



Chaucer's The Merchant's Prologue and Tale

Activity Pack for AS and A Level

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Teacher's Introduction

Activity Pack to Support Classroom Learning for OCR AS and OCR and Eduqas A level Specifications from 2015.

The activity pack is in three sections:

- A. Introduction and setting the literary and historical context
- B. Close examination of the text of 'The Merchant's Prologue and Tale'
- C. *Bringing it together* – an overview of the 'Prologue and Tale'

Chapters in each section are designed to encourage individual and group study of the text, using a variety of approaches to independent learning. Suggestions are also offered for wider study. (Line numbering begins with the first line of 'The Merchant's Prologue'.)

Assessment Objectives

Although the AOs for this text are different for AS and the two A Level specifications, students on both courses can be taught together. The relevant assessment objectives are indicated alongside each task.

OCR AS

For OCR **AS** the most heavily weighted is **AO2** (40%), where students are asked to analyse ways in which meanings are shaped.

AO1 is weighted at 30%: here students are required to 'articulate informed, personal and creative responses' to the text, using appropriate terminology and 'coherent, accurate written expression'.

For **AO4** (20%) students must 'explore connections across literary texts'.

10% of marks are awarded for **AO3**, where students should show their 'understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which texts are written and received'.

OCR A Level

At OCR A Level, where study of the text is linked with that of a drama, **AO3** is the most important with a weighting of 50% of the marks for this paper.

AO4 carries 25% of marks.

Both **AO1** and **AO5** (which requires students to 'explore texts informed by different interpretations') are weighted at 12.5%.

Eduqas A Level

At Eduqas A Level, students must answer a question that is split into two parts. The first is a close reading of an extract, the second focuses on the text as a whole.

In the first part of the question, AO1 and AO2 are both worth 10 marks each. In the second part of the question, AOs 1, 2, 3 and 5 are all equally weighted at 10 marks each.

October 2015

Please be aware that, for obvious reasons, the image of Priapos on the website suggested on p. 32 is fairly explicit.



A webpage containing all the links listed in this resource is conveniently provided on ZigZag Education's website at **zzed.uk/923**

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* resulting from minor specification changes, suggestions from teachers and peer reviews, or occasional errors reported by customers

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Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

Section A

One – Setting the Scene, Chaucer in

Before looking at the text you will need to know a little about the world in which it was written. Features of the world of Chaucer that you should know more about are:








- ❖ **The place of religion** in people's lives in the fourteenth century, especially the pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury; the Church's orders (i.e. monks, friars and nuns); criticism of, and dissatisfaction with, some of the orders.
- ❖ **Social change** and what is happening to the feudal system; finding out the lives of the Franklin, the Wife of Bath and the Merchant in the context of the rise of the merchant class.
- ❖ **Chaucer's life and career**, including his family background, his work abroad, his time at the royal court; why he chose to write in Middle English and the significance of this.

Task (AO1)

In pairs or in small groups choose one of the topics above and prepare a presentation. Your presentation should include lasting material (either in the form of posters, booklets or a video) which can be used for the duration of the class study of Chaucer.

Below are some resources you may find useful.

Sources of Information

-  *The Oxford Companion to English Literature* (ed. Margaret Drabble)
-  Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (Penguin Classics, translated by Neville Coghill)
-  Chaucer, *The Merchant's Prologue and Tale* (Cambridge School Chaucer)
-  Peter Ackroyd, *Chaucer* in the series *Brief Lives* (Chatto and Windus, 2004)
-  zzed.uk/923-Chaucer-BL
-  zzed.uk/923-Chaucer-BBC
-  zzed.uk/923-Spark-Notes

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Two – Is It a Tale? Is It a Poem?

What do we mean by The Canterbury Tales?

It's a collection, the idea being that every person who has gathered at the Tabard Inn to start on pilgrimage the next day to Canterbury, will tell two tales on the way out and two on the way back. The collection is unfinished and there are only 24 tales we aren't sure of the exact order in which they were told.

So it's just a group of stories...?

Chaucer uses this device to give us a collection of stories but also to show us what the world was like in other words we get a picture of a wide range of characters (fictional, of course) who Chaucer knew or had observed in thirteenth-century society. This is done largely through **links** between some of the tales; and in the **prologues** to some of the individual tales. Keeping the pilgrims in order is the **Host**, the owner of the Tabard Inn, who has decided as a way of passing the time; the best tale will win a prize – a dinner at his inn, paid for by the pilgrims.

... written in English?

Well, yes and no. Not English as we know it today but still largely recognisable. When Chaucer was writing, three languages were being used in England: Latin by the Church and the law courts; French by royalty and the government and English by most of the people. After the Norman invasion of 1066 Old English, spoken in England since the time of invasion by Angles and Saxons, began to be influenced by Norman French. By Chaucer's time everyday English had become 'Frenchified'. Chaucer was the first writer to use this modified form of the language in a major work. So, yes, he was writing in the English of the time, we now call it **Middle English**. People listening to the tales would easily be able to understand the language although few people at the time could actually read.

And is it really poetry?

Yes. 'The Merchant's Tale', like most of The Canterbury Tales, is written in rhyming couplets. There is also a strong rhythm: every second syllable is emphasised (or stressed) and there are generally 10 syllables in every line – what we call **iambic Pentameter**.

Can such a regular, formal style of writing sound natural when read aloud?

Chaucer's skill as a narrative poet enabled him to use the 'rules' (and to break them) at the opening lines of 'The Merchant's Prologue':

Weping and wailing, care and oother sorwe

I knowe ynough, on even and a-morwe,

Quod the Marchant, 'and so doon other mo

That wedded been. I trowe that a-ro

For wel I wote, if I shal in me.'

Three ways in which Chaucer

1. He starts by stressing the rules of iambic pentameter.
2. First and third lines rhyme at line end is
3. Caesura used to make the line sound more natural but it is avoided in the

In the three examples above you can see how Chaucer is giving variety to how the opening lines; the rules of poetry don't mean that everything has to sound repetitive. By adapting them Chaucer is able to control how his work should be read (for example, certain phrases should be emphasised). This is especially important when you remember that the tales were read aloud. The overall effect in these opening lines of his Prologue is of the Merchant's Tale being told in a quite a natural way.


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Hear it for yourself!

Obviously we don't have any live recordings of *The Canterbury Tales* being read, but the audio clip below will give you an idea of what scholars think Chaucer's English sounded like. Listen to the clip below:

 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=923-Canterbury-YouTube>

The extract is taken from the beginning of 'The General Prologue'. Read the text below:

*Whan that Aprill with his shoures sote
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendered is the flour:
Whan Zephirus eek with hi swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tender croppes, and the softest herbes
Hath in the floures bisshopped and dressed
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That sleepen al the night with open ye
(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages):
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages*

So how much of *The Canterbury Tales* will we be studying?

The main focus of study, and what you will be examined on, is the part of the text 'The General Prologue and Tale' ('The Merchant's Prologue' is very short – 32 lines). You will also study 'The General Prologue', where the scene is set and all the tales' narrators are introduced. The description of our narrator, the Merchant.

The opening lines of 'The General Prologue' describe the urge people have to go on pilgrimages, as you heard in the clip.

Anything else?

Yes, 'The Merchant's Tale', a tale of marriage between an old man and a young woman. There are also other tales which deal with the subject of marriage and relations between the sexes. What happens in these tales; they are: 'The Clerk's Tale'; 'The Wife of Bath's Tale'.

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Three – Introducing the Merchant

We are going to look at two sources in order to get an impression of the Merchant in 'The General Prologue' he is brief.

Read the description below from 'The General Prologue' and then discuss possible a partner. Use your answers to show how Chaucer is shaping our view of this character.

*A marchant was ther with a forked berd,
In mottelee,¹ and hye on horse he sat;
Upon his heed² a furred gysshe bever³ hat,
Whiche his shuldres clasped faire and fetisly.³
His resouns he spak ful solempnely,
Sownynge alwey th' encrees of his wynnynge.⁴
He wolde the see were kept for any thing
Bitwixe Middelburgh and Orewelle.⁵
Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.⁶
This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette⁷
So estatly was he of his governaunce
With his bargaynes and with his chevysaunce.
For sothe he was a worthy man with alle
But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle.*

Task 1 – (AO2; AO3)

Questions for discussion

1. Comment on the attention Chaucer gives to his appearance.
2. What seems to be the Merchant's main topic of conversation?
3. How do his appearance and conversation belie the true nature of the merchant?
4. Comment on the last two lines; how is Chaucer shaping our response here?
5. Can you think of a modern-day equivalent of the Merchant – perhaps a businessman?

Task 2 – (AO1)

Produce an illustrated poster for the classroom wall; aim to highlight the Merchant's character. Use figure drawings, speech bubbles, use of colour, etc.

