight returns t
of his quest to answer the question, 'What thyng is it that wommen moost desire
of women: 'Ful many a noble wyf, and many a mayde, / And many a wydwe' (ll. 1
classified as either wives, virgins or widows. And throughout both her *Prologue* a
as preoccupied either with how women find husbands, or how women are treate
negotiate a marriage that best suits their needs – see the discussion of marriage

However, the reader is offered a fleeting glance of other aspects of women's live
of Bath in the *General Prologue*, we discover that the Wife is a highly skilled cloth
surpasses that of the cloth-makers of Ypres and Ghent (two centres of cloth-mak

> *Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt*
> *She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt. (ll. 447–448)*

This detail is important, as not only does it present the Wife as possessing a tale
suggests she earns a living from her craft. While the Wife may have gained wealt
see above – she is also, as were many women in the Middle Ages, economically s
the Christian mystic and author of probably the first autobiography in English, m

The *Prologue* also presents the Wife as well informed: we do not know whether
whether she can read, but she certainly knows her Bible and her classical myths,
which she quotes them in defence of her chosen way of life. While clearly she is
author, and thus her learning is simply that of Chaucer's, she may well still reflec
Middle Ages, whether formally educated or not, would have absorbed Biblical te
that were disseminated orally in church or in their households.

Another detail we can glean about women's lives is the solidarity they enjoyed in
women – something that most women nowadays still value. When the Wife beg
husband, Jankin, she explains that she met him as he boarded with her best frien
reveals that she would tell her best friend – who also shares her name, Alisoun –
husband no blushes:

> *She knewe myn herte, and eek my privetee,*
> *Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!*
> *To hire biwreyed I my conseil al*
> *For hadde myn housbonde pissed on a wal,*
> *Or doon a thyng that sholde han cost his lyf,*
> *To hire, and to another worthy wyf,*
> *And to my nece, which that I loved weel,*
> *I wolde han toold his conseil every deel.*
> *And so I dide ful often, God it woot,*
> *That made his face often reed and hoot*
> *For verray shame… (ll. 531–541)*

Her best friend is also witness to the beginnings of her relationship with Jankin, w
alive – but away in London, presumably on business – as the Wife, Alisoun and Ja
providing an opportunity for the Wife to flirt with her friend's lodger.

This section of the *Prologue* also fleetingly mentions some of the social opportun just women – in the Middle Ages. During her fourth husband's absence from hor extended period of time – the Wife talks of how she took advantage of this oppo and eek for to be seye / Of lusty folk' (ll. 551–553). She thus 'made [her] visitacio processiouns, / To prechyng eek, and to thise pilgrimages, / To pleyes of miracles 558). While these are all religious events or occasions, the focus for the Wife see said that in springtime (the occasion of her husband's absence) she likes to walk sondry talys' (l. 547), and we can imagine that seeing and being seen, and hearin accomplished at church services or theatrical performances. And if the reader is motivations, the fact that she tells us she would wear her 'gaye scarlet gytes' (l. 5 these events, should clear matters up once and for all.

The Wife's enthusiasm for pilgrimages is not a passing fancy. Of course, the who is her participation on a pilgrimage to Canterbury, which provides the framing na but she, unlike the other pilgrims, is presented as a keen participant on these rel description in the *General Prologue*, the narrator notes the number of places she

> *And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem*
> *She hadde passed many a straunge strem;*
> *At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,*
> *In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne. (ll. 463–66)*

Then in her *Prologue* the Wife refers to one of her pilgrimages to Jerusalem, sayi 'deyde whan [she] cam fro Jerusalem' (l. 495). The historical reality of pilgrimage women's participation in them, is covered in more detail in Section 1 above. The events tells the reader both about an important aspect of community life in late ways in which the Wife sought freedom outside the confines of domestic marita

Marriage

The historical context of marriage is discussed in detail below – section 5 – and n preoccupation of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. When the Wife tells her marriage took place when she was 'twelve yeer… of age', we can assume that th parents. Until fairly recently, marriage was primarily a social and economic union the Wife's first three husbands all being 'goode men, and riche, and olde' (l. 197) much – if any – role to play. Instead, the marriages are presented as a battle bet Wife doing everything in her power to gain access to her husbands' wealth, exer gain the right to lead her life in the way she chooses.

Her goal achieved, her husbands' deaths grant her the wealth and the freedom t choices, as is clear from marriages four and five. Now the Wife appears to be cho union, at least on the Wife's part, is motivated by lust, if not love, but in both cas their problems, with the Wife referring to both husbands as 'badde' (l. 196). Hus 'revelour' (l. 453) and 'hadde a paramour' (l. 454), whereas husband number five her to the home and reads misogynistic literature to her. In both cases, the Wife husbands – has a battle on her hands. She repays her philandering fourth husban she is keen to stress that she was not actually unfaithful to him:

> *I made hym of the same wode a croce;*
> *Nat of my body, in no foul manere,*
> *But certeinly, I made folk swich cheere*
> *That in his owene grece I made hym frye*
> *For anger, and for verray jalousye. (ll. 484–488)*

Her misogynistic fifth husband is defeated by symbolic violence – her tearing thr wikked wives' – and by her feigning death when he hits her, allowing her to com which gives her the 'soveraynetee' (l. 818) in their marriage, enabling her to cho 'trewe' (l. 825) wife to him. This final solution is then echoed in the ending of the knight shows he has learned his lesson by giving his new wife the freedom to cho ugly, but faithful to him, or become young and beautiful, with no guarantees of f up his power with a wife who is 'bothe fair and good' (l. 1241), every man's ideal *Prologue* and the *Tale*, the woman may have the choice, but the husband still ge

Anti-feminism

Anti-feminism is a key theme in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. The word 'a to feminism, a concept that was unknown in the Middle Ages. In the medieval co used to describe the open hostility and hatred of women that prevailed at the tim expressed in many classical, Biblical and literary texts.

The Church's anti-feminism is clear in the opening section of *The Wife of Bath's P* Biblical injunctions against remarriage, the medieval Church strongly discouraged their husbands had died – there was not the same attitude towards widowers. Fo Wife spends the first 162 lines of her *Prologue* vigorously defending her lifestyle a

But it is not only the Church's position on remarriage that makes it anti-feminist. Church – the Pardoner, the Friar and the Summoner – who are on the pilgrimage interrupt her when she is speaking and comment – not always favourably – on wh interruptions can be interpreted in a number of ways – see the detailed discussio – they do suggest a Church that seeks to silence women's voices, particularly wh unsettling or controversial.

Textual anti-feminism makes a prominent appearance in Jankin's 'book of wikked to the Wife night after night. The book is an anthology of stories about women fr history who have behaved badly in their dealings with men. From Eve who 'brogh wrecchednesse' (l. 716), to Socrates' wife, Xantippa, who emptied a chamber pot Pasiphae, who mothered the Minotaur following a sexual encounter with a bull, t their most depraved and immoral. Chaucer's account of these women, in a list th poetry, conveys the relentlessness of Jankin's tirade and the unending number o to put women in their place.

A similar effect is created earlier in the *Prologue* in the Wife's report, between lin three husbands supposedly said to her when they were drunk – though she of co was fals' (l. 382) and just part of her strategy to control them. What the Wife rep feminist commentary on the ills of women, not citing any specific author but rath misogynistic opinion and proverbial sayings:

> *Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,*
> *Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde; (ll. 376–77)*

The Wife clearly has her work cut out for her in this anti-feminist society, and wh admirably challenging these opinions, the way in which she does so is rather que the Wife as the embodiment of precisely those characteristics that the anti-femi women. She is vain, bad tempered, sexually voracious, materialistic, disobedient a nag, and most shockingly, she seems to have no shame about being like this. Sh how she deceived her first three husbands, defends her adulterous affairs and bo husbands: 'For, God it woot, I chidde hem spitously' (l. 223).

In this way, Chaucer presents the reader with a dilemma. For while, particularly a a post-feminist age, we may sympathise with the way women were perceived an difficult to feel much sympathy for a woman who behaves so disgracefully and w redeeming features. The Wife's presentation also raises questions about Chauce text. Is he a proto-feminist who, through his literary creation, is giving a voice to needs and desires were not heard? Or is he a typical medieval misogynist, who th women deserve the criticism and blame they receive?

Probably the truth lies somewhere between the two. Through the character of th situation of women in a deeply misogynistic society: bitterly denounced by those presented only with unflattering and male-authored depictions of themselves in women to see themselves in any other way were limited or even non-existent. Th fight back against the anti-feminist depictions of themselves was by using those w so the Wife can only challenge her sexist and restrictive husbands by using the o from what she has been told by these men, such as cunning, manipulation and n so severely limited, their options for survival are curtailed too.

Imagery

Chaucer uses a range of images in his poem to help express the Wife's concerns a
are discussed in the detailed analysis of the poem in the previous section of this
particularly prominent fields of imagery which recur throughout the poem and w
consideration: bread imagery; marketplace imagery.

Bread Imagery

The Wife makes a number of references to bread – and related products like whe
Prologue, using them as metaphors for talking about virginity, sex and marriage.
could be seen to reflect the largely agricultural society of the Middle Ages, refere
Bible, which the Wife repeatedly cites in her *Prologue*. With bread being such a s
and marriage might also reflect the Wife's belief that sex and marriage are funda

The Wife first uses this imagery at lines 113–114, where, having acknowledged t
she admits her own strengths lie elsewhere:

> *I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age*
> *In the actes and in fruyt of marriage.*

Just as 'flour' is the best part of the wheat, with the indigestible and unattractive
suggests that she is now at her prime as a mature woman and her energy can be

Thirty lines later the Wife picks up this imagery again, once again in relation to he

> *I nyl envye no virginitee.*
> *Let hem be breed of pured whete-seed,*
> *And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;*
> *And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan*
> *Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man.* (ll. 142–146)

The Wife uses the metaphor of white bread ('breed of pured whete-seed') to des
purity and high value (white bread would have been an expensive luxury in the fo
are the everyday barley bread. But as she points out, in Mark's gospel Jesus 'refr
breed'. Through this **analogy**, the Wife emphasises the importance of wives in a
world. At the same time, her use of the verb 'refresshed' – in this instance mean
her earlier use of the word in relation to King Solomon's many wives and concub
desire to be 'refresshed half so ofte as he!' (l. 38), 'refresshed' here meaning 'sex
the Wife, there is a keen desire to inject sexual meaning into the most **innocuou**

The final significant use of this type of imagery comes more than three hundred
Wife describes her fourth marriage, her tone becomes increasingly wistful as she
reckless behaviour with the woman she is today, deprived of beauty and vitality

> *The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;*
> *The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;* (ll. 477–478)

In contrast to the imagery used at line 113, the Wife now considers herself as pa
and likens herself instead to the unappealing 'bran'.

Marketplace Imagery

At a number of points in her *Prologue* the Wife uses the language of the marketp
describe marriage and sexual relationships. At no point in the poem does the Wi
as a union based on mutual love and respect: instead, marriage, and sex, are red
transactions, with the Wife regarding herself as an asset who puts herself out to
of such imagery, while revealing the Wife's own beliefs and values, also reflects t
social and economic union at this time – see the discussions of marriage in Sectio
market economy of late fourteenth-century England.

The first use of this type of imagery comes with the Wife's account of married lif
She confesses that she made little attempt to please them or win their love once
land and wealth, since, 'What sholde I taken keep hem for to please, / But it wer
(ll. 213–14). Altruism and selflessness do not play a part in the Wife's marriages;
profit by it.

She makes this same point towards the end of her narrative of her life with her f
describes how she would only endure her old husbands' sexual desires if she cou

> *Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;*
> *With empty hand men may none haukes lure.*
> *For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure,*
> *And make me a feyned appetit;* (ll. 414–417)

Men, the Wife advises, should make a profit where they can, since everything ha
falconer to attract his hawk with an empty hand. She uses this image to illustrate
husbands to treat her: they needed to invest in her if they wanted a return (i.e. s
variant on the theory of the marriage debt,[40] but deployed in crudely economic t
luring his hawk refers to a popular form of entertainment at this time, and is thus
recognisable to the text's original readers.

A few lines further on the Wife appears to move from a metaphorical use of mar
suggesting that had her old husbands not been jealous and possessive, she could
beauty:

> *For if I wolde selle my bele chose*
> *I koude walke as fressh as is a rose:*
> *But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth.*
> *Ye be to blame, by God! I sey yow sooth.* (ll. 447–450)

The other two principal uses of marketplace imagery come in relation to the Wif
already noted in the discussion of bread imagery above, as the Wife remembers
compares her younger attractive self with her current position as an ageing wom
bran in the marriage market economy (lines 477–478).

And finally, the Wife in her description of her fifth husband, Jankin, admits that c
the most 'for that he / Was of his love daungerous to me' (ll. 513–514): he was d
his love from her. Using another marketplace image, she notes women's peculia

> *Waite what thing we may nat lightly have,*
> *Therafter wol we crie al day and crave.*
> *Forbede us thing, and that desiren we;*
> *Preesse on us faste, and thanne wol we fle.*
> *With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;*
> *Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,*
> *And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys: (ll. 517–523)*

Just as cheap goods are considered not worth buying, so a man who makes hims
little value to women, an idea that will be just as familiar to twenty-first-century

[40] See Page 15 of this resource.

Resource 7: Imagery in *The Wife of Bath*

The Wife of Bath draws on a number of recurring images in her *Prologue* below, annotating the worksheet with examples from the text and your i suggests about either the Wife or the issues and concerns of late 14th cen

Agricultural and harvesting imagery

“

Household imagery

“

Animal imagery

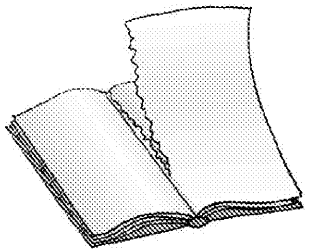
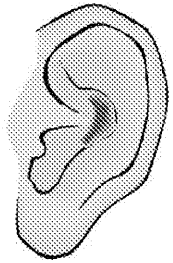
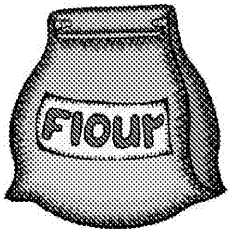
“

Imagery of trade and the marketplace

“

Resource 8: Imagery in *The Wife of B*

The following are referred to on at least one occasion in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*. Locate th and with your ideas about what they might represent or symbolise.

A torn book 	**Red dress** 
Deafness 	**Flour** 

In this section some of the key contexts for reading and studying *The Wife of Bat* discussed. They cover two principal areas: the social and historical contexts; the l

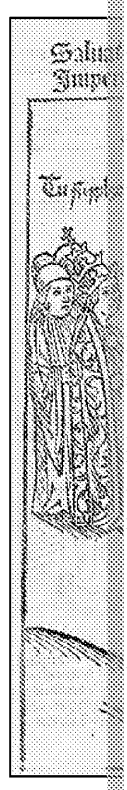
Social and Historical Contexts

Medieval Society

Chaucer's pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* come from all walks of life. While this medieval pilgrimages, it also allows him to present a snapshot of medieval societ

Medieval society was a feudal society, a political and economic system imposed Conqueror, whereby society was ordered **hierarchically**, with those with less po for offering loyalty to the more powerful. The monarch was at the top of this **hie** then the vassals (land owners) and knights; ending with those who worked on th (rent-paying tenant farmers with a certain amount of independence) and villeins land and could not move away without the landowner's consent).

Within feudalism, medieval society was also organised according to the three estates: the Church (those who pray), the Nobility (those who fight) and the Labourers (those who work). The *General Prologue* is sometimes regarded as a form of literature called 'Estates Satire', with pilgrims representing all three estates being satirised by Chaucer. Within the Nobility are included the Knight and his son, the Squire. The Church has very full representation, with its characters being among those that Chaucer satirises the most: the Prioress, the Monk, the Friar, the Pardoner, the Summoner, the Nun's Priest, the Second Nun and the Parson (the only religious figure on the pilgrimage presented in a wholly positive light). Many of the other pilgrims are Labourers, including the Ploughman, the Carpenter, the Weaver and the Tapestry-Maker (none of whom actually tell a story).



But this tripartite structure of society was actually too simplistic, particularly by the end of the 14th century. It allowed no place for townspeople, nor for the emerging middle-class professions of the fourteenth century or, most importantly in the case of the Wife of Bath, for women.[41] Amongst Chaucer's pilgrims who do not fit into the traditional structure are the Merchant, the Sergeant-at-Law (a legal officer), the Shipman, the Franklin (a landowner) and the Doctor. Chaucer's motley collection of pilgrims, from both the traditional sectors of society and the new emerging classes, reflects the fact that the late fourteenth century was a time of increasing social mobility.

As well as emerging new professions, events in the 14th century also helped to sh structure. The Black Death and other epidemics which afflicted England in the m led to a shortage of labour, which placed peasants and labourers in a favourable terms and conditions. A number of legal measures were subsequently put in plac landowners and employers. Anxiety about threats to the social hierarchy are also laws' of 1363 which "sought to specify the food and clothing of each social class' not to wear gold, silver or silk and servants were to receive only appropriate, and Restrictions in clothing and food prevented the lower classes from giving out mis class they belonged to, thereby keeping them 'in their place'. In June 1381 decad protests by groups of peasants from Kent and Essex – led by Wat Tyler and John and in two meetings with King Richard II demanded radical reforms. Their many imposition of a poll tax, a fixed payment demanded from everyone in a commun

[41] See the next heading in this section - Women in the Middle Ages.
[42] S. H. Rigby, "Society and Politics", in Steve Ellis (ed.), *Chaucer*, p. 33.

and the ongoing system of tied labour (they argued for the abolition of villeins). A
1381 was crushed, and both leaders killed, in the course of the late 14th and 15th c
demands were met, including an end to compulsory labour.

Without doubt Chaucer was living through a period of social flux and change. How
social changes is not clear. Chaucer can be considered an example of the social m
His surname comes from the French, *chaussier* or *chaucier*, meaning shoemaker, s
his ancestors lived and worked in the city of London in Cordwainer Street, the sh
London Chaucers – including Geoffrey Chaucer's father, John, and grandfather, R
merchants). Both shoemakers and wine merchants were respectable professions
practitioners sufficient money to lead a comfortable lifestyle. However, John Cha
son, paying for him to enter the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster and w
King Edward III in order that he receive a courtly education and be enabled to ma
advance his career. His actions received the desired result, with his son winning t
in the court, most importantly the three kings during whose reigns he lived. Had
this privileged start in life by his father, it is far from certain that he would have b
know him as.

Whether Chaucer actually endorses – or criticises – social mobility within his wri
been divided on this. On the one hand, his portrayal of the representatives of the
(those who work), the Knight (those who fight) and the Parson (those who pray)
their duties for the common good, suggests Chaucer is upholding the values of a
where people know their place. On the other hand, the fact he gives such compe
aspirational characters like the Miller, the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath could s
those who challenge the prevailing social order.

For discussion of social mobility within *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* see
Section 4, Themes and Imagery

Women in the Middle Ages

Fourteenth-century English society was a patriarchal society; men dominated all
positions of power, in the Church and in society as a whole. As stated in the mid
thirteenth-century *Laws and Customs of England*: 'women differ from men in ma
respects for their position is inferior to that of men'.[44] This belief had its roots in
the **pagan classical** tradition (writers like Aristotle and Galen had argued for the
inferiority of women based on their anatomy, or bodily structure) and the Christi
tradition (with women regarded as inherently inferior to men owing to their des
from Eve, the woman responsible for the downfall of all humanity). These views
spawned a hostile **anti-feminist** literature about women, which Chaucer draws o
writing *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. According to this literature, women
vain, cunning, manipulative and sexually voracious – among other failings. This ty
criticism that was levelled at women can be seen in the accusations the Wife's fi
three husbands supposedly make against her, but which she subsequently confe
are in fact all fabricated (ll. 235 – 378). Jankin's 'book of wikked wives' that he re
aloud from and that so incenses the Wife is an example of the type of collection
misogynistic writings that would have been circulated at the time.[45]

In the Middle Ages, women's social inferiority impacted on all aspects of their liv
significantly to the medieval economy – and the Wife of Bath is an example of th
power (economic, **ecclesiastical**, legal or political). Daughters only inherited in th
women with property rights equal to men were unmarried women or widows (s
also defined in terms of their relationship to men – unmarried, married or widow
'three estates' in line with the male version.[46]

[43] A. W. Pollard, "Geoffrey Chaucer," *Luminarium Anthology of English Literature* http://www.lumi
[44] *Bracton on the Laws and Customs of England,* ed. Samuel E. Thorne (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap
'Society and Politics' in *Chaucer: An Oxford Guide*, ed. Steve Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
[45] For a collection of these anti-feminist writings, see *Woman Defamed and Woman Defended: An*
Blamires (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).
[46] See above, Page 52.

However, it is important to avoid generalisations about women at this time. Whi
been hostile and derogatory, there are a number of documented examples of wo
power, and commanding respect from men. Examples of such women in England
figures Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, who also authored books, the que
(Eleanor of Aquitaine) and Henry III (Eleanor of Provence), and probably an array
women like the Wife of Bath. What makes Chaucer's depiction of the Wife so rev
she is defending women – writing in the early fifteenth century, the Italian-Frenc
attacked the literary depiction of women – but that Chaucer uses a middle-aged
important issues, rather than putting them in the mouth of a more highly esteem

For discussion on ways of reading *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* from a fe
on feminism.

Marriage in the Middle Ages

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale gives readers an insight into different views
and some of the everyday practicalities too. The Wife of Bath is the only woman
with experience of marriage – the other two female pilgrims are the Prioress and
so the Wife is uniquely placed to provide a woman's perspective on this institutio

The fact that the Wife is referred to by the narrator in terms of her marital status
referred to by their profession – suggests that it is the Wife's experience of marr
the work she does as a cloth-maker); she might be termed a professional wife. Th
defined by their marital status in the Middle Ages is seen in the *Tale*, where the W
court there were assembled, 'Ful many a noble wyf, and many a maide, / And ma
woman is either a wife, or yet to be one (and thus a virgin) or has been one (and

But not only was medieval society obsessed with marriage, so too is the Wife of
third line of her *Prologue* and, while the word 'mariage' only appears seven time
comes 24 times (and 19 times in the *Tale*) and 'housbonde' 21 times in the *Prolo*
an additional 10 times) and a further four times in the *Tale*. The frequency – or n
for the Wife of Bath does not appear to be particularly interested in marriage as
rather in the struggle for power between the two participants and the roles occu

In the Middle Ages marriages were frequently arranged and involved the exchan
consequence, little importance was placed on love or sexual attraction. That cert
the Wife of Bath's first three marriages. She records that she has been married si
(l. 4), reflecting the fact that girls were believed to be ready for marriage once th
sexual relationships. By making the Wife's first three husbands significantly older
reproducing a common practice in medieval society whereby young girls would b
men: the girl's family would benefit financially and the older man would benefit
younger woman, and also her potential for childbearing (though obviously Chauc
perhaps to simplify her presentation without the distractions of motherhood).