- ¹ Expensive multicoloured cloth
- ² Expensive Flemish beaver fur
- ³ With a smart, fashionable fastening
- ⁴ Always talking about his profits
- ⁵ He wanted the sea to be protected from pirates
- ⁶ He was good at dealing in foreign currency (illegal at the time)
- ⁷ Nobody knew he was in debt
- ⁸ Borrowing

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Four – The Marriage Group

'The Merchant's Tale' is the story of an older man's desire for marriage and what his wife. To appreciate its place in *The Canterbury Tales* you need to know a little about the group'. The information and tasks on the next few pages will help you. You will now choose one of three activities.

- 1** In '**The Franklin's⁹ Tale**' a young woman, Dorigen, marries but her husband is away for him and worries that on his return he may be shipwrecked on the coast of her home. Another young man, Aurelius, wants her as a wife and is very persistent in order to reject him without sounding too cruel she promises that on the day that the rocks are removed she will be his. She is certain that this can never happen and so on her husband's return. However...

Task

Read a modern translation or a detailed summary of 'The Franklin's Tale' to Dorigen. Prepare to present the tale to the class as a short drama or a PowerPoint presentation.

- 2** In '**The Wife of Bath's¹⁰ Tale**' a knight is to be punished for raping a young woman. The king of King Arthur decide not to have him executed immediately but to give him a chance to answer a question; the question asks what it is that women most desire. If he can answer within a year his life will be spared. He sets off to find the answer...

Task

Read a modern translation or a detailed summary of 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' to the knight. Find the correct answer and what happens on his return. Present the tale to the class as a PowerPoint presentation.

- 3** '**The Clerk's¹¹ Tale**' is about a ruler, Walter, who marries a poor woman, Griselda. She must obey him completely. After the birth of her children they are taken away, she is told that their marriage is to be annulled and she must prepare the wedding for a new bride. She agrees to everything as she had promised to be an obedient wife.

Task

By reading a modern translation or a detailed summary of the tale find out about Griselda. Present the tale to the class in the form of a PowerPoint slide show.

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⁹ A franklin was a landowner, but not a member of the aristocracy; such people were becoming more common in the 14th century.

¹⁰ This woman had already been married five times and may well have been on the lookout for a new husband. This suggests an independent spirit.

¹¹ A clerk was a student destined to become a priest and, therefore, unmarried.

What do we learn from the Marriage Group of tales?

Being familiar with these concepts will help you understand better the way marriage is portrayed in the *Canterbury Tales*.

GENTILLESSE

A type of behaviour which would usually indicate one was a well-bred person and *chivalrous*; from this comes the adjective *gentil*, which leads to our modern concept of 'the gentleman'. Gentillesse required, among other things, that one treated women with respect (but more in a sense that would appear patronising and sexist in our society). A *gentil* person, above all things, he or she was expected to keep his word. Knights were, of course, expected to show especially *gentil* behaviour but Chaucer is sometimes keen to show that less grand people can be capable of *gentillesse* too.

This term is probably not used often in Chaucer's society which is run by a *patriarchal society*. Although in some forms, some common inheritance of wealth only; women may have their fathers' permission to marry and property or wealth being expected to be passed on to the next generation. Women were expected to be obedient and to be devoted to the welfare and status of their husbands.

COURTLY LOVE

This term is often used when writing about literature in the Middle Ages. It describes a type of behaviour which was probably found more in stories than in real life. It is closely related to *gentillesse* and *chivalry*. A typical courtly love scenario would be of a man, perhaps a knight, whose love for a lady is driving him crazy. He may keep it secret and suffer in silence, or he may eventually 'confess' his love to her. She may then ignore him while he performs a difficult task which may take a long time and involve personal danger; the purpose is to prove the strength of his love and his worthiness. Of course, in reality most marriages were arranged as a business arrangement in such a patriarchal society. Sometimes courtly love is used by Chaucer to satirise the concept which Chaucer sometimes enjoyed satirising.

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Task – (A02; A03; A04; A05)

Making notes on the Marriage Group

Now that you have some knowledge of what happens in these tales and you have looked at the previous page, have a discussion with a partner, or in a small group, about the way the institution of marriage is dealt with in these tales.

Use the questions below to help guide your discussion.

After the discussion make some notes headed: **How Chaucer deals with the topic of marriage.**

1. In 'The Franklin's Tale' how does Dorigene show the characteristics of a 'good' wife?
2. How well does 'The Franklin's Tale' illustrate the concepts of courtesy and chivalry?
3. What does 'The Franklin's Tale' and 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' tell us about the importance of gentillesse?
4. The Clerk doesn't actually endorse the treatment given to Griselda in his tale; but the Merchant in his 'Prologue' comments on her 'grete pacience'. What does Griselda's acceptance of her husband's treatment contribute to the discussion of marriage?
5. Do you think the ending of 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' is a victory for women?

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Section B

One – ‘The Merchant’s Prologue’

The prologue to this tale is short and serves as a link with the preceding tale from of his own marriage and is then asked by the Host to tell his own tale.

Task 1– (AO2)

Read the first 27 lines of ‘The Merchant’s Prologue’. Look at the statements in the text which supports them.

1. The Merchant expresses his misery in a dramatic manner as his Prologue begins.
2. Chaucer shapes our view of the Merchant’s character as outspoken and honest.
3. The Merchant’s use of language betrays his misogyny and a view of women as property.
4. The Merchant seeks to identify with his audience, claiming that his experience is common.
5. Chaucer uses irony in the opening of the second verse paragraph to make the Merchant seem a little foolish.
6. Overall the Merchant is presented as a character skilled in using words to manipulate.
7. This prologue illustrates the Host’s skill in managing the pilgrims.

Task 2– (AO3)

In Chaucer’s era the merchant class was a growing sector of society; in a world where status had previously been strictly determined by a feudal system there would have been some suspicion about people who were redefining the social order and gaining personal wealth, especially as they did not own land.

Look again at the description of the Merchant in ‘The General Prologue’ and look at his own Prologue. Discuss with a partner how Chaucer indicates that he is representative of the beginnings of a new middle class which might not be entirely reliable or trusted by others. In what sense do both extracts suggest his skills as a merchant? Make notes on what you have discussed.

Find the above mentioned Chaucer’s Prologue.



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Two – ‘The Merchant’s Tale’

The story of a knight, who we later discover is called Januarie, is introduced, but in a lengthy **digression** (a characteristic feature of *The Canterbury Tales*).

Task 1 – discussion (AO2; AO3)

With a partner or in a small group try **reading** the lines 33 to 54 aloud, as though in a classroom.

If you want to read a modern English translation of the tale before you start your discussion, visit [zigzag-education.co.uk/923-Merchant-Tale-Modern](https://www.zigzag-education.co.uk/923-Merchant-Tale-Modern)

After reading aloud **discuss** the following points and **make a few notes** on:

- ❖ the 'Prologue' to the story, why Lombardy might be an appropriate setting
- ❖ the perceived status of the knight;
- ❖ how he has spent his life;
- ❖ possible reasons for his wanting to marry;
- ❖ his perception of what married life might be;
- ❖ how the narrative voice (of the Merchant) shapes the reader's view of the tale;
- ❖ the 'Tale' ends with the Knight being made a fool of – consider how the Merchant's opening lines.

Task 2 – reading (AO3)

Read from line 55 to 80. Here the Merchant appears to be giving his own views on marriage. As you read, consider: how these thoughts relate to what he said about his own marriage in his 'Prologue'; what he seems to value in marriage; and the effect on the reader of the rhetorical questions.

Annotate your text with the observations you have made.

Read on from line 81 to 98. By referring to Theophrastus (Theophrastus) and his views on marriage the Merchant is able to give some 'authority' to his views, showing he has considered what learned people have said but still can defend his own point of view. There is a terrible irony in the Merchant's comments, as Theophrastus' words foreshadow something of Januarie's fate! **Check the meaning of** *cokewold* (line 94) – 'cuckold' in modern English. This will be a key word in the unfolding of the 'Tale'.

Key Idea

The Merchant's Tale
The Merchant's Tale is a story of a knight who is married to a woman who is quite a bit older than he is. The Merchant is a bit of a hypocrite, as he is quite a bit older than his wife is. He is also a bit of a hypocrite, as he is quite a bit older than his wife is. He is also a bit of a hypocrite, as he is quite a bit older than his wife is.

Find

about the Merchant's views on marriage. Visit [zigzag-education.co.uk/923-Merchant-Tale-Modern](https://www.zigzag-education.co.uk/923-Merchant-Tale-Modern)

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Task 3— reading and thinking about the text (AO2)

There is more praise for the institution of marriage in the next two verse paragraphs. The character is subtly shaped by Chaucer in the first one, below. Try to **make two** comments on the text. If you do this, then annotate your text. There are some suggestions on the next page for discussion.