The notion that marriage is at least partly an economic transaction is referred to
example, boasting of the appalling way in which she treated her first three husba
as their wife, she had gained access to their wealth, she had no need to treat the
me yeven hir lond and hir tresoor; / Me neded nat do lenger diligence / To winne
reverence.' (ll. 204–06). Even when she is not talking literally about money and p
language of financial transactions in her discussion of marriage. She says she wo
three husbands unless it were for her 'profit' (l. 214), and later, in the narrative o
husband, she wistfully comments on the ageing process and the loss to her beau
'goon', all she has left to 'selle' is her 'bren' (ll. 477–478).

With the Church playing a key role in medieval society, its view of marriage – that
desire – was also an important opinion. All sexual activity outside of marriage was

[47] On this point, see James Winny's introduction to the CUP edition of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue*

chastity was judged to be the best lifestyle option, human frailty was acknowledge
beings to release their sexual desires in a legitimate context with the main aim bei
understanding of marriage informs much of the Wife's discussion in the opening 1
she is happy to accept her frailty and that she is not made to lead the perfect life o
proclaims 'I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age / In the actes and in fruit of mariag

However, the key point of contention between the Wife and the Church regardin
to remarry following the deaths of her husbands. The medieval Church contested
subsequent – marriages, and particularly advised widows to remain celibate. The
the first 162 lines of her *Prologue* are mainly taken up with her arguments agains
favour of her position. Her starting point is the rather illogical position taken by t
Christ is only ever recorded as having attended one wedding (that at Cana where
turning water into wine), so humans 'ne sholde wedded be but ones' (l. 13). The W
with her own warped logic, citing a number of examples of **polygamous** Old Test
justify her successive marriages (even though they are not the same). Where she
though, is where she quotes St Paul who, in his first Letter to the Corinthians (Ch
when the husband dies the wife is free to marry again: 'Whan myn housbonde is
Cristen man shal wedde me anon, / For thane, th'apostle seith that I am free / To
liketh me' (ll. 47–50). The fact that, at the end of this opening section of her *Prol*
preaching by the Pardoner, another expert in this field, suggests she has won the

Literary Contexts

This section addresses the key literary contexts that inform Chaucer's work, nam
genre and the Loathly Lady.

A Collection of Stories

As noted previously *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* is part of a much large
Canterbury Tales. *The Canterbury Tales* is a collection of 24 stories held together
of 29 pilgrims travelling from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of St Thom
storytelling competition as they journey, in order to pass the time.

This use of a frame narrative to hold together a collection of stories is not unique
examples include *The Thousand and One Nights* – a collection of Arabic stories d
AD – and *The Decameron* by the fourteenth-century Italian writer Boccaccio.

In *The Thousand and One Nights*, a Persian king, Shahryar, with a tradition of exec
the marriage has been consummated (so that the women cannot be unfaithful to
Scheherazade. Knowing what her fate is to be, Scheherazade tells her husband a st
– but does not finish it. The king, curious to hear the conclusion, is forced to postp
Scheherazade finishes the first tale, only to begin – but not finish – a second, once
the execution. And so she continues for 1001 nights, with the king eventually spari

Boccaccio's *Decameron* (c. 1353) more closely resembles *The Canterbury Tales* in
structure. Like Chaucer, Boccaccio has a variety of storytellers – seven women an
Chaucer's are travelling from one place to another, Boccaccio's are static: they h
villa outside Florence from the Black Death which is ravaging the city. Unlike Cha
a range of professions and social classes representing late fourteenth century En
from the leisured upper-middle classes. *The Decameron* thus lacks the power str
that is a key feature of *The Canterbury Tales*. In fact, everything is very well orde
takes it in turn to rule for one day, deciding what activities everyone will particip
storytelling theme for the day. Each of the ten characters takes it in turn to tell a
place over ten days (thus creating 100 stories in total). The stories in the *Decame*
Thousand and One Nights and *The Canterbury Tales*, cover a range of genres. Pro
Chaucer and Boccaccio were writing within 50 years of one another and in a Wes
have a number of concerns and issues in common, including corruption of the ch
different social classes. Whether Chaucer was actually familiar with Boccaccio's w
travel to Italy in both 1372 and 1378, which may have granted him access to the
The Reeve's Tale is very similar to one of Boccaccio's stories, but there is an olde

likely Chaucer worked from that than from Boccaccio's Italian version. Likewise, T
same story as Boccaccio's tale of Patient Griselda, but Chaucer may have been w
the story by Petrarch rather than Boccaccio's version.

The Fabliau (Plural: Fabliaux)

Fabliaux, which originated in France in the twelfth century, were short, frequent
in the contemporary world – as opposed to the mythical past of medieval roman
setting and were peopled by characters commonly found in such an environmen
doctors, students and priests. The tales usually revolve around deception and tri
the old, the unintelligent and the presumptuous. A frequent fabliau plot involves
a foolish old husband by sleeping with his significantly younger and more attracti
that the growth of the fabliau can be attributed to the emergence of the middle
towns. A new, educated readership wanted a literature which reflected their live
met that need.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Miller's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale* and *The Shipman's Ta*
The Wife of Bath's Prologue can also be regarded as containing many elements o
member of the aspiring middle classes and she spends much of her time successf
husbands. Her outspokenness and coarse language are also reminiscent of the fa

The Loathly Lady

Addressing his new wife, who has asked him why he is so reluctant to consumma
The Wife of Bath's Tale explains his reasons: not only is she low-born and old, bu
The adjective 'loothly' has a number of definitions in the Middle English Dictiona
appearance of someone or something fearsome, horrible, terrifying, detestable,
unpleasant. The fact that the knight calls his wife 'loothly' first, before proceedin
coming from 'so lough a kynde' suggests that it is principally her ugliness that re

Although the word 'loothly' is only used once to refer to the old lady of *The Wife*
critical discussions, as in James Winny notes, referred to as the Loathly Lady, a co
Middle Ages.[48] In this tradition, the Loathly Lady is an extremely ugly woman, wh
When she marries, the curse is broken and she is transformed into her real beau
stock character are found in Irish and Norse literature; she subsequently makes a
about the Quest for the Holy Grail (the cup used by Jesus at the Last Supper) and
medieval English literary texts which tell of the exploits of King Arthur and the Kn
first of these is Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, which dates from the late four
texts, the Loathly Lady is associated with Sir Gawain, nephew to King Arthur, and
being a punishment for a rape, is a situation Gawain enters into willingly to help
situation; neither is there a lesson on 'gentillesse' for Gawain to learn.

In *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell*, which dates from the fifteenth c
what it is that women most desire is given to King Arthur himself by a knight, Sir G
revenge on Sir Gawain for seizing his lands (as opposed to the rape committed by
Should King Arthur not find the answer within a year, he will be beheaded. When
posed to his uncle, he offers to help him find the answer. Dame Ragnelle – who tu
– is the Loathly Lady who gives King Arthur the correct answer, provided he guara
Unlike the knight in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, Gawain treats his old, ugly wife with
like a dutiful husband, finds he actually has a beautiful wife. The change, however
must choose whether to have his wife beautiful by night – when only he can see h
the world can witness it. Handing the decision over to his wife, Gawain is rewarde
wife. *The Marriage of Sir Gawain* is a fragment of a very similar version of the sto
helping out his uncle, King Arthur, his behaviour being nothing like the hideous se
The Wife of Bath's Tale. So Chaucer's tale, while inspired by other versions and in
alone in the way that not only the Loathly Lady, but the knight also, is transforme
reflecting the Wife of Bath's concern with marital power relationships.

[48] See J Winny, note on line 1100, Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*, ed. Winny, p. 11

Resource 9: Contexts of Production of *T*
Prologue and Tale

In the Edexcel specification AO3 - Demonstrate understanding of the significance which literary texts are written and received – is a key assessment objective whe *Prologue and Tale*. AO3 can be divided into two areas: the contexts of **productio**

The contexts of **production** of a literary text refer to what was happening at the t written and/ or set: the historical events, but also the customs, views and beliefs literature and literary traditions which influenced the text. Knowledge of the con because it gives the reader insight into why the text was produced. Literature is n writer's concerns often reflect the concerns of his or her society. Up to a point, a was produced.

Being able to write about the contexts of production of a text does not require re some may be helpful, and Section 1 of this pack provides some background infor you need to know can be gleaned from careful study of the text itself. The quest *of Bath's Prologue and Tale* tell us about the times in which it was written?

This resource is split into two sections. **Section A** lists a number of areas of late f that are addressed in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. For each one, make n about these areas, referring closely to the text to illustrate your notes. **Section B** write a short commentary on each quotation explaining what it shows about the Since the life of medieval women is such a prominent aspect of *The Wife of Bath* with separately (see Resource 10).

A) Late fourteenth-century English society

Make notes about these aspects of English society, referring closely to t

1. The Church occupied an important position in late fourteenth-century Engli

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2. There was growing concern about elements of abuse and corruption in the C

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3. A large sector of the population would have been very familiar with the Bibl

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4. The late fourteenth century witnessed the emergence of an increasingly me emphasis on buying, selling and making profit.

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5. Dreams held great significance in the Middle Ages.

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6. People believed that physical appearance revealed character traits.

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7. People believed that character was partly formed by planetary influences.

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8. Books were an expensive luxury in the late fourteenth century.

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9. Classical authors were regarded as figures of great authority.

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10. A traditional notion of fixed social status – feudal society – was starting to b beginnings of social mobility.

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B) Quotation Task

Listed below are a number of quotations from *The Wife of Bath's Prologu*
what is suggested about life in late fourteenth-century England.

1. *Housbondes at chirche dore I have had five.* (l. 6)

.....

.....

.....

2. *The bacon was nat fet for hem, I trowe, / That som men han in Essex at Dun*

.....

.....

.....

3. *Whoso that first to mille comth, first grint;* (l. 389)

.....

.....

.....

4. *He deyde whan I cam fro Jerusalem, / And lith ygrave under the roode beem*

.....

.....

.....

5. *Greet prees at market maketh deere ware, / And to greet cheep is holde at l*

.....

.....

.....

6. *Therfore I made my visitaciouns / To vigilies and to processiouns, / To prech*
/ To pleyes of miracles, and to marriages, (ll. 555–558)

.....

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.....

7. *And eek I seyde I mette of him al night, / He wolde han slain me as I lay upri*
verray blood; / But yet I hope that she shal do me good, / For blood bitokene
(ll. 577–581)

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8. *But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth. / Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me*

.....

.....

.....

9. *For certes, I am al Venerien / In feeling, and myn herte is Marcien.* (ll. 609–6

.....

.....

.....

10. *Now wol I sey yow sooth, by Seint Thomas, / Why that I rente out of his boo so that I was deef.* (ll. 666–668)

.....

.....

.....

11. *Wommen may go now saufly up and doun. / In every bussh or under every t but he, / And he ne wol doon hem but dishonour.* (ll. 878–881)

.....

.....

.....

12. *Thenketh hou noble, as seith Valerius, / Was thilke Tullius Hostillius, / That c noblesse. / Reedeth Senek, and redeth eek Boece.* (ll. 1165–1168)

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Resource 10: Women and Marriage in t

More than any other aspect of fourteenth-century society, Chaucer's *Wife of Bat* insight into the lives of women at this time, into society's views of them (as dicta sources of authority), into men's opinions of them and (perhaps with some gues have regarded their situation. This is an important aspect of the context of produ almost guaranteed that you will end up writing about it in your A Level examinat

This resource is split into two sections. Section A lists a number of aspects of the fourteenth-century England that are addressed in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue an* on what Chaucer's text reveals about this aspect, referring closely to the text to lists a number of quotations; your task is to write a short commentary on each q about women and marriage in the late fourteenth century.

A) Women and marriage in the late fourteenth century

For each of the statements about women's lives listed below, make not *Prologue and Tale* has to say, referring closely to the text for evidence.

1. At this time women were defined primarily by their marital status.

   .....