Extract 1

A wyf is goddes yifte verrailly

Alle other maner yiftes hardily,

As londes, rentes, pasture, or commune,

Or moebles, alle ben yiftes of fortune

That passen as a shadowe on a wall.

But dredelees by my speke I shal,

A wyf wol laste, and in thyn hous endure,

Wel lenger than thee list, paraventure.

(Lines 99–106)

In the second verse paragraph (lines 107–124, below) discuss with a partner the use of metaphor. Try to use some, or all, of the terminology which is given on the next page to help you.

Extract 2

Mariage is a ful gret sacrament;

He which that hath no wyf, I holde him shent;

He liveth helpeles and al desolat,

I speke of folk in seculer estaat.

And herke why, I sey nat this for noght,

That womman is for mannes help y-wroght.

The hye god, whan he hadde Adam made,

And saugh him al allone, bely-naked,

God of his grete goodnesse seyde than,

'Lat us now make an heere of us'

Lyk to himself; and thus heere was made'

Heer may ye se, and heer may ye see'

That wyf is mannes help and comfort'

His paradys terrestre and his hevene'

So buxom and so vertuous'

They moste nedes live in wedded'

O flesh they been, and o flesch they be'

at; but oon herte, in oon'

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Thinking about **Extract 1** – How did you do?

- ❖ Note how the language used reflects the Merchant's concerns; by using language to comment on the 'value' of a wife we are given hints about what he really thinks.
- ❖ Notice also the 'double-edged' comment in the final two lines. Is the Merchant will never be free of his own wife?

Terminology you could use when discussing **Extract 2**:

- ❖ Religious diction
- ❖ Use of hyperbole
- ❖ Irony
- ❖ Use of repetition
- ❖ Sententious tone
- ❖ Lack of self-awareness
- ❖ Biblical allusion

Having looked closely at both verse paragraphs you should have developed some thoughts about how Chaucer wants us to view the character of the Merchant. His 'Tale', which is soon to continue, is about a man whose wife makes a mockery of their marriage; and the discrepancy between the ideal marriage (from a traditional, patriarchal point of view) and the reality is what makes 'The Merchant's Tale' so humorous.

Unsure

They are allowing it in sections indicated

Notice how the Merchant's views of an ideal marriage contrast sharply with the ideal which he gives in the 'Prologue'. Chaucer gives an extra dimension to the work by showing how the Merchant persists with an idealised view of marriage despite his problems. By showing how the Merchant persists with an idealised view of marriage Chaucer increases the humorous potential of the 'Tale'. The reader may ask is the Merchant idealism; is he unaware of the irony or is he a truly disappointed man who wants to escape what he has been let down?

Whatever you think, you will be sure to notice how the tone in the next 75 lines of the 'Tale' is its praise of marriage – with perhaps a few reservations!

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Three – Finishing the Digression

In lines 125 to 149 the Merchant continues to digress as he presents a picture of life that the reader may be offended by this description of subservience and obedience in wife. An audience in Chaucer's time might notice some sarcasm in the Merchant's words. The digression means used by Chaucer to keep his audience interested.

Task 1– (AO1; AO2; AO3)

Look at lines 125 to 149 with a partner. Imagine you are the Merchant, exasperated with your wife's life; prepare a reading aloud to impress the other pilgrims. You might like to show the patriarchal view of marriage, but is there also an element of self-pity? Is the final verse paragraph quite humorous? Offer to read the whole text, or part of it, to the class. The Merchant, then invite questions to be answered in role.

As you prepare your reading look out for some of the devices and techniques listed below. Chaucer achieves special effects through their use. After you have done the reading, discuss how it shapes the reader's view of the merchant in these lines.

- ❖ Rhetorical questions
- ❖ Religious exclamations
- ❖ Use of alliteration for emphasis
- ❖ Dramatising through use of direct speech
- ❖ Use of apostrophe
- ❖ Use of anaphora
- ❖ Exaggeration/hyperbole
- ❖ Bathos

Not sure?
If you need more
terms go to
www.zigzageducation.com

Task 2– (AO3; AO4)

As the digression finishes (ll. 150 to 180) the Merchant makes more biblical allusions. Find out what each of the women mentioned has done; there are a number of websites with lists of women in the Bible (e.g. [zzed.uk/923-Women-Bible](http://www.zzed.uk/923-Women-Bible) and [zzed.uk/923-Wiki-Women-Bible](http://www.zzed.uk/923-Wiki-Women-Bible)). Do you see any irony in the examples the Merchant has chosen?

The ideal of marriage in a Christian society is asserted in the final verse paragraph:

Love wel thy wyf, as Crist loved his chirche

If thou lovest thyself, thou lovest thy wyf;

which reminds readers of the Roman Catholic teaching that the Church is seen as 'the bride' of Christ. How this pious image is undermined by the sarcasm, even cynicism, of the last line of the digression.

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Four – Back to the Story

The Merchant brings us back to the narrative, with an almost casual, intimate tone

For which this Januarie, of whom I tolde

Follow this return to the story by reading lines 181 to 257, use a modern translation to understand the meaning. Januarie is explaining why he wants to marry and what he is instructing his friends to find one, rather than one might ask a friend to get something for him.

Task 1 – Januarie wants a wife (AO2)

Use your knowledge of Januarie, and what he says he requires in a wife, to produce a list of characteristics that should begin with something like

 Knight (r)mour?

Looking for Love

Knight, 60 years old, very wealthy, bachelor, Pavia, seeks wife. Merchant

Task 2 – Looking a little deeper (AO1; AO2)

Having read these lines and done the task above you should have a better understanding of his character and desires. It's now time to look more closely at how Chaucer shapes our view of the Merchant's narration.

Find evidence in the text to support the following statements; when you have done this, underline the evidence and make notes in your text.

- ❖ Marriage is seen as a last minute attempt to lead a more wholesome life
- ❖ Despite the religious considerations he is primarily interested in sex and money
- ❖ He is afraid of being outwitted and of not having any peace and quiet if he marries
- ❖ The imagery used to talk about his tastes suggests he views women as a commodity
- ❖ He makes himself look ridiculous by using rhetorical techniques to 'preach' to himself
- ❖ There is dramatic irony in what he says about controlling a wife – note the irony of the simile!
- ❖ The Merchant is keen to bring out Januarie's naivety; do we see parallels between him and Januarie becoming married?
- ❖ Natural imagery is used to make him appear more ridiculous when he talks about his wife; there is also a terrible irony here when we realise later how his cuckolding of Januarie is foreshadowed.



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Five – A Big Debate

After Januarie has spoken about his intentions, his brothers, Placebo and Justinus marriage. Read lines 257 to 354, using a modern translation to help your understand the names Chaucer has given the brothers (they are Latin).

Task 1– Placebo's contribution (AO2; AO3)

Make notes and annotate your text on what Placebo has to say (lines 266–306).

- ❖ Placebo's role in life and why his advice is appropriate to it (could Chaucer's narrative be making a satirical point about a priest whose job is to advise?)
- ❖ the appropriateness of Placebo's advice
- ❖ how useful his advice is

Januarie's brother, Justinus, has much more to say about marriage; in lines 307 to 353, these enable the modern reader to gain a clearer insight into how patriarchal society; the modern reader may also find humour in the way men point out perhaps this is meant to amuse contemporary readers too. You may also detect humour in the comments Justinus makes about his marriage.

Task 2– What Justinus says (AO2)

Read lines **307 to 353**, use a modern translation to help you if you need it then copy out below.

According to Justinus a bad wife could be

A drunkard

According to Justinus a good wife should be...

According to Justinus a marriage may be difficult or not what it seems, for example...

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Task 3– (AO2)

Discuss the following questions with a partner, then annotate the text with your answers.

1. Which examples of language (e.g. imagery) would best illustrate what you think is the nature of this patriarchal society?
2. Where can we see echoes of the narrator's own life in this section?
3. Towards the end of Justinus's contribution to the 'debate' there is a warning. What is it?
4. Where, if anywhere, do you find humour in this section of the text?

Task 4– Putting it in context* (AO3, AO4)

Looking at the other tales in the **Marriage Group** we can put 'The Merchant's Tale' in context. Work with a partner and with a partner discuss how ideas and expectations can be compared and contrasted with the others in the group.

Prepare a wall chart or poster to show your findings; display it in the classroom.