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2. It was not unusual for women to marry at a young age.

   .....

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3. The Church advised women to remain celibate after they had been widowe

   .....

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   .....

4. A number of negative stereotypes of women circulated in the late fourteent included the beliefs that women were:

   Deceptive .....

   .....

   .....

   Materialistic .....

   .....

   .....

Sexually voracious .....

.....

.....

Relentlessly scolding .....

.....

.....

Desirous of flattery .....

.....

.....

Inclined to infidelity .....

.....

.....

Argumentative .....

.....

.....

Alcoholic .....

.....

.....

Tormenting .....

.....

.....

Indiscreet .....

.....

.....

Disobedient .....

.....

.....

Verbose .....

.....

.....

Immodest .....

.....

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Wanting control over their husbands .....

.....

.....

5. After marriage, a woman traditionally renounced ownership of any property became the property of her husband.

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6. It was acceptable for a man to beat his wife at this time.

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.....

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7. There was a body of textual authority that presented women in a negative li

.....

.....

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8. The early Church considered women – in the figure of Eve – to have caused

.....

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B) Quotation Task

Explain what each quotation shows about women and marriage in the la

1. *sith I twelve yeer was of age, / ... / Housbondes at chirche dore I have had fi*

   .....

   .....

2. *Th'apostel, whan he speketh of maidenhede, / He seyde that precept therof h conseille a womman to been oon, /But conseilling is no comandement.* (ll. 6

   .....

   .....

3. *Al were it good no womman for to touche, – / He mente as in his bed or in h and tow t'assemble:* (ll. 87–89)

   .....

   .....

4. *An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette, / Whiche shal be bothe my dettour tribulacion withal / Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.* (ll. 154–157)

   .....

   .....

5. *I have the power duringe al my lyf / Upon his propre body, and noght he.* (ll.

   .....

   .....

6. *As help me God, I laughe whan I thinke / How pitously a-night I made hem s*

   .....

   .....

7. *I governed hem so wel, after my lawe, / That ech of hem ful blissful was and thinges fro the faire.* (ll. 219–221)

   .....

   .....

8. *Now herkneth hou I baar me properly, / Ye wise wives, that kan understond hem wrong on honde; / For half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere and lyen*

   .....

   .....

9. *Thus goth al to the devel, by thy tale. / Thou seist men may not kepe a caste been overal.* (ll. 262–264)

.....

.....

10. *And if that she be foul, thou seist that she / Coveiteth every man that she m on him lepe, / Til that she finde som man hire to chepe.* (ll. 265–268)

.....

.....

12. *And al was fals* (l. 382)

.....

.....

13. *O Lord! the peyne I dide hem and the wo, / Ful giltelees, by Goddes sweete p*

.....

.....

14. *Deceite, weping, spinning God hath yive / To wommen kindely, whil that the*

.....

.....

15. *Oon of us two moste bowen, doutelees; / And sith a man is moore resonable been suffrable.* (ll. 440–442)

.....

.....

16. *And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe; / That feele I on my ribbes al by re ending day.* (ll. 505–507)

.....

.....

17. *We wommen han, if that I shal nat lie, / In this matere a queynte fantasie; / lightly have, / Therafter wol we crie al day and crave. / Forbede us thing, an faste, and thanne wol we fle.* (ll. 515–520)

.....

.....

18. *I bar hym on honde he hadde enchanted me, – / My dame taught me that so*

.....

.....

19. *And thanne wolde he upon his Bible seke / That ilke proverb of Ecclesiaste / w*
forbedeth faste, / Man shal nat suffre his wyf go roule aboute. (ll. 650–653)

.....

.....

20. *And every night and day was his custume, / Whan he hadde leyser and vaca*
of wikked wives. (ll. 682–685)

.....

.....

21. *For trusteth wel, it is an impossible / That any clerk wol speke good of wives*

.....

.....

22. *Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?* (l. 692)

.....

.....

23. *Lo, here expres of womman may ye finde, / That womman was the los of al*

.....

.....

24. *He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond, / To han the governance of hous and lo*
honde also; / And made him brenne his book anon right tho. (ll. 813–816)

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Resource 11: Contexts of Reception
Bath's Prologue and Tal

While **Resources 9 and 10** focus on the contexts of **production** of *The Wife of Ba* requires you to write about the contexts of **reception,** which is the focus of this w

The **reception** of a text is the way that it is read, interpreted and received. While text remain **unchanged** – with the exception of revisions and new editions, a tex contexts of **reception** are **multiple and changing**. Since we are all individuals, eve every reader; this explains why we don't all agree about a book. Furthermore, di views, our age, our gender, our belief system all affect the way we read texts. At to address the way reception of texts varies ***over time***; fourteenth-century reade twenty-first-century readers like yourselves.

Obviously it can be difficult to make judgements about how readers who have pr fourteenth-century readers, would have read and responded to Chaucer's text, u responses (and that would only tell you about what a few published critics think) information about the changing readership of the text – see Section 2 above - an deductions based on the differences between the fourteenth and the twenty-firs

This resource is split into two sections. Section A identifies areas in which twenty to Chaucer may differ from original readers'. Your task is to write down what you making close reference to the text to support your ideas. Section B lists a numbe comment on how twenty-first-century readers' understanding may be different f

A) Areas in which twenty-first-century readers' responses may differ fr
Write down what you think the differences in the responses would be an the text to support your ideas.

1. The role of the Church in society

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2. The influence of the Church and Bible in shaping people's understanding and op

.....

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3. Religious beliefs, including knowledge of the Bible

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4. The importance of marriage for a woman's status

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5. People believed that physical appearance revealed character traits

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.....

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6. People believed that character was partly formed by planetary influences

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.....

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7. Books were an expensive luxury in the late fourteenth century

.....

.....

.....

8. Classical authors were regarded as figures of great authority

.....

.....

.....

9. Society held that, as ordained by God, women were of lower status than me

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10. It was deemed acceptable in the Middle Ages for men to beat their wives

.....

.....

B) Quotation Task

Listed below are a number of quotations from *The Wife of Bath's Prologu* need to comment on how a modern reader might respond to the line(s), differ from that of original readers.

1. *For, lordinges, with I twelve yeer was of age, / ... / Housbondes at chirche do*

.....

.....

.....

2. *Why sholde men thanne speke of it [a woman's remarrying after her husban*

.....

.....

.....

3. *I nil envye no virginitee.* (l. 142)

.....

.....

.....

4. *And yet was he [her fifth husband] to me the mooste shrewe; / That feele I c evere shal unto myn ending day.* (ll. 505–507)

.....

.....

.....

5. *He was, I trowe, a twenty winter oold, / And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth*

.....

.....

.....

6. *But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth. / Gat-tothed I was, and that bicam me*

.....

.....

.....

7. *For certes, I am al Venerien / In feeling, and myn herte is Marcien.* (ll. 609–6

.....

.....

.....

8. *Stibourn I was as is a leonesse, / And of my tonge a verray jangleresse, / And biforn, /From hous to hous, although he had it sworn;* (ll. 637–640)

.....

.....

.....

9. *Upon a night Jankin, that was oure sire, / Redde on his book, as he sat by the wikkednesse / Was al mankinde broght to wrecchednesse, / For which that J That boghte us with his herte blood again. Lo, here expres of womman may los of al mankind* (ll. 713–720)

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.....

.....

This section considers two literary approaches to studying *The Wife of Bath's Pro* the carnivalesque.

Feminism

Feminist readings of literature – like the political movement of feminism – take a seeking to overturn centuries of the oppression of women by uncovering their **m** either as authors (whose works have been neglected) or as characters. In the lat be reappraised, often in a more positive light than may have traditionally been th also consider how women's writing differs from men's, while French feminism ha further, arguing that writing can be masculine or feminine regardless of the sex o feminism has joined forces with **psychoanalysis** (the literary form of which was p Jacques Lacan) to investigate the silences in a text: what is not said may be just a Psychoanalysis also assumes that the biological differences between men and wo and perceptions of the world, and that the gender difference of male vs female i with male being the standard, and female being 'the other'.

While feminism was not a recognised word in the Middle Ages, *The Wife of Bath'* itself to feminist readings in the light of the above definitions. Through his creati gives a voice to women, which society and the Church has denied them. The Wif should be allowed to remarry – contrary to the commands of the Church – are lo dispute. At the same time, Chaucer uses the Wife to expose the deep-rooted mis the lack of opportunities for women to express themselves and author a differen Wife herself notes, in some of the most avowedly 'feminist' lines of the *Prologue*

> *For trusteth wel, it is an impossible*
> *That any clerk wol speke good of wives,*
> *But if it be of hooly seintes lives,*
> *Ne of noon oother woman never the mo.*
> *Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?*
> *By God! if women hadde writen stories,*
> *As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,*
> *They wolde han writen of men more wikkednesse*
> *Than al the mark of Adam may redresse. (ll. 688–696)*

The male-authored books, written for the most part by **celibate** scholars leading nothing of real women, present women who are virtuous if they are saints, and w female authors to **rectify** the situation, women are **consigned** to one of two mod which **embodies** true female complexity. The Wife can thus be read as Chaucer's realistic model of womanhood. As James Winny notes, Chaucer is a **radical** write private affairs of a middle-aged woman could provide the subject of a long narra the subject of his text, Chaucer is performing a feminist act. An older, experience her **prime** – 'The flour is goon' (line 477) – the Wife has many flaws, but she insp her ability to not just survive, but also thrive, in a cruelly misogynistic world. Her husbands – the high point being her defeat of her most difficult opponent, her fi youth and intelligence on his side – her material gains (due in part to her many m her own skill in cloth-making) and her refusal to submit without question to the the stereotypes of women circulated in medieval society, make the Wife nothing literary female creation of her time.

That being said, Chaucer's presentation of the Wife is far from unproblematic, b century readers. For all her complaints about the way in which both she as an ind husbands, and women in general are treated by society and its institutions, the W so as to undermine her position and reinforce the complaints both her husband against women. Admitting her manipulation and deception of her husbands, her adultery – amidst other failings – the Wife becomes the **embodiment** of the anti **vehemently** protests against.

[49] Introduction, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 199

Equally problematic is the way in which the very structure and rhetoric of the Wif
supposed superiority of her female-lived experience of marriage (which she oppo
on marriage in the opening lines of her *Prologue*).[50] For not only does the Wife re
authorities (both from the Bible and secular classical texts) to defend her position
woman, but many of the rhetorical techniques of her *Prologue* – such as her repe
'herkneth' and oral markers such as 'eek' and 'lo' – are in fact features of the serm
discourse that the Wife is supposedly opposing. The great irony of *The Wife of Ba*
however controversial and liberating the Wife's voice may appear to be, she is so
even the way in which she speaks is determined by men – there are no female mo
course, the greatest irony of all, is that behind her voice lies the voice of a man – C

The Carnivalesque

One of the most enduring aspects of *The Canterbury Tales* in general – and *The Wi*
particular – is the emphasis on festivity and carnival, on a 'world turned upside do
Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), is probably the best-known critic on the concept of c
argued that medieval culture was characterised by a series of oppositions betwee
institutional structures of society; between laughter and seriousness; between the
democracy and feudal hierarchy; between carnival and restraint. Bakhtin proposed
of medieval culture, and was played out in a number of medieval rituals and practi
upside down; these included the boy bishop and Twelfth Night.

The custom of the boy bishop was popular in England in the Middle Ages and ear
monasteries and churches. The boy bishop was elected on 6th December (St Nich
was 28th December (the Feast of the Holy Innocents, which commemorates the c
Herod). On this day, the boy bishop acted as a priest, aided by his fellow students
institution. A similar **inversion** of hierarchy would customarily take place on Twe
and noble households, when the servants – overseen by a 'Lord of Misrule' – wo
masters, who would themselves take on the roles of servants. In both cases, the
social hierarchy was just temporary, with order being quickly re-established. Tha
historians have argued that there is little that is truly revolutionary about the car
of **subversion** that ultimately reinforces the **status quo**.