Points to consider for Task 4

- ❖ The emphasis on equality and gentillesse shown in 'The Franklin's Tale' may suggest both a traditional and a modern approach to marriage; are these ideals reflected in 'The Merchant's Tale'?
- ❖ Although the illustration of wifely obedience in 'The Clerk's Tale' may be typical of a patriarchal society, remember the appeal of this tale to the Merchant in 'The Merchant's Tale'.
- ❖ Consider how 'The Wife of Bath's Tale' and its insistence on women's desire is received by a male audience.
- ❖ Do all four tales suggest that women are not to be trusted and can be a threat to men under male control?
- ❖ Does the discussion of what makes a suitable wife suggest the mercantile values of 'The Merchant's Tale'?
- ❖ How might the values and concerns of the other narrators be reflected in 'The Merchant's Tale'?

Group
Activity
or
Class
Meeting
Use

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Six – Januarie’s Choice

A few more lines of dialogue follow Justinus’s warning. It’s clear that Januarie wants to know about what others say; notice how the two short verse paragraphs, the abrupt dialogue, and the example the adverb ‘sodeynly’) give the impression of a speedy move towards what is to come.

The narrator’s description of Januarie’s thoughts as he contemplates his choice highlights his expectations of what is to come in lines 365 to 404. For the next task we shall discuss this in more detail.

Task 1 – Exploring Januarie’s mind (AO2: AC1)

The aim of this activity is to examine how Chaucer’s language shapes our view of Januarie and what is to follow.

After discussion with your classmates and/or your teacher choose **either** lines 365 to 375 or lines 376 to 385 in pairs produce an exploded version of the text with annotation to highlight some of the use of language and structure.

You will need a photocopy of the appropriate lines enlarged to 22-point text; this should be the middle of an A3 sheet (landscape) leaving plenty of room on each side for annotation. It should begin to look something like this:

Inside Januarie’s Mind – lines 365 to 385

Notice order in which he lists her qualities; use of anaphora emphasises a business-like approach to the process, maybe reflecting the narrator’s values?

And when that he was in his bed ybroun

He purtreied in his herte and in his thowght

Hir fresshe beautee and hir age tene

Hir middle smal, hir armes longe and stree

Hir wise governaunce, hir gentillesse

Hir womanly beringe, and hir sadnesse

And so forth that he on hire was . . .



On the next page are some ideas which you might include. Don’t look at these until you have finished your poster! Don’t add any of these unless you agree and feel able to justify them. When you are ready to talk to the class about your poster; be sure you can talk not just about the ideas but also about the language used (making sure to employ correct terminology) but also about the way such ideas are used to shape the reader’s response to the text.

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How did you do?

On this page are some ideas about use of language and structure in the two extracts; you will probably have thought of many other points to make.

Lines 365 to 386	Line
❖ Women are reduced to sex objects in Januarie's mind through reference to his fantasies of shapes and faces.	❖ Despite immaturity, thinking impressions of anaphora
❖ Chaucer uses the demeaning simile of a mirror in a marketplace to illustrate how important is appearance and how women are portrayed as objects.	❖ Januarie's order in qualities
❖ The qualities of different women are assessed as though Januarie is shopping.	❖ Arrogant choice of diction time in
❖ The aphorism, 'love is blind' serves to foreshadow later events and has a literal as well as metaphorical meaning here.	❖ Sense of as he was quickly enjambed (e.g. 'h

The Bride to Be

Januarie's choice is called May, although we aren't given her name at this point; obviously reflect the relative ages of the couple to be, suggesting winter and spring have her name, but we don't hear from her, her feelings are not voiced and, it is known that she is young, lives in the same town and is famous for her beauty. He knows the fact that she is of lower social status than Januarie,

... that of beautee hadde greet renoun,
 Al were it so she were of smal degree;
 Suffiseth him hir yowthe and hir beautee.

Januarie is convinced that happiness will follow and that it is God's will; only one turns to his friends for help. As he is expecting a blissful life on earth with his new bride, he is denied everlasting bliss in heaven?

... quod he, 'herd seyde, ful yore ago,
 There may no man han parfite blisses two –
 This is to seye, in erthe and eek on hevene.

Januarie's naivety and ignorance about the realities of married life may amuse the narrator's experiences and those of Justinus; there is dramatic irony here too about what is to come.

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Task 2– Understanding Januarie’s dilemma (AO2)

With a partner read lines 425 to 476 where Januarie explains his concerns and Justinus replies, side by side as below, list the points which each makes in modern English.

Januarie’s worries about marriage	Justinus’s reply
<p>Even if I remain free of all the seven deadly sins I may not get to heaven because...</p>	<p>There’s no problem because you may end up repenting your married life before you die...</p>

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Task 3– Thinking about tone (AO2; AO1)

When you have explained what each character is saying about marriage, discuss how the language shapes the reader’s response.

You will probably notice how earnest Januarie is, you may notice hyperbole in his questioning hints at his inexperience and naivety, but above all he is confident and is like! If the ending of ‘The Merchant’s Tale’ is to have a comic effect the main character must fall – and you are probably familiar with the saying ‘Pride comes before a fall’!

There is comic content in what Justinus says too. Pay special attention to the simple ascent into heaven. You may wish to discuss whether you find his tone sardonic or not. After your discussion make notes in your text to show how Chaucer, through his distinctive voices to these two characters and to shape the reader’s response to them.

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Seven – The Wedding



Wedding Invitation

You are cordially invited to the wedding

Januarie and May

At the castle of Januarie, Pavia, on

The wedding ceremony is described very briefly after the Merchant has told us the marriage has been secretly arranged. The description of the religious service is a matter-of-factly guided.

The wedding feast is given much more attention with a lavish description of the

Task 1– (A02)

Read lines 488 to 496 then try to explain what techniques Chaucer uses to create here. Why do you think the religious aspect of the wedding is dealt with in this way? Use the suggestions on the following page. Annotate your text when you have finished.

Task 2– (A02; A04)

Read lines 497 to 529 and answer the following questions:

1. Why do you think Chaucer includes reference to Greek mythology?
2. Find and comment on three different techniques which Chaucer uses to create these lines.
3. What does the presence of Venus contribute to the effect of this extract?
4. What is the effect of the narrator speaking in the second person between these lines?
5. How do you respond to these lines?

*When tender youthe hath wedded stouping age,
Ther is swich mirthe that it may nat be writen.*

Task 3– Short task: Januarie's anxiety (A02)

As the wedding feast comes to an end, Januarie becomes anxious about his performance. He might expect a man so much older than his bride to be worried about satisfying her. Read lines 529 to 549, do you find anything surprising here?

Notice that Chaucer is giving us Januarie's thoughts directly in the first person. What effect does this have? Is he again being reminded of the old adage 'Pride comes before a fall'? A lack of self-awareness? Comment on the humour of this tale.

Annotate the text with your thoughts.

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Task 1 – how did you do?

- ❖ Regular rhythm inverted so line starts with a stressed syllable, helps create strident tone
- ❖ Business-like tone in addressing the bride – factual
- ❖ Repetition of ‘and’ suggests priest’s actions are mechanical, a listing effect, not what reader might consider appropriate for a wedding
- ❖ Repeated lines beginning in same way (anaphora) result in a dull, lifeless mood
- ❖ Diction suggests lack of genuine interest in part of the priest
- ❖ Pronouns used in preference to proper nouns, distancing effect

But finally y

That to the chire

For to receyve

Forth comth the preest,

And bad hir be ly

In wisdom and i

And seyde his

And crouched hem, and

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Task 2 – How did you do?

Some suggestions for answers.

1. Chaucer may wish to portray the Merchant as wanting to appear educated like some of the aristocratic and better educated pilgrims.
2.
 - i. There is a strong appeal to the senses; for example, in the reference to instruments.
 - ii. Use of hyperbole, achieved, for example, through employing superlatives (l.502).
 - iii. Chaucer uses quite long sentences (e.g. lines 510 to 519) where the effect is one of never-ending excess.

3. Reference to Venus, Roman goddess of love and fertility, is appropriate to the Merchant's tale, humorous when we remember the disparity in the ages of Januarie and May.

... Venus laugheth upon every wight,

For Januarie was bicombe hir knight

Perhaps the gods are having a laugh at the expense of the mortals.

4. The narrator is here ‘addressing’ Martianus Capella, who was famous for writing about the marriage of Philology and Mercury. Find out more at zzed.uk/923-Capella because of the discrepancy in status and grandeur between the two couples; the discrepancy in age between Januarie and May; he is also satirising the ‘over-the-top’ nature of the Merchant's tale. Chaucer also seems to be showing the narrator again trying to show off his knowledge to the reader.
5. Coming after a reference to the marriage of Philology and Mercury, the narrator is here; does the word *mirth* suggest that we are meant to share their joy in laughing at the mismatched couple? After such a grand description of the Merchant's tale, the effect here is of bathos.

Remember to annotate your text when you have finished.

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Eight – The Wedding Night

Januarie is keen to finish the feast and for the guests to leave. At this point in the tale we hear of Damyan, Januarie's squire, who has fallen hopelessly in love with May and retires to his room – very much in the tradition of *courtly love*!

Task 1– (AO2)

Read lines 556 to 582 and with a partner discuss and make notes on:

- ❖ how Damyan's condition is described (compare how his love is described in comparison to that of Januarie's);
- ❖ what variations you notice in narrative technique;
- ❖ the change in tone beginning at line 571 – consider how it is achieved and its effect.

When you finish, check this with suggestions on the next page and annotate your copy.

Task 2– (AO1; AO2)

Although Januarie is keen to get to bed as quickly as possible, the pace of the narrative slows here; the Merchant describes the sunset in lengthy, roundabout terms, a technique known as circumlocution or periphrasis. Again we see Chaucer allowing the character of the Merchant to emerge, showing the audience that he is as capable as any person of speaking in an educated manner, using various rhetorical techniques. **Read lines 583 to 605** and make notes in your text on the description of nightfall and on Januarie's preparations (do you find anything surprising in these preparations in the light of what he said about himself earlier in the text?).

Task 3– May's night of passion! (AO2)

The description of what happens in bed is full of humour and innuendo. Read the extract (lines 606 to 642) on the next page, then match the comments which follow with the bolded sections of the text.

1. A mood of bathos emerges towards the end of the extract, as Januarie is presented as looking ridiculous.
2. Animal imagery is used to ridicule Januarie's efforts.
3. An unflattering simile to describe Januarie's appearance undermines the description of how he treats her.
4. Repeated use of personal and possessive pronouns shows up the one-sidedness of this relationship.
5. The narrator hints at sympathy with May's disappointment – helping us to understand her later actions.
6. A certain innuendo suggests both his going to sleep and a sexual innuendo.
7. May is presented like an inanimate object, achieved through use of the passive voice, hard alliteration and a lifeless simile.
8. Diction used by Januarie and the narrator suggests an unromantic approach to his lovemaking.
9. A sequence of lines beginning with the same word creates a lifeless, dull effect in tension with the words used to describe Januarie's joy.

When you have completed this, annotate your copy of the text with the comments.

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Task 3 – May's night of passion!

Comments

The bryde was **brought a-bedde as stille as stoon;**
 And whan the bed was with the preest y-blessed,
 Out of the chambre hath every wight him dressed.
 And Ianuarie hath faste in armes take
His fresshe May, his paradys, his make.
He lulleth hir, **he** kisseth hir ful ofte
 With **thikke bristles of his berd**, so close,
Lyk to the skin of houndis, sharp as brere,
 For he was chaungefulle in his manere.
 He rubbeth aboute hir tendre face,
 And seyde thus, 'allas! I moot trespase
 To yow, my spouse, and yow gretly offende,
Er tyme come that I wil doun descende.
 But nathelees, considereth this,' quod he,
 'Ther **nis no werkman, what-so-ever he be,**
That may bothe werke wel and hastily;
 This wol be doon at leyser parfitly.
 It is no fors how longe that we pleye;
 In trewe wedlok wedded be we tweye;
 And blessed be the yok that we been inne,
 For in our actes we mowe do no sinne.
 A man may do no sinne with his wyf,
 Ne hurte him-selven with his owene knyf;
 For we han leve to pleye us by the lawe.'
 Thus **laboureth he** til that the day gan dawe;
And than he taketh a sop in fyn clarree,
And upright in his bed than sitteth he,
And after that he sang ful loude and cleere,
And kiste his wyf, and wasle wantoun chere.
 He was alightful of ragerye,
 And ful of meryte as a **flekke**d pye.
 The slakke skin aboute his nekke shaketh,
 Whyl that he sang; so chaunteth he **and craketh.**
 But **god wot what that May thoughte in hir herte,**
 Whan she him saugh up sittinge in his sherte,
 In his **night-cappe, and with his nekke lene;**
She preyseth nat his pleying worth a bene.

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Task 1 – suggestions for answers:

- ❖ Damyan is portrayed as floored by his passion for May; note the diction, the sibilance in: *swelte...swowned...stood...So...sore* which draw attention increased by his portrayal as a victim of Venus in line 565. Unlike Januarie woman, Damyan is showing the signs of being smitten by courtly love as he takes pity on him.
- ❖ The narrator stands aside and addresses the audience directly in line 568, drawing attention to his craft as he shapes the narrative; this also allows a dramatic change of tone to follow.
- ❖ The Merchant uses the technique of apostrophe to engage the audience, creating a more fevered, intense tone to emphasise the danger which is to follow 'O perilous fyr... / O perilous fire... / O servant traitour...'. The excited tone is also enhanced by the repetition through use of parallelism the strength of the simile likening Damyan's love to fire. 'O perilous fyr... / O perilous fire... / O servant traitour...'. The excited tone is also enhanced by the repetition through use of parallelism the strength of the simile likening Damyan's love to fire.

Task 2 – suggestions:

- ❖ The metaphorical description of dusk, including, for example, the personification of the sun, seems to raise the tone here, as well as showing a narrator who wants to be knowledgeable to be able to tell a more worthy or serious tale; the contrast between the elevated language here and the more down-to-earth events of the rest of the story is strangely inappropriate!
- ❖ Januarie seems to have learnt a lot about aphrodisiacs in a Latin book; the confidence in what he said earlier about his sexual prowess – another way in which the narrator, shows Januarie's lack of self-knowledge.

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Nine – Damyan

Damyan continues to suffer in the mode of a courtly lover whose case is, or should be, again uses the technique of speaking directly to one of his characters, warning D

Task 1– (AO2)

Read lines 654 to 672. **Discuss** with a partner the tone of the words spoken by the narrator ‘directly’ to Damyan in the first verse paragraph and how this tone is achieved. Do you see any irony in what the Merchant says to Damyan about May?

Highlight all the words and phrases in the second verse paragraph which suggest Damyan is being presented as a courtly lover. Do you think the narrator’s tone is sincere? Annotate your text.

Four days later...

After observing the custom of staying away from everyone for four days after the Januarie at dinner. Januarie has finally noticed that Damyan is absent and, in lines 685 to 703, expresses concern for him. It is in keeping with the lack of understanding and self-knowledge that Januarie praises his squire in such lavish terms;

He is as wys, discreet, and as secree

As any man I woot of his degree,

And therto manly, and eek servisable...

He then instructs May to visit him, thus setting in train the events which leads to

Task 2– (AO2)

Read lines 685 to 733. **Discuss** the following with a partner, then **annotate** the text.

- ❖ Check the meaning of *dramatic irony* and think whether it is appropriate.
- ❖ Notice the recurring reference to gentillesse in lines 704 to 716, what is its effect?
- ❖ Do you think that either Januarie or Damyan could be truly described as a courtly lover? (Consider account Damyan’s words in lines 730/731 before you answer this)?
- ❖ How does Chaucer use language to create a pitiful picture of Damyan on lines 704 to 716? How convinced this is genuine?
- ❖ How does Chaucer shape the reader’s response to May in these lines?

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Task 1 – How did you do?

In the lines which the narrator addresses directly to Damyan he seems to be treating him as if he were a friend, allowing his narrator to use direct speech and by using the second person Chaucer gives the text a personal quality and making a break for the audience from the third-person narrative; the narrator, however, says no, endorsed in his mind, it would seem, by the use of the adjective *fresshe*, a word which presents the narrator as naive but perhaps it is part of the comic effect and should be read as a hint of the potential faithfulness as a wife.

The hyperbole of presenting Damyan *sike*, about to *dieth for desir*, a victim of *Ver*, a victim of courtly love. (This is made more ridiculous when we see his later actions!) In line 1106 the narrator writes verse for his beloved *faire fresshe lady* and keeps it close to his *herte*.

Task 2 – How did you do?