Whether truly subversive or not, the carnivalesque can be a helpful way of think
framework story of the pilgrimage to Canterbury contains elements of carnival, s
order and hierarchy. The Knight, as the pilgrim with the highest social status, app
competition, but at its conclusion, the Host's invitation to the Monk – who occup
medieval feudal society – to tell the next tale, is interrupted by the drunken Mille
insists on telling his story next (and whose rude story of adultery can be read as a
chivalry and honour). From that point on, little attention is paid to order and dec
'Lord of Misrule' – attempting to wield some control over the rather unwieldy pi
another's stories, speak out of turn and mock each other whenever they have th

The Wife of Bath embodies many aspects of the carnivalesque. In her disregard f
40 days of **abstinence** before Easter – she is literally a figure of carnival (the wor
meaning farewell to meat, and is the term used to describe the day or days imm
are characterised by celebration and excess). She boasts how when her fourth h
'hadde the bettre leyser for the pleye, / And for to se, and eek for to be seye / O
Disregarding the traditional expectations of Lenten behaviour, she walks out in t
Jankin (who will become her fifth husband) and wears red dresses, a symbol of **fl**
refuses to 'know her place': she cannot be silenced (appropriately her *Prologue* i
she defies the authority of Church and medieval society and she cannot be conta
metaphorically: she cannot be contained within the four walls of the marital hon
walking 'From hous to hous' [line 640]) and she cannot be contained metaphoric
chaste womanhood (she constantly boasts of her unrestrained sexual desires).

However, it is also worth considering whether the Wife's carnivalesque is truly su
reinforces gendered hierarchies and expectations. While the woman may dethro
the *Prologue* and *Tale*, in both cases the final outcome is at least as pleasing to th
the end of the *Prologue* the Wife notes that once she had gained the 'soverainet
'as kinde / As any wyf from Denmark until Inde / And also trewe' (lines 823–5), w
Knight is rewarded with a wife who is 'bothe fair and good' (line 1241).

[50] For a more detailed account of this aspect of the Wife's *Prologue*, see Gail Ashton, 'Feminisms', in
Guide (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 369–383.

Section 7: Preparing for the Final

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is a set text for the new specification for Ed
is not examined for the Edexcel AS in English Literature).

It is an optional text for **Component 3: Poetry (paper code 9ETO/03)** for which candidates study first a specified selection of post-2000 poetry and second a specified range of poetry from either a literary period (the choices range from medieval poetic drama to the twentieth century) or a named poet from within a literary period (the choices range from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* to a selection of Larkin's poetry). The teaching objective of this component of the A Level is to develop students' knowledge about poetic style; literary study of the text will also be enhanced by study of the contexts in which it was written.

Component 3 is assessed by a written examination of 2 hours 15 minutes in leng
A Level qualification; it is an open book examination, so candidates may take cle
texts into the examination hall. Chaucer is assessed in Section B of the examinati
answer one question from a choice of two, writing an essay worth 30 marks.

The essay question requires the candidate to 'explore' a key theme or idea in *Th
Tale* by referring to a specified passage (of approximately 15 lines in length) and
length. The candidate is also instructed to 'discuss relevant contextual factors'. T
available in the *Sample Assessment Materials* published by Edexcel.[51] The essay i
Assessment Objectives:

AO1: Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, usin
terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression.

AO2: Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts.

AO3: Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contex
written and received.

In **student-friendly language**, these Assessment Objectives require the students

AO1: Show knowledge of, and engagement with, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue ar*
structured argument in accurate English, using appropriate literary termin

AO2: Explain how Chaucer writes his text and what he is doing in *The Wife of Ba*

AO3: Write about the relationship between *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tal*
historical, social and cultural contexts, and show an understanding of how
interpreted over time.

Sample Questions

- In lines 194–210 and one other passage of similar length, explore how marri
Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion of relevant c
- In lines 248–270 and one other passage of similar length, explore how attitu
The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion
- In lines 889–912 and one other passage of similar length, explore how the fe
Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion of re
- In lines 788–802 and one other passage of similar length, explore how powe
Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion of re
- In lines 669 – 696 and one other passage of similar length, explore how text
Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion of re
- In lines 508–524 and one other passage of similar length, explore how fema
of Bath's Prologue and Tale. Your answer must include discussion of relevan

[51] The sample assessment questions are available on the Pearson Qualifications website at
http://qualifications.pearson.com/content/dam/pdf/A%20Level/English%20Literature/2015/Speci
nts/A%20level%20Lit%20SAM.pdf

Student-friendly Mark Scheme

Level	Mark /30	Explanation of mark: AO1= bullet point 1; AO2= bull
	0	Nothing written of any relevance.
Level 1	1–6	**Descriptive** • The points made are very general and there is little Ideas lack development and organisation. Written e inaccurate in places (e.g. spelling and punctuation e correct critical language and terminology. • The student describes or summarises what happens *and Tale* rather than focusing on how Chaucer write Bath as if she is a real person. • There is little – if any – relevant discussion of the lat of the text.
Level 2	7–12	**General understanding and explanation** • While the points made are still general, there is mo some explanation. Some use of correct critical langu mainly clearly structured and expressed, although th • Some understanding that the Wife of Bath is a chara some discussion of the way Chaucer writes, though superficial. • The writer shows some awareness of what *The Wife* tell the reader about its late fourteenth-century con
Level 3	13–18	**Clear and relevant understanding and exploration** • The student's response is clear and makes relevant support points. Appropriate use of critical language is clearly and logically organised, and the written ex • There is a clear focus throughout on how Chaucer h meaning, with relevant and clear commentary on te • Relevant links are drawn between *The Wife of Bath* fourteenth-century contexts, with some exploration shaped by its contexts.
Level 4	19–24	**Selective and shaped response and exploration of ide** • The student's response is shaped and makes use of are embedded in the argument. Critical language ar selected and used appropriately. The student displa which is organised and written so as to clearly comm • The student writes perceptively about how Chaucer created meaning, making detailed and subtle comm choices of language, structure, voice and poetic form • Detailed links are drawn between *The Wife of Bath's* fourteenth-century contexts, with some appropriate interpretation of Chaucer's text is shaped by its con reception over time.
Level 5	25–30	**Analytical and considered** • The response is analytical and considered, supporte the chosen passages. Critical language and terminol and the essay is structured and written in such a wa persuades the reader to the writer's perspective. • Well-judged, sophisticated and analytical discussion creates meaning. • Subtle and original links are drawn between *The Wif* and its late fourteenth-century contexts. There is ev appreciative understanding of how an interpretatio its contexts of both production and reception over t

Sample Essays

Explore how textual authority is presented in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Ta*
and one other passage of similar length. You must discuss relevant contextual fa

Top-band Essay

As the Wife explains in the lines immediately preceding the passage, she is going
she 'rente … a leef' out of Jankin's, her fifth husband's, 'book', to which he respo
became 'deef', an act of physical abuse that readers nowadays find abhorrent bu
understandable – though in no way acceptable – when one considers the immen
Ages. This violent physical conflict, which will eventually be narrated almost 100
the Wife's battle with textual authority throughout her *Prologue,* a battle which
with her claim that her personal 'Experience' – whether or not there were any te
grants her the authority to 'speke of wo that is in mariage'.

Between lines 669 and 696 the Wife introduces Jankin's 'book of wikked wives',
Bible and classical sources of women's misdeeds against men – antifeminist com
popular in the Middle Ages. Jankin is presented as finding great pleasure in his b
For his desport' and 'lough alwey ful faste'. Assuming that the Wife is unable to r
the late fourteenth century – a rather unpleasant image is created of the scholar
knowledge that is denied to his wife. His fascination with the book, and the way
thoughts about women, is shown through the Wife's repetition of the phrase 'ni
and 682) to describe when he would read it.

At the same time, it is clear that the Wife knows what is in this book. She refers t
ascetic Desert Father, St Jerome, 'That made a book again Jovinian', a more liber
virginity was not a superior state to marriage – a point of view that would clearly
on in the *Prologue*, after this passage, the Wife will cite a number of examples of
she explains Jankin 'redde' to her.

The fact that the book functions as an example of textual authority in shaping Ja
shown in the Wife's comment that he knew 'mo legends and lives' of 'wikked wi
Bible'; the selection of tales and examples by scholars and clerics creates an auth
anyone – let alone an uneducated woman – to challenge.

But challenge it the Wife will, and in a way that gets straight to the heart of med
dependence on textual authority. Arguing that it is 'an impossible / That any cler
if it be of hooly seintes lives,' she draws on her own example of textual authority,
one of his tales: 'Who peyntede the leon, tel me who?' By referring to the story i
of a man killing a lion, pointed out that had the lion made the sculpture the story
the Wife explains that the problem with textual authority is that it is produced by
writers, the stories would be very different: 'They wolde han writen of men more
of Adam may redresse.'

The Wife's clear-sightedness as far as the misuse of textual authority is concerne
earlier in the *Prologue* (lines 13–45). At this earlier point, she is not drawing atte
bias of textual authority, but rather to the selective way the Church makes use o
own position. Living in a culture where women were dissuaded by the Church fro
a husband – a 'command' that the Wife has defied through her five marriages – s
Bible that her remarriages are not contrary to God's commands. And, she points
authority on her side: she cites the injunction in the Book of Genesis to 'wexe an
mention is made anywhere in the Bible of the 'nombre' of times one may remar

The Wife closes this earlier passage with a biblical example in support of marriag
Solomon – though her selective use of the text is shown by the fact that all her e
and that Solomon is an example of polygamy (and numerous concubines), rather
death of a spouse. In her request to God that 'it were leveful unto me / To be ref

Wife expresses her own desire for a textual authority that grants her the same p
Chaucer emphasising that point through the rhyming couplet of 'me' and 'he'.

In both passages the Wife thus challenges the authority of Biblical and classical s
perpetuate, a privileged male view of the world. Her reading of the texts provide
just as the 'loathly lady's' monologue in the *Tale* challenges an outmoded view o
male discourse of the time.

Marker's comments:
*The candidate presents a very informed and well-written response to the two pas
focus on the issue of textual authority and an understanding of how that plays ou
The candidate is able to explain the importance of these two passages within the
particularly strong with the first passage (**AO1**) – and there is also good discussio
authority is presented by Chaucer: there are meaningful comments on language,
(**AO2**). There is also clear appreciation of the late fourteenth-century context, an
readers' responses over time (**AO3**), though the latter point could have been deve*

Middle-band Response
Textual authority in the *Wife of Bath's Prologue* is presented as a platform that is
manipulated by the men that dominated patriarchal medieval society in order to
The use of textual authority is significant as it allows the reader to comprehend t
Wife so badly wants to question, and also allows the hypocrisy of the medieval C

Jankin uses textual authority in the form of a book called *Valerie and Theofraste*
women being disobedient and foolish beings, thus allowing him to justify his con
wikked wives' provided more 'legends' and detailed more 'lives' of bad wives tha
Bible', showing how certain textual authority allowed prejudices against women
Wife interestingly notes, 'By God! if wommen hadde writen stories' about thems
portrayed in a better light. As texts were usually written by men they tended to h
negative thought of women, thus the Wife questions the impartiality of the texts

Furthermore, at the beginning of the *Prologue,* the use of textual authority, in th
also questioned by the Wife. In the Middle Ages the Bible was used by the Churc
women. The Church advised women not to remarry after becoming widowed. Ho
to question the teachings of the Church and their autocratic interpretation of the
fact 'God bad us for the wexe and multiplie', and that St Paul suggested that 'Bet
The Wife uses the Bible in order to justify her desire to be married a sixth time, b
hypocrisy of the medieval Church in her interpretation of textual authority, thus
presented and used in different ways.