When you annotate your text consider the following points:

- ❖ Januarie sees him as a *gentil man* – the reader, remembering his appearance, sees him differently;
- ❖ Januarie's complete lack of understanding of Damyan's character is highlighted by the narrator's description of him as a young man who is about to cuckold him;
- ❖ by referring to Damyan as a *gentil man* he highlights his own lack of perception (which becomes literally true when Januarie is later struck blind);
- ❖ despite his concern for Damyan, Januarie's resolve to visit him after dinner is a sign of her judgment and, of course, a lack of vigour – needing a rest after dinner;
- ❖ despite being portrayed as a suffering courtly lover with language appropriate to the genre (alliteration and hyperbole emphasising his sighs *Save that he siketh won* *Mercy*), Damyan is underhand in passing a note to May and shows a self-interest in the indication of devoted love by showing how concerned he is for his own *thing be kid*;
- ❖ until these lines May has been presented as inert and speechless; for example, the narrator's feelings for Januarie and the narrator points out that he can't imagine her engaged in lovemaking. Verbs in the passive mood have been used for example, she *stoone* (l.606);
- ❖ in going to Damyan's room with her women, May is obeying her husband but for the first time we see her taking action, expressed in brisk terms: *hath straight hir wey yholde* (l.720); at the bedside she seems quick to accept and hide the love letter; by showing that she hid it *in with her bosom* there is a foreshadowing of the intimacy which is to occur later; there seems to be a hint of eagerness to get to know the man whose name she has just heard; which is at odds with the constant use of the adjective *fresshe* by the narrator, a word which reminds us of the disparity in the ages of the two young men but may also have an ironic purpose, highlighting an innocence which she lacks.

Go to the Court in 'The Merchant's Prologue and Tale' and see how the narrator's words for the did not translate into a couple.

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Ten – May's Response

May goes straight from Damyan's bedside to her husband's bed; keen to read Damyan's letter, she needs the lavatory; there she reads his letter, rips it to shreds and throws it down the drain. The narrator undermines the gentil, courtly love genre!

Task 1 – (AO2)

Read the lines below (743 to 754) and consider how the narrator presents May's attention to the bolded words and phrases. Do you feel that we are being made to sympathise with her? When you have finished, annotate your copy of the text.

Who **studieth** now but **fairer** than she May?

Adoun by **olde** I may the line lay,

That sleep that the **coughe** hath him awaked.

Anon he preyed hire strepen hire al naked;

He wolde of hire, he seyde, **han som plesaunce**,

And seyde hir clothes dide him **encumbrance**,

And she obeyeth, **be hire life or looth**.

But lest that precious folk be with me wroth,

How that he wroghte, I dar nat to yow telle;

Or wheither hire thought it **paradis or helle**,

But here I lete hem werken in hir wise

Til evensong rong, and that they moste arise.

Task 2 – (AO2)

Make a few notes about the character of the **Merchant** and how Chaucer is shaping him in the lines above. Consider:

- ❖ where the narrator's sympathies appear to lie;
- ❖ his awareness of his role as a storyteller;
- ❖ the humour in his apparent reluctance to offend his audience.

The Decision

In lines 755–760 May's dilemma is quickly resolved. The narrator presents the decision as unknown, suggesting it may have been chance, natural causes, and astrological influences. Nevertheless, there is a sense of *tongue in cheek* as he 'pity' her decision to *take pity* on Damyan.

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Task 3– (AO2; AO3)

Read lines 755 to 782 and answer the following questions. Annotate your text after on the next page before doing so.

1. How does May's behaviour contribute to the undermining and ridiculing?
2. How would you describe the tone with which the narrator describes May?
3. Does your view of May change in reading these lines?

Task 4– (AO1)– Getting creative

Work with a partner on this task:

Imagine you are *either* May *or* Damyan. *As May*, write about your thoughts prior to the event, during the wedding night and what happens afterwards. Write in the form of a letter to be more up to date, a *love letter* (e.g.). *As Damyan*, write about events from May's perspective until she brings you home. In your love letter, you may choose to include a copy of your thoughts in a *letter to an 'agony aunt'*.

Read your work to the class or to a small group – for each task be prepared to justify your reference to the text!

Dear Diary
Today I met an old man who...

*To: the Problem Page,
Since the day my master
knight, brought home*



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How did you do?

Task 2

You might consider:

- ❖ Narrator's sympathies apparently with May (reflected in positive tone of contrasted with reference to Januarie's age and his coughing; use of rhetorical agreement on part of audience; implication that the experience might be
- ❖ self-conscious storytelling reflecting on plight of his characters, seen in u
- ❖ pretence of deference to more prudish members of audience, *precious for* lovemaking is amusing, especially when seen in the light of what the narrator the false modesty shows his sense of humour.

Task 3

Points to consider:

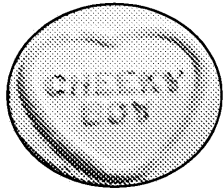
1. There is a suggestion that she has become obsessed and is only concerned lines *from ... the she ne drive kan / The remembrance for to doon h* ent by her willingness to love him more than any other man, even shir ignoring her marriage vows without the slightest hint of concern she shows no traces of *gentillesse*. The traditional object of a lover's *court* much more prudence!
2. The narrator's tone is amusing, verging on sarcastic, as he piles praise on 'compassionate'. The hyperbole goes so far as to show her as a life saver narrator's own marital circumstances as he generalises about women's b remember the warnings of Justinus.
3. The first time that May shows independent action is to secure her own s about her husband's efforts in bed you may have some sympathy for her here as defying the strictures of a patriarchal society and offending again

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Eleven – Damyan's Recovery



In lines 783 to 808 the pair of illicit lovers move quickly; May Damyan recovers with remarkable speed.

Task 1 – looking closely at how Chaucer's language and structure

Read lines 783 to 808 then match the phrases from the text in the left column with the right column.

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. ... fulfilled of pitee | a. Soft alliteration draws attention to May's |
| 2. ... graunteth him hire a prayr grace | b. Catalogue of three verbs shows May's |
| 3. ... she mighte ... in must suffise | c. Ironical comment from narrator about the |
| 4. ... she ... with this letter down she threste | d. Inverted syntax and staccato rhythm |
| 5. ... nought of it wiste | e. Reflects suddenness of May's recovery |
| 6. Up riseth Damyan | f. Eagerness to have May's attention |
| 7. ... kembeth...preyneth...piketh | g. Language of courtly love, lack of |
| 8. ... al that his lady lust and liketh | h. Motivation, ironic comment on May's |
| 9. ... as lowe / As evere dide a dogge for the bowe | i. Diction suggests May's |
| 10. For craft is al ... | j. Animal imagery reflects May's behaviour; assonance |

Task 2 – (AO1; AO2)

Draw and label a cartoon image of Damyan for a classroom A3-size wall poster.

Aim to indicate the following in your work:

- ❖ his household role;
- ❖ his smart refreshed appearance – contrasted with his 'illness';
- ❖ his love-struck nature;
- ❖ his two-faced nature – to Januarie – don't forget the different kind of animal imagery which the narrator has used to show his character!

If you prefer not to draw you may wish to use magazine cuttings, etc. to create a collage or composite image reflecting his character – use your imagination!

Be prepared to justify what you have done when you present your poster to the class.

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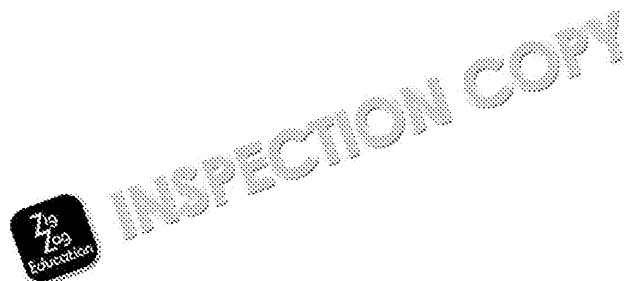
How did you do?

Task 1

1: e
2: i
3: f
4: h
5: a

6: d
7: b
8: j
9: g
10: c

Now you have completed this task, annotate your text with the comments.



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Twelve – A Wonderful Garden

Following the epicurean philosophy that pleasure is life's chief pursuit, Januarie and May can enjoy themselves, even making love there in the summer. The garden terms; at one point the narrator says that the writer of *The Romance of the Rose* (a poem in which a young man falls in love with a rosebud in a dream or vision) was describing it – perhaps another instance of Chaucer making his narrator wanting interested in money (remember the reference to Martianus Capella when the wife says line 520).

Task 1 – (A01; A04)

Read the description of the garden in lines 819 to 844 and with a partner discuss classical mythology. For each, using the information below as a starting point, prepare a presentation for the class – use any method you think appropriate (e.g. PowerPoint, poster, or table) and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the narrative. When you have finished the task



Proserpina wife of
Pluto, begin to find out
more at:

[zzed.uk/923-Proserpina](https://www.zzed.uk/923-Proserpina)

Priapus
fertility
 [zzed.uk/923-Priapus](https://www.zzed.uk/923-Priapus)



Pluto King of the
Underworld. Find out more
at:
 [zzed.uk/923-Pluto](https://www.zzed.uk/923-Pluto)

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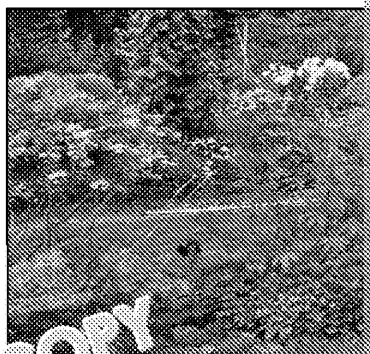


Task 2– (A02)

In the two verse paragraphs, lines 830 to 856, there is a big contrast in tone. In the first we read of Januarie's happiness in the garden with May and in the next of a terrible event.