Marker's comments:
*This response shows a clear understanding of both passages discussed and of the
Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale (**AO1**). Relevant close reference is made to the t
(**AO1**). The response is clearly and logically structured, and points are expressed c
would have been helpful to have situated the passages within the Prologue as a w
conclusion linking them both. The response shows a very good understanding of t
particularly the practices of the medieval Church and its use of texts and tradition
significant weakness, which prevents a higher band, is the lack of discussion of th
contest with textual authority through the way he writes and creates meaning (l*

Tips for Writing Examination

- ✓ **Plan well** – spend approximately 10 minutes planning: the more detailed yo find it to write the essay and the better your essay is likely to be. If you kno begin writing, you are more likely to get there!

- ✓ **Plan using the AOs** –If you plan using the relevant AOs, you can be sure you

- ✓ **Aim for a mixture of textual overview and detailed textual analysis** – The E to focus in detail on two passages from *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tal* on the examination paper, the other is of your own choosing). Since it is an be expected to write in detail on these two passages; however, your focus c informed by your knowledge of the whole text.

- ✓ **Begin well** – if you have planned well (see first bullet point above), then you when you start writing. In your first paragraph you should set out your argu your essay.

- ✓ **Check your work –** aim to leave yourself 5 minutes to check your work at th and punctuation is important, also ask yourself:
  - Have I answered the question? And if not, then do so – ideally in the fir helpful to leave a few blank lines at the start of your essay or at the en can go back and add anything necessary if need be).
  - Have I expressed myself clearly?
  - Have I met all the Assessment Objectives?

Section 8: Further Readi

This further reading and research could be done either prior to reading and study during the study of *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. The recommended and each heading are by no means an exhaustive list:

The life and works of Geoffrey Chaucer

- http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/
- http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/chaucer.htm
- http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/dnb/5191.html
- http://www.oxforddnb.com/public/themes/94/94766.html

Pilgrimage in the Middle Ages

- http://spartacus-educational.com/NORpilgrimage.htm
- http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/pilg/hd_pilg.htm
- http://blog.oup.com/2011/12/pilgrimage/

St Thomas Becket

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/becket_thomas.shtml
- http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14676a.htm

Women's lives in late fourteenth-century England

- http://mw.mcmaster.ca/home.html
- http://www.bl.uk/the-middle-ages/articles/women-in-medieval-society

The three estates and medieval feudal society

- http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/middleages/topic_1/welc
- http://www.middle-ages.org.uk/feudalism.htm

Medieval professions: pardoner, summoner, friar

- **pardoner**: http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/canterbury/canalysis.html
- **summoner**: http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/canterbury/characters.html
- **friar**: http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06280b.htm

Lines 1–162

1. Explain the significance of the reference to both 'experience' and 'auctoritee' (a
Prologue.
**The Wife establishes a dichotomy between her own personal experience of m
(of the Church and medieval society) that she will be opposing in this first sec
that her experience actually accords her an authority to speak on this subject.**

**It is also worth noting that, despite the apparent opposition between the Wif
authority, she will draw heavily on written authorities to support her position**

2. Describe the Wife's immediate concern in the first 13 lines of her *Prologue*.
**To establish herself as an authority on marriage and set out her opposition to
against the remarriage of widows.**

3. Explain how the Wife immediately sets herself up in opposition to the Church a
first 34 lines of the *Prologue*.
**She argues that her personal experience of marriage – she has been married f
was only 12 – gives her the right to speak on the subject. She immediately qu
women should only marry once, and makes use of Biblical quotations (such as
'wexe and multiplie'[l. 28]) to challenge the Bible stories and quotations that
argument.**

4. Identify the Wife's most persuasive point about remarriage in these lines. Expla
   - **No one has ever stated precisely how many times a woman can marry (ll**
   - **Referring to Genesis 1: 28, God commanded people to procreate (l. 28).**
   - **God commanded a man to leave his parents and be united to his wife (ll.**

5. Explain how the Wife draws on the Bible to justify her position.
   - **She refers to Biblical figures who enjoyed multiple partners – King Solom
and suggests that if they were permitted this freedom, then so should sh**
   - **She refers to St Paul's writings on chastity in his first letter to the Corinth
readers to lead a life of chastity but admits he has no authority to comm
as a justification for remarrying.**
   - **She quotes St Paul on the 'marriage debt', that the husband and wife are
one another bodily union (sex).**

6. How does the Wife attempt to balance respect of the Church and its textual au
needs and rights as a sexual being?
   - **The Wife is careful not to undermine the Church's authority or what is w
respect for a life of chastity, but claims that her gifts will be best deploye**
   - **She points out – logically – that were everyone to adopt a life of chastity,
peopled and there would be no more virgins!**
   - **Since God created sexual organs – the use of which is not confined to dis
the purging of urine – he must have thereby also authorised their use in**

7. The Wife uses a number of images from everyday life in this section of her *Prol*
below. In each case, describe the image used, explain how the Wife uses it to p
evaluate its effectiveness:
   a. *For wel ye knowe, a lord in his household,*
   He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
   Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servise. (ll. 99–101)
   **The Wife uses the analogy of a lord who has houseware (plates, dishes) m
occasions) and wood (for everyday use), to argue that God does not requ
(virgins); some humans are made to be married and that is the way they
gifts. This analogy allows the Wife to show support for the Church's teac
defending her own position on marriage.**

b. *I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age*
In the actes and in fruit of mariage. (ll. 113–114)
The word 'flour' is used by the Wife to refer to her energy and attraction lament the passing of time and that 'The flour is goon' (l. 477); for now th gifts (God did not choose her to be a virgin), and she will deploy them in

c. *Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,*
And lat us wives hoten barly-breed;
And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
Oure Lord Jhesu refresshed many a man. (ll. 143–146)
Using bread imagery, the Wife compares herself to virgins: the latter are reflecting their purity and high value, while wives are everyday barley br 5,000 with barley bread, according to Mark's gospel account, the Wife is role played by wives in the Christian world.

8. Describe how Chaucer portrays the Wife of Bath in lines 1–162 of her *Prologue*.
   - **outspoken**
   - **subversive**
   - **defiant**
   - **knowledgeable**
   - **clever**
   - **manipulative**

Lines 163–193

1. Explain the thrust of the Pardoner's interruption of the Wife of Bath.
   He praises the Wife's talent for preaching, but says that her comments on ma his upcoming marriage.

2. How does the Wife respond to the Pardoner's interruption?
   She reprimands him, pointing out that she has not yet begun her story; only w whether or not he wants to marry.

3. Invited by the Pardoner to resume her storytelling, the Wife says that people sh says since her 'entente is nat but for to pleye' (l. 192). What do you understand it affect your response to what you have read so far?
   The Wife claims that her intention is only to entertain and amuse; this sugges seriously her comments on the Church and the treatment of women. It is diffi considering the important points she is making, so it may be that she is protec offending the Church.

4. What function does the Pardoner's interruption serve? You might consider the
   a. The description of the Pardoner in the *General Prologue*
      The fact he is a good preacher serves to endorse his praise of the Wife. He is presented as deceitful and corrupt, and also as possibly homosexua what he says about marriage.
   b. The structural function of the interruption – how does it help to structure
      It reminds the reader of the frame narrative of the pilgrimage and that sh It separates the Wife's theological justification of remarriage from her na
   c. The Pardoner as a representative of ecclesiastical authority that the Wife h previous 162 lines of her prologue
      As a figure of corruption and immorality he presents the Church in a nega strength to the Wife's attack on the Church.

Lines 194–451

1. Describe how the Wife treated her first three husbands.
   **By her own admission she treated them mercilessly and with contempt. She c
   though they were old and not able to fulfil her sexual needs. She ruled over th
   significantly, she deceived them into believing they had been cruel to her whe
   so, she had the upper hand in the marriage.**

2. Summarise the complaints about women that the Wife alleges her husband's m
   To what extent does the Wife's behaviour, as described so far in the *Prologue*, j
   - **The husband complains about every kind of woman: a poor woman is co
     woman is proud; a beautiful woman will be unable to remain faithful; an
     Nagging wives make men want to flee their homes. Women conceal thei
     which time it is too late for the man to do anything about it. Women are
     praised for their looks. If women take care over their appearance they en
     love is like Hell, it burns up and destroys everything in its vicinity.**
   - **Whilst the reader may feel sorry for the Wife at this point, she has openl
     with disdain (II.201-16), controlling them (II.219-23), deceiving them (11.
     (11.323-36), and the reader may feel her husbands' complaints are justifi**

3. Explain how the Wife's choices of language, phrasing and structure serve to cre
   husband and his complaints.
   - **The Wife reiterates the phrases 'Thow seist' and 'Thus seistow' throughc
     impression of a nagging husband who is constantly complaining about hi
     conjunctions 'and', 'eek' and 'also' create a sense of the complaints abou
     never-ending list.**
   - **The use of proverbs to criticise women suggests a body of misogynistic c
     society.**
   - **The repeated use of the general noun 'wommen' suggests men generalis
     particular example and assume that all women are the same.**

4. Summarise the Wife's complaints about her first three husbands.
   - **She expresses suspicions about their fidelity and the amount of time the
     complaining if she goes to visit her friends.**
   - **They come home drunk and lecture her on her behaviour.**
   - **They criticise her and all women.**
   - **They withhold their wealth from her so she has nothing to wear.**
   - **They spy on her.**

5. Identify three images the husbands use to talk about women. Explain what effe
   they suggest about views of women in the Middle Ages.
   - **'Thou seist men may nat kepe a castel wal, / It may so longe assailled be
     are compared to fortresses, under siege from men, thereby suggesting th
     eventually succumb to the pressures of men.**
   - **'as a spaynel she wol on him lepe, / Til that she finde som man hire to ch
     are so desperate that, like an indiscriminating dog, they will leap on any
     find one willing to have sex with them.**
   - **'Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat; / For whoso wolde senge a cattes
     dwellen in his in; /And if the cattes skin be slik and gay, / She wol nat dw
     352) – women, like cats, are vain: if they feel unattractive they will refuse
     with their appearance they seize the opportunity to go out and parade th**

6. Identify three terms the Wife uses to refer to her husbands, e.g. 'olde kaynard' t
   about her opinion of them.
   - **'olde kaynard' (l. 235) – she refers to him as an old fool, suggesting disres
   - **'olde lecchour' (l. 242) – she refers to him as an old lecher, suggesting she b
   - **'shrewe' (l. 284) – this can be translated as meaning scoundrel, once agai**

7. Describe how both the Wife and her husbands use textual authority to assert th
   **As seen from the opening of the *Prologue*, the Wife uses textual authority to s
   rather than use the Bible, she uses classical sources, referring to Ptolemy to ju
   9 – and to the Greek mythological creature, Argus, who had 100 eyes. Accordi
   outwit Argus if she was sent to be her bodyguard (ll. 358–61). According to th
   Paul's letter to Timothy on the modesty of dress (ll. 337–345). They also cite m
   about women.**

8. Who is Jankin (ll. 303–307) and why is he causing problems between the Wife a
**Jankin is their apprentice and the husbands accuse the Wife of having an affa
denies.**

9. Explain the proverb by Ptolemy at lines 326–327: 'Of alle men his wisdom is the
hath the world in honde'. How does the Wife use this saying to her advantage w
**The proverb means 'The wisest man is he who does not care how much anoth
is quoting Ptolemy to justify her adultery: provided her husbands have their s
should they mind who else she sleeps with?**

10. What is the significance of the cat analogy between lines 348 and 356?
**The cat analogy is supposedly used by the husbands to comment on their Wif
unattractive then, like a cat with singed skin, she will stay at home; however, i
looking beautiful then she will go out so that others can admire her.**