In this task you are going to look closely at Chaucer's craft as a writer, analysing how he shapes the reader's response.

Answer the questions with a partner, make rough notes, check the suggestions on the following page and then annotate your text.



Lines 830 to 844

1. How does Januarie made to appear faintly ridiculous in the opening lines?
2. Comment on how structure and rhyme contribute to the sense of Januarie's wishes to suggest.
3. Why does the narrator emphasise the privacy of the arrangements?
4. What symbolism do you see in the locked gate?
5. How might the description of the garden and its occupants reflect the Garden of Eden? What is significant?

Lines 845 to 856

1. What rhetorical technique, repeated in these lines, creates a sense of shock and sorrow?
2. How effective do you find the use of an extended simile in these lines?
3. What is the effect of the rhetorical question in shaping our response to the narrator?
4. What technique is used in the last line to help create a hopeless mood?
5. Consider the appropriateness to the narrative as a whole of Januarie's becoming blind.

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How did you do?

Task 2 (Check these notes before you annotate your text)

Lines 830 to 844

1. Emphasis on his age at end of first line, contrasted with *pleye* at end of second line, emphasises his situation.
2. Rhyme of the onomatopoeic words *wiket* and *cliket* draws attention to his situation.
3. Privacy reminds reader of Januarie's lust and of his insecurity, doesn't want to be seen in his young wife. Makes outcome, when Damyan has sex with May, all the more shocking.
4. Locked gate symbolises locked access to May, he is her 'owner'.
5. Garden of Eden is paradise – in previous verse paragraph this garden has been compared to Eden. It is the place of supreme happiness for Januarie. Only the two of them, Januarie and Eve, are in it. Happiness is destroyed later when May, like Eve, commits a sin.

Lines 845 to 856

1. Apostrophe 'O mynster', creates an urgent alarming effect, changing the focus of the tale abruptly, and raises the audience's expectations. It also suggests that the narrator has sympathy for his character, Januarie.
2. The extended simile of the scorpion works because a scorpion is small and not easily detected, the sting is in the tail, at the end, and unexpected.
3. The rhetorical question in lines 853/854 suggests the narrator has pity for his character and helps to remind us of the unpredictability of life, which the tale depends on for its success.
4. The hard alliteration in *desireth he to dien* emphasises Januarie's seemingly hopeless condition at this point, drawing attention to death at the end of the verse paragraph.
5. Januarie has been blind in a metaphorical sense throughout: not seeing the truth about May; not understanding her distaste for his lovemaking; not recognising his true nature. His literal blindness becomes an emblem for his lack of awareness.

For the first time in the tale, the narrator is not a participant in the action. He is a witness to the events that are about to unfold.

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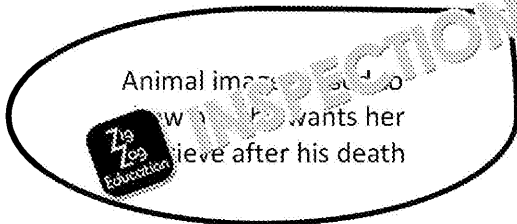
Thirteen – Januarie’s Distress

Now he is blind Januarie’s possessive and insecure nature is made even more apparent as he is worried his wife may *falle in som folye* (i.e. go astray) and that he even wishes for her death, after his death, in mourning for him. He comes up with a scheme which will allow him to have his cake and eat it – the might have of meeting Damyan.

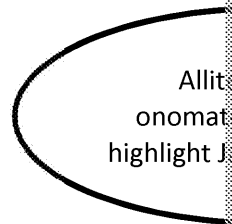
Task 1 – (AO2)

Read lines 857 to 884 with a partner and find a place in the text for each of the following. Once you have agreed on what goes where annotate your copy of the text.

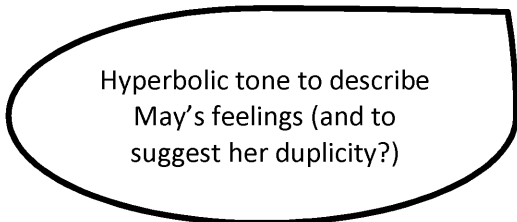
(a)



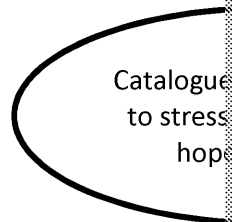
(b)



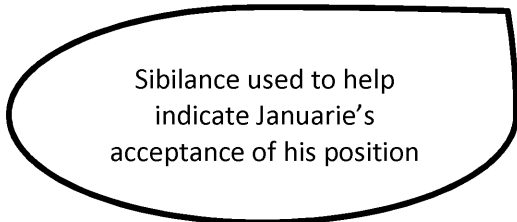
(c)



(d)



(e)



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Suggested answers:

(a) line 867; (b) lines 860-861; (c) lines 880-884; (d) lines 876-878; (e) line 870

Task 2– (AO2)

Read lines 884 to 919 and see how they move quite quickly and with quite a lot of variety in tone. We first hear of Damyan's plight, the narrator then speaks 'directly' to Januarie, commenting on his capacity for being deceived. This is followed by an account of how May makes an impression on the key, and then a reflection on the part of the narrator on how love will always triumph.

Make notes in your text on the following points.

- ❖ Sarcastic humour on narrator's part in use of hyperbole to describe Damyan's condition.
- ❖ Incongruous use of *fresshe* to describe May, an adjective repeatedly used in the text but especially inappropriate here, where it is juxtaposed with such underhand behaviour.
- ❖ Highlighting of Damyan's being duped by use of apostrophe and ironic simile/amusion.
- ❖ Ironic reference to *warm wex*, remembering that May is meant to be wax in Januarie's hands (find other references to wax in the tale – it is a recurring motif).
- ❖ Effectiveness of intertextual references (Pyramus and Thisbe*).

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Task 3– (AO1)

Working in groups of three prepare a reading of lines 884 to 919 accompanied by predicaments of the main characters. Offer to present your work to the class or to

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Fourteen – Back in the Garden

After May has been egging Januarie on to *pleye* once more in the garden, one morning he ‘sweet-talks’ her into what should be a private visit. Damyan is given signs by May to indicate that he should get in there first, using the copy of the key he has made from the wax imprint.

In the next tasks you will be looking closely at the language used by Januarie prior to the incident in the garden and considering what the effect of this may be on the reader.

Task 1 – (AO2)

(Don't forget to annotate your copy of the text when you have completed these tasks. Look at the suggestions on the next page.)

Read lines 931 to 936, where Januarie quotes scripture to entice May into the garden, and make notes on the following.

- Why might the Merchant be presenting Januarie as a scripture-quoting, sweet-talking lover at this point in the narrative?
- Do you see any dramatic irony here?
- Turtle doves were thought to be monogamous; might this add to the reader's enjoyment of these lines?

Find

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Task 2 – (AO2; AO3)

Read lines 937 to 943

- How do you respond to the narrator's comments on Januarie's language? (must necessarily debunk or ridicule the effect of his lines!)
- May's response is not to waste any time: comment on how she and Damyan's narrative.
- What is achieved by portraying Damyan as hiding quietly *under a bush*?

Task 3 – (AO2)

Read lines 944 to 972

- The entry into the garden is described abruptly. How does the language shape the romantic encounter?
- Januarie says a lot about his feelings and intentions towards May; itemise these in modern English.
- How do you think the narrator is shaping the reader's response to Januarie?

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How did you do?

Suggested points for annotating the text:

Task 1

- a) Januarie is about to be cuckolded and duped – the more he is seen as a sad man, the more his downfall and the more unacceptable will seem the behaviour. Maybe we will be encouraged to laugh at him all the more as we see him. This 'love talk' also makes a sharp contrast with the crude activity later in the tale.
- b) There is dramatic irony in his statement 'Thou hast me wounded in my honour' about the security of the garden.
- c) May is just about to give up monogamy! Note also the irony of her being 'wounded'.

Task 2

- a) Perhaps the Merchant is being ironic, showing that he is not taken in by Chaucer is wanting to demonstrate his character's mercantile values, pointing out an appreciation of poetry and higher feelings.
- b) Her response is to signal to Damyan, suggesting she is completely uninterested and her priorities are entirely elsewhere. The sharp onomatopoeic noise is to suggest fast action.
- c) Damian's position may remind the reader of his role as a tempter in the Garden of Eden.