11. How does the Wife's admission at line 382 that all these accusations she made
affect the reader's sympathy for the Wife?
It is likely to make us less sympathetic towards her, as she is manipulating her

12. Explain how the Wife conforms to medieval anti-feminist stereotypes of women
**She shows herself to be manipulative, cunning, deceitful and adulterous – and
characteristics of the stereotyped woman complained about by misogynistic m**

13. Between lines 413 and 417, and lines 447 and 449, the Wife refers to sex using
transaction. Explain what she says in each case, and explore what her language
sexual relationships and the nature of late fourteenth-century English society.
    - **'Winne whoso may, for al is for to selle; / With empty hand men may no
    The Wife uses the image of the falconer having to lure its hawk with som
    husbands had to offer her something if they wanted sex in return.**
    - **'For if I wolde selle my *bele chose,* / I koude walke as fressh as a rose; / B
    tooth.' (ll. 447–449)
    Here the Wife refers to the idea of literally selling her body – *bele chose* l
    organs – which, had she done, would have enabled her to afford beautifu
    out rather begrudgingly, she has not done so but has kept her body for h**
    - **With both images the Wife presents her view of sex as a business transac
    receives something in return – rather than an activity involving love and
    may also reflect the beginnings of the capitalist market economy in fourt**

Lines 451–502

1. Describe what the reader learns about the Wife's fourth husband. Explain how
husbands.
**He is one of the two husbands – along with the fifth – that the Wife describes
first three 'goode', 'riche' and 'olde' husbands. We learn that he enjoyed a ple
mistress.**

2. Explain the significance of this image used by the Wife:
The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle; (ll. 477–478)
**This image combines references to agricultural society and to the marketplac
had referred to her bestowing the 'flour' of her age (l. 113), namely her matur
marriage. Now she says the 'flour is goon', suggesting that she is past her prim
to the 'bren', the indigestible and unattractive part of the wheat, which is all s
Wife says she must 'selle' the bran, is another reference to the idea of marria
exchange for her assets, the wife expects appropriate compensation.**

3. When did the Wife's fourth husband die?
On her return from Jerusalem (where she had presumably gone on pilgrimage

4. What is the significance of the fourth husband's burial place?
The Wife says that her fourth husband is buried 'under the roode beem' of th frequent feature of medieval churches, is a beam of timber which spans the a around the altar, thus the holiest part of the church) from the nave (the main congregation sits). Surmounted on the beam is a 'rood', a large cross bearing the figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Evangelist. Burial under the roo costly than burial in the chancel, reflecting the wife's financial prudence.

5. Despite the sympathy we might feel for the Wife, Chaucer still allows her to rev character. What unappealing features emerge at this point in her narrative?
   - **her desire to requite her husband for his infidelity, and her enjoyment of**
   - **her ongoing view of sex and marriage as a business transaction, devoid o**
   - **her miserliness (burying her husband in the cheaper part of the church)**

Lines 503–828

1. How does the Wife make it clear that her fifth husband was the one she loved t
She asks God to 'lete his soule nevere come in helle' (l. 504) and acknowledge cruel to her and beat her, he could easily win her love again.

2. Why does the fact that her fifth husband 'Was of his love daungerous' to her, m
The fifth husband was difficult to please and would withhold his love from the him. As she notes, women prefer a man who is not too readily available.

3. Identify the marketplace image used between lines 515 and 523 and describe t understanding of, and response to, the Wife.
In the image, the Wife uses the analogy of over-cheap goods in the market th buying to explain why a readily available man is less attractive to women than difficult to secure. The idea that the unavailable man is more attractive to wo the twentieth-first century, but the marketplace image used by the Wife serve impression of her as a woman who views sexual relationships as economic tra

4. Describe two ways in which the Wife's behaviour between lines 524 and 626 w behaviour for Christian women in the Middle Ages.
   - **She goes out walking in the fields with her best friend and an unmarried on business in London.**
   - **She wears bright red dresses during Lent.**

5. The Wife takes a very pragmatic approach to sexual relationships and marriage lines 524 and 626 to support this assertion?
She prepares the ground for her fifth marriage to Jankin, although her fourth with Jankin, and drops hints saying to him that if she were a widow, he would of a mouse always needing more than one hole to run to, to describe her fore husband number five.

6. Explain the significance of the Wife's references to Mars and Venus between lin
Born under the influence of two contrasting planets, Mars and Venus, the Wif them. From Mars she has inherited boldness, and from Venus her love of sex. impulsive in her pursuit of sexual pleasure.

7. Throughout the *Prologue* the Wife uses a number of different terms to refer to describe the context in which each one is used and explain the significance of th
   - **'bele chose' (l. 447; l. 510): from the French meaning 'beautiful thing', the referring first to how she could have sold her body to purchase nice cloth gain sex after beating her. The Wife is unusually coy here, and in both ca herself as a sexual being and the idea that she is attractive to men.**
   - **'quoniam' (l. 608), from the Latin, meaning 'since, whereas, because', an 'thingummebob' or 'what-do-you-call-it'. While it might appear to be a e it to the crude term 'queyne' that the Wife deploys elsewhere, thereby t Latin term, audiences would have been familiar with it from the church l scandal to the Wife's use of it in a sexual context.**
   - **'chambre of Venus' (l. 618) another euphemism, but this time one with m describing her genitalia as Venus's chamber, the Wife draws a parallel be sexual desire.**

8. Look again at lines 627–633. Explain how the Wife's behaviour in her marriage t
behaviour in her previous marriages.
**The Wife gave all her land and possessions over to Jankin. This contrasts with
she complained that her husbands denied her access to their wealth (ll. 308–0
decision, 'afterward repented me ful soore;' (l. 632).**

9. Give three reasons why Jankin has more power than the Wife at the beginning
**He had access to her wealth and land; he was physically more powerful (being
had intellectual power over her, having studied at Oxford and being able to re
Wife can read or not).**

10. Explain what caused the Wife's partial deafness.
Jankin hit her on the ear when she tore three pages out of his book.

11. How – and why – might a modern reader's response to Jankin's treatment of th
response of a medieval reader?
**Modern readers would consider any physical abuse of a woman to be unacce
the case in late fourteenth-century England. Moreover, books – being handwr
in the Middle Ages and thus contemporary readers might have sided with Jan**

12. What aspects of the Wife's behaviour – that she describes between lines 637 a
his response?
**She was stubborn, she talked incessantly and she would go out of the house u
to hous,' (l. 640), although Jankin forbade her from doing so. Jankin's response
tell her old Roman stories of the consequences that befell disobedient wives a**

13. Explain the nature of the book, described between lines 669 and 685, that Jank
The book, that Jankin refers to as *Valerie and Theofraste*, is a compilation of a

14. Explain the meaning and significance of the Wife's question at line 692; 'Who p
**The Wife is referring to a fable by Aesop in which a lion responds to a sculptu
pointing out that, had the lion produced the sculpture, it would have shown a
namely the lion conquering the man. The Wife uses this fable as an analogy to
depicted in a negative light in these old stories – the answer being that they h
Were women to put pen to paper, they would produce a very different versio**

15. Why, according to the Wife, will scholars never write good things about women
**Scholars lead lives of seclusion with no contact with women and thus do not w
Also, they are born under the sign of Mercury – the sign of knowledge and stu
children of Venus and are motivated by pleasure and lust. These two incompa
incompatible types of people.**

16. Choose four examples of 'wicked wives' from Jankin's book and explain their m
The examples might include (but are not limited to):
- **Eve, through eating the forbidden fruit, caused the downfall of all human**
- **Delilah, Samson's wife, cut off his hair – the source of his strength – betra**
- **Socrates' wife, Xantippa, emptied a chamber pot over his head.**
- **Clytemnestra murdered her husband Agamemnon on his return from the
her lover.**
- **Lucia gave her husband a love potion which ended up killing him.**

17. Identify and evaluate the effects of three different rhetorical strategies the Wif
relentlessness of Jankin's anti-feminist diatribe between lines 711 and 787.
Answers include:
- **Connectives of accumulation – 'eek' (l. 740), 'forthermo' (l. 783) – create
examples of wicked wives.**
- **Simile used stating that Jankin knew of wicked wives 'mo proverbs / Tha
herbes' (ll. 773–774) creates the impression that the examples continue t**

- **Repetition of phrases like 'redde he me' (ll. 721, 724), 'tolde me' (ll. 740, create the sense of Jankin's unceasing reading aloud of these stories.**
- **The repeated tags 'tolde me,' 'quod he' suggest Jankin keeps flinging acc**

18. Explain how Jankin's onslaught on the Wife mirrors her verbal assault on her fir 235 and 378 of her *Prologue*).
    - **Just as the Wife nagged the husbands by listing their misdemeanours to listing other women's misdemeanours to her.**
    - **Just as the Wife reiterated the phrase 'Thou seist' to her husbands, creat verbal attack on her (and thereby verbally attacking them), so here the W 'quod he' to present the way Jankin flings accusations at her.**

19. What two actions does the Wife take against Jankin when he persists in reading **She tore three pages out of the book and punched him in the face with such f fireplace.**

20. Explain how the Wife symbolically overturns Jankin's authority through these a **She overturns his intellectual authority by tearing the book, and overturns his him to the ground through a punch.**

21. Explain how the Wife manages to gain 'maistrie' (the upper hand) in her marria **When Jankin punches her – in reprisal for her actions – she feigns death, frigh agreeing to give the Wife the power of control in the marriage: 'He yaf me al t allows her to run the home and their lands, and to take control of his behavio book.**

22. Explain how the Wife also changes in her behaviour in her marriage.
    She shows great kindness to Jankin and is also faithful to him.

23. Explain how the Wife's account of her battle with Jankin provides a fitting conc consider:
    - the opening of the *Prologue*
    - the Wife's account of her marriages
    - the Wife's wrestling with authorities (textual and otherwise)
    - the Wife's self-presentation throughout the *Prologue*

    At the beginning of the *Prologue*, the Wife establishes the opposition betwee suggesting the supremacy of her own personal experience in marital matters. this as, through her cunning and intelligence, the Wife overpowers her intelle of pages from the book, and the eventual burning of it, suggests the destructi specifically the harmful views of women therein. The *Prologue* is an account o wrestling with her husbands, and with Jankin she manages to achieve a marri craves. At the same time, she learns to treat Jankin with kindness, so an ideal

Lines 829–856

1. Summarise the nature of the Friar and Summoner's interruption and argument **The Friar jokes about the length of the *Prologue,* his comments incurring the a criticises his interference, comparing Friars to flies who are found everywhere to tell a story about a Summoner that will make the whole company laugh; th he will tell two or three about friars. It is left to the Host, Harry Bailly, to impo her tale.**

2. Account for the inclusion of their interruption at this point in the text.
    It reminds the reader of the frame narrative of the pilgrimage to Canterbury a tales told by the Friar and Summoner, which will follow the Wife's story. The the Summoner is a battle for power between these two characters, continuin that is so important in *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*. The negative dep Summoner – both representatives of the Church that the Wife is contesting – complaints in a more sympathetic light.

3. Compare and contrast the Friar and Summoner's interruption with that of the P
193. Think about:
   - the nature of the interrupting characters: the Pardoner, the Friar and the S
   - the structural significance of their interruptions
   - the content of their interruptions
   - any symbolic interpretation of their interruptions

   **The Pardoner, Friar and Summoner are all presented in the *General Prologue* s
   As representatives of the Church and ecclesiastical authority, they encourage t
   pronouncements of the Church on women and marriage. In both cases the int
   purpose: the Pardoner's interruption divides the Wife's defence of her remar
   life, while the Friar and Summoner's interruption separates the end of the *Pro
   Tale*. While the Pardoner's interruption includes praise of the Wife's talent fo
   criticises the length of the *Prologue*. Both interruptions symbolically suggest t
   trying to drown out women's voices and erode their authority. But in both cas
   back and resumes her narrative suggests that Chaucer understands the impor
   to be heard.**

Lines 857–918

1. Describe the thrust of what the Wife says about friars in the opening lines of he
   **She explains that fairies have been driven out of England by friars who are to
   women used to walk in fear of being preyed upon by male spirits, they are no
   by friars. The Wife's disparaging comments about friars continue the anti-eccl
   and could also be read as her taking revenge on her fellow pilgrim, the Friar, f
   length of her *Prologue*. The reference to the ubiquity of friars echoes the Sum
   argument with the Friar at the end of the Wife's *Prologue*.**

2. What aspects of the opening of the *Tale* seem surprising coming from the mout
   **The tale's chivalric setting – 'th'olde dayes of the King Arthour' – and the nost
   England was 'fulfild of faierie' seem unusual for a woman who, throughout he
   as forward-thinking, realistic and grounded in the here and now.**

3. Where do the Wife's concerns and preoccupations feature in the opening 60 lin
   **In her criticism of friars, her idealisation of a young man – she describes the K
   matter-of-fact description of the rape and the emphasis on power struggles b
   Wife's concerns and preoccupations are clearly shown.**

4. What is the significance of the quest the Knight is sent on by the Queen?
   **In raping the maiden the Knight prioritised his desires over hers; it is thus ent
   out what women most desire.**

5. What features of the Wife's narrative style that have appeared in the *Prologue* s
60 lines of her tale?
   - **lists (ll. 869–871; *Prologue* ll. 285–299)**
   - **anti-ecclesiastical satire**
   - **digression (ll. 864–881; *Prologue* ll. 669–710, 721–87)**

Lines 919–982

1. List five different answers that are given to the Knight in his quest to find out w
   Answers might include:
   - **wealth**
   - **honour**
   - **cheerfulness**
   - **fine clothes**
   - **sexual pleasure**
   - **being frequently widowed and married**
   - **flattery**
   - **being free to do as one wishes**
   - **to be considered constant and discreet**

2. Identify points at which the Wife begins to intrude into the tale.
   - **One of the suggested answers to the Queen's question to the Knight: 'oft… 928) – applies to the Wife.**
   - **A shift from the third to the first person shows the Wife becoming involv… at line 929.**
   - **Open contempt for the idea that women like to be considered discreet – … stele. / Pardee, we women konne no thing hele;' (ll. 949–950) – recalls th… *Prologue* of revealing her husbands' secrets (ll. 533–542).**

3. Explain the significance of the reference to King Midas at this point in the tale, a… makes to the story.
   The Wife retells the story of the secret of King Midas's donkey ears – which w… god of music, for claiming that Pan was a better musician – being revealed. In … King Midas's barber tells the secret by whispering it into a hole which he cove… the spot they whisper the secret to the wind. The Wife, however, has Midas's … her point that women cannot be discreet.

Lines 983–1072

1. What is the correct answer to the Queen's question, 'What thing is it that wom… answer of such significance to the Wife?
   The answer is that women desire to rule over their husbands and to have the … answer is important to the Wife because it is what she sought to have through… to achieve in her marriage to Jankin.

2. How is women's power over men demonstrated in the episode following the Kn… answer to the court?
   Women's power over men is shown when the old lady demands the Knight ke… her any request, provided she gave him the right answer to his question. Her … the Knight is forced to comply, even though it is not what he wants.

Lines 1073–1227

1. Why does the Wife not go into detail about the marriage celebrations between … **Because there were no celebrations: the Knight married the old lady in secret … he felt.**

2. What accusations does the Knight level against his new wife when she question… consummate their marriage?
   He accuses her of being repulsive ('loothly'), old and of low social status.

3. What, according to the Loathly Lady, is true 'gentillesse'?
   Noble and virtuous behaviour.

4. Distil the content of the Loathly Lady's speech to the Knight into five key points.
   - **True nobility – gentillesse – is not dependent on high social status; neithe… ancestors.**
   - **Gentillesse is demonstrated through virtuous behaviour.**
   - **Gentillesse is a gift from God.**
   - **Being poor should be considered a blessing rather than a curse.**
   - **Both old age and ugliness have their value.**

5. What features of the Wife's narrative style can be identified in the Loathly Lady … **The speech itself is a digression from the main storyline, and in her *Prologue* t… The reference to textual authorities – Dante, Valerius, Senek, Boece and Juven…**

6. What choice does the Loathly Lady offer her husband at the end of her speech? **That she remain ugly and old, but faithful to him; or that she become young a… assurances of fidelity.**

Lines 1228–1264

1. What is the significance of the way the Knight addresses the old lady at line 123
**First, he calls her 'lady', which shows respect. Second, he calls her '[his] love', h
her, and finally, he acknowledges her as his 'wyf so deere'. His mode of addre
heart and attitude to her.**

2. How does the Knight respond to the choice that his wife offers him at lines 121
significance of his response?
**He hands the decision back to his wife, showing that he has understood the a
namely that all women desire to rule over their husbands. It is also appropria
he raped a choice, he now denies himself the right to choose.**

3. How does the ending of the tale:
   - provide a parallel with the ending of the Wife's *Prologue*?
   - contain an element of wish-fulfilment for the Wife?

   **Both *Tale* and *Prologue* end with the woman attaining the upper hand over he
struggle. In each case, though, having attained power, the woman is happy to
the Wife is 'kinde' and 'trewe' to Jankin, while the Loathly Lady becomes your
knight. In both cases, a balanced partnership in which both spouses are happy
The element of wish-fulfilment may be seen in the Loathly Lady's transformat
woman, something that the ageing Wife can never achieve.**

4. What three requests does the Wife make in the prayer that she utters following
She asks God to:
   - **send women husbands who are submissive, young and lively in bed, that**
   - **shorten the lives of those men who will not be ruled by their wives**
   - **send down the plague on old and angry misers**

Section 10: Keywords Glos

abstinence:	the practice of restraining oneself from indulging in someth or related to pleasure, e.g. sex or alcohol)
allude:	to hint or indirectly suggest (noun: **allusion**)
alms:	money or food given to poor people
altercation:	a noisy argument or disagreement
ambivalent:	having mixed feelings or contradictory ideas about someone **ambivalence**)
analogy:	a comparison between one thing and another, usually to ex The teacher used the analogy of water flowing through a pi through the vessels.)
antagonism:	active hostility or opposition (verb: **antagonize**)
anti-feminism:	hostility to and hatred of women (adjective: **anti-feminist**)
asset:	something useful or valuable
attest:	to provide or serve as clear evidence of
aural:	relating to the ear and sense of hearing
barrage:	an overwhelming number of criticisms or complaints deliver succession
berate:	to scold or criticise someone
bigamy:	being married to two people at the same time (adjective: **bi**
celibacy:	abstaining from marriage and sexual intercourses (adjective
chaperone:	someone who accompanies or looks after another person o also be used as a verb)
chasten:	to restrain or moderate, as a result of a telling-off or a bad e
chastity:	abstaining from sexual intercourse (adjective: **chaste**)
chivalry:	the code of behaviour that a medieval knight was required t show courage, act courteously, aid the weak, strive for justic (adjective: **chivalric**)
classical:	relating to ancient Greek or Latin literature, art or culture
connote:	(of a word) to imply or suggest an idea or feeling, in addition word (noun: **connotation**)
consign:	to put something or someone in a place (usually in order to
consummate:	**to** make a marriage or relationship complete by having sexu
contravene:	to go against a law or oppose something or someone
coy:	shy or modest
crux:	the most important point
cuckold:	a man whose wife is unfaithful to him
deficient:	inadequate or lacking
derogatory:	showing a critical or disrespectful attitude
deviant:	departing from usual or acceptable standards; often used in
diatribe:	a forceful and bitter attack against someone or something

dichotomy: a division or contrast between two things that are represent from each other (e.g. the dichotomy between Heaven and H

digression: a temporary departure from the main subject, in either spee

discourse: a formal discussion of a topic in speech or writing

discreet: careful about what one says, in order to keep a secret or avo

ecclesiastical: relating to the Christian Church and/or its clergy

edict: an official order or proclamation issued by someone in auth

egocentric: being self-centred; thinking only of oneself with no regard fo others (noun: **egocentricity**)

elite: a select group, superior in ability or qualities to the rest of so

embody: to be an expression of, particularly to give outward expressio **embodiment**)

fabliau: (plural: **fabliaux**): a short, frequently rude, tale with an urba some sort of deception. For more detailed discussion, see Li

feign: to pretend

feudalism: a set of legal customs in medieval Europe between the ninth system for structuring society around the holding of land an

flamboyance: the tendency to attract attention because of one's confiden stylishness (adjective: **flamboyant**)

frontispiece: an illustration facing the title page of a book

genre: a style of literature (e.g. science fiction is a genre)

gullible: easily persuaded to believe something

hierarchy: the ranking of a society according to status or authority, wit top and the least powerful at the bottom (adjective: **hierarc**

iambic pentameter: a line of verse with five 'feet', each of which consists of one one stressed syllable (e.g. Two households both alike in dign

imperative: the mood of a verb that expresses a command

initiate: to cause a process or action to begin

injunction: an order or warning

innocuous: harmless

interpolate: to insert

invert: to turn upside down (noun: **inversion**)

literary type: a particular class of character that recurs in literature (e.g. t

marginalise: to treat someone as unimportant

martyr: someone killed for their beliefs (religious or otherwise)

misogyny: dislike of, or contempt for, women (the person who embod adjective: **misogynistic**)

nostalgia: a sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the

oral: spoken, rather than written (adverb: **orally**)

pagan: having religious beliefs other than those of the main world r

parody: an imitation of the style of a particular writer or literary gen effect

patriarchy: a system of government or society in which men hold the po

patristic: relating to the early Christian writers

patron:	someone who gives financial or other support to a person, c
patronage:	the support given (usually to a writer or artist) by a patron
penance:	punishment that one inflicts on oneself as an outward sign c committed
penitence:	action of feeling or showing sorrow and regret for having dc
perpetuate:	to circulate something – usually an idea – and make it contin
polygamy:	having more than one wife or husband at the same time (ac
predecessor:	a person who occupied the same office or position before th
prevailing:	influential
prime:	the time of greatest success or energy in someone's life
prologue:	an introductory section to a literary work
prone:	lying flat
psychoanalysis:	a form of psychological therapy, which treats mental disord unconscious elements in the mind
quest:	an expedition made by a knight to accomplish a particular ta ordered to do, often by a woman)
radical:	marking a departure from tradition, progressive
rectify:	to put right or correct
resurgence:	increase or revival
retort:	a sharp, angry or witty answer
rhyming couplet:	two rhyming lines that follow on from one another and that
satire:	the use of humour, irony, exaggeration or ridicule to expose weaknesses or flaws (adjective: **satirical**)
secular:	not connected with religious or spiritual matters
status quo:	the existing state of affairs
stereotype:	a widely held but fixed and over-simplified image or idea of a
subversive:	intending to undermine or overthrow an established system **subversion**)
swindle:	to use deception to deprive someone of money or possessio
tag:	a phrase that is added to a sentence to add emphasis – the se without it. An example of a tag phrase would be 'isn't he' in th
titillate:	to arouse someone to interest or mild excitement through th words
transaction:	an example of buying or selling something, or doing busines
tripartite:	consisting of three parts
ubiquity:	being found or appearing everywhere
vehement:	showing strong feeling; passionate, forceful, intense (adverb
venerate:	to regard with great respect, to worship
verbose:	very talkative
vigil:	the eve of a festival or holy day kept as a day of religious ob

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