Task 3

- a) The sudden closing of the gate, with its onomatopoeic effect, reminds the reader of May as someone to be contained and guarded – ironic in the light of what is to come.
- b) Januarie says: he loves her most of all; he would rather die than offend her love; that by being true to him she will have Christ's love, keep her honour, a legal settlement that will be drawn up the next day; and that he hopes to be always at her side.
- c) Maybe Januarie is being set up for his cuckolding in a way which reminds the reader of the Garden of Eden or maybe the narrator is hoping for maximum dramatic effect, highlighting the betrayal in the light of Januarie's just revealed kindness and human weakness.

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Fifteen – May's Moment in the 6

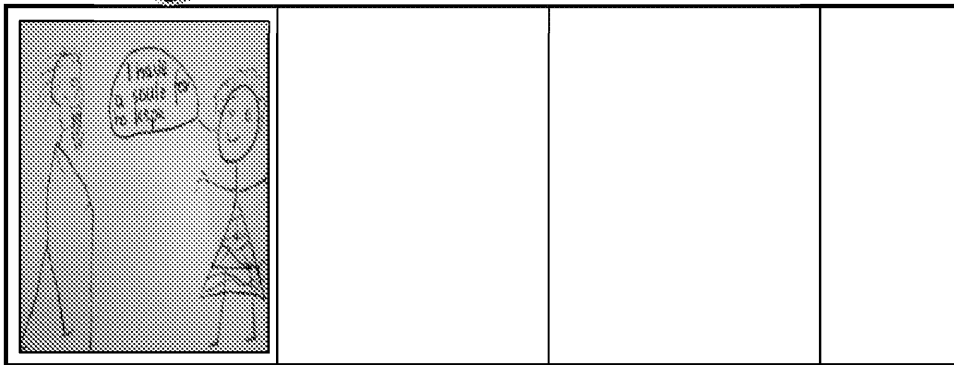
Immediately after Januarie's declaration of devotion to May she swears never to

Task 1– (AO1; AO2)

Read lines 973 to 1006. With a partner design a comic strip of five frames illustrating

- ❖ May's apparent distress at being doubted and her concern for her 'honour'
- ❖ her challenge that she should be put in a sack and drowned should she be
- ❖ her belief that it is men who are not to be trusted;
- ❖ her gestures towards Damyan;
- ❖ Damyan climbing into the tree

Be sure to use original ideas, speech bubbles, aim to convey the outrageousness of the simple idea that you start you off.



When you have completed the cartoon frames, think in more detail about the character of May. Discuss with your partner how she has been portrayed so far in the 'Tale'. Pinpoint several moments, remembering that at first she is presented as a silent, passive character yet here she is the centre of what is going on.

Prepare a **PowerPoint presentation** or a **poster** in which you trace the development of May's character. Use quotations from the text to show how Chaucer, through the narrator, is shaping her. Consider to what extent she is presented as a sympathetic character, a woman trying to survive in a repressive patriarchal society? Or do you see her as a manipulative and selfish woman? Compare her with other women earlier in the text that wives can only bring trouble?

Present your work to the class and set up a discussion about it. How the modern reader's view of May differs from that of the audience in Chaucer's time. Summarise the different points of view on the next page.

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How do *you* respond to the character of May?

I think that before we judge her we should remember that in such a strictly patriarchal society she is presented as having no voice, reflected in the fact that she *actually* isn't *heard* at all until after meeting Damyan.

Maybe Chaucer
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Perhaps it's significant that May only responds to the commands of others, her actions are reported in the passive mood, until after she has visited Damyan (in itself a response to her husband's order). Her role as a bride and wife in a society dominated by men is underlined in this way.

Lighten up! This is a fabliau and May's behaviour is no worse than Januarie's when we think of his many liaisons with women before he married. We are being invaded by her too! Laugh at the double standard of the sexes!

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Sixteen – Another Digression

The events in the garden suddenly take a dramatic turn as we see figures from classical mythology, Pluto and Proserpina – who were mentioned when the garden was first described – discussing relations between men and women and the situation which has arisen with Januarie, May and Damyan.

Task 1– (A02: A04)

Read lines **1007 to 1051**, then answer the questions below.

1. Comment on the change in tone in the first verse paragraph; what do you think it achieves?
2. What do you find unusual about the sources quoted by Pluto?
3. Would you have expected a more restrained debate among the gods? What is added to the effect of the 'Tale' by involving them in such a way?
4. What is Pluto's motive in restoring Januarie's sight?

Task 2– (A02)

Read lines **1052 to 1107** and answer the questions.

1. How would you describe the tone of Proserpina's reply?
2. Identify and comment on two techniques used by the author to help give the scene its dramatic effect.
3. Who wins the argument?
4. What is the reader reminded of when Pluto says *My word shal stonde*?

After reading suggested answers for Tasks 1 and 2 on the next page annotate your copy of the text.

Task 3– (A02)

Draw a picture of the garden **or** present a tableau in which the following are represented: Januarie; Damyan; the bush; the pear tree; the gate and the walls; Pluto and Proserpina. You may use any materials for your picture or, if doing the tableau, use labels, costumes, etc.

Present your work to the class and be prepared to answer questions on the choice of your presentation.

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Suggested answers for Tasks 1 and 2

Task 1

1. Tone becomes much more self-consciously poetic; this allows narrator to show he is educated; it also makes a break with the previous less elevated style and distance from the narrative and slowing down for a while (a favourite storytelling device) to focus on the 'real-life' – and very down to earth – events.
2. While primarily using classical sources there is reference to Christian ones more familiar to an educated contemporary audience; less educated audience may miss Christian references. Perhaps Chaucer wants to show the narrator as using his knowledge of chronological inconsistency or anachronism, to make his point. Or maybe he is a character whose desire to show off his 'knowledge' is to be laughed at for making errors.
3. The reader may see these gods arguing as humorous, expecting a humorous ending. The war of the sexes takes place even at this level. It adds another dimension to the themes of the 'Tale' too. Additionally this is an example of deus ex machina.
4. Perhaps Pluto's motive at first is to protect a worthy knight from the villainous knight. When he is challenged by his wife he acknowledges that she must do what she wants. He grants Januarie his sight because he needs to assert his role as king and be seen to do so (I swear my oath) – reminding the reader that chivalrous behaviour is a part of society of the gods!

Final
expected
answer

Task 2

1. Proserpina's reply is extremely assertive and challenging; she refutes Pluto's authority and undermines received authority, for example when she speaks of King Solomon.
2. Variety of devices includes: swearing oaths; repetition of syntax (anaphora); rhetorical questions.
3. Proserpina is acknowledged by Pluto as having won the argument and it is she who has the last word at the end of the 'Tale'.
4. Pluto seems to be making a desperate attempt to assert his authority as king but is also reminded of the values of chivalry.

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Seventeen – The Story Ends

The action now moves quickly and the cuckolding of Januarie is made all the more (depending on your point of view!) by his words to May, as the narrator compares

Singeth ful murier than the papejay

‘Yow love I best, and shal, and oother noon’

Task 1– (AO2)

Read lines 1108 to 1141

1. In pairs draw a quick sketch of Januarie, May and Damyan at the base of the tree (stick figures are perfectly acceptable if you don't consider yourself to be artistic!). Base this on the first two verse paragraphs, using A3 paper. Take note of the words used by the narrator to describe May and Damyan and try to convey either their emotions or using your drawing skills. Also note what Januarie has saying, possibly with speech bubbles.
2. Present your sketch to other students in the class and discuss the language used to give an impression of the young lovers; consider its effectiveness and try to relate it to other parts of the narrative. (You might like to concentrate on the imagery of spring and the recurring image of the tree.)
3. Discuss the irony of what Januarie says in the third verse paragraph; think too about how May uses him to ascend the tree – do you see any irony in this?
4. In the last verse paragraph discuss the following: Januarie's willingness to help (might this be?); the verb used to describe Januarie's movements; the narrator's 'modesty'; the language used to describe May and Damyan's 'lovemaking'

When you have completed this task check the notes below and annotate your copy

Task 2– (AO2)

What happens next can be described with the literary and dramatic term *deus ex machina*, indicating that an outside agency has intervened. Pluto gives Januarie his sight back and for once Januarie knows what is going on!

Read lines 1148 to 1199 and follow the argument between Januarie and May. Working with a partner take the direct speech from each of the verse paragraphs and put it into modern English (if you wish to summarise, there's no need to include every line). Use your translation as the basis for a classroom display or as the basis for a multimedia presentation.

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Task 3– (AO2; AO3)

After reading to the end of the 'Tale', discuss the following in a small group:

- ❖ The narrator's sense of modesty (or lack of it) in recounting Januarie's wedding.
- ❖ The irony of May's claim that she is being kind to Januarie by having sex with her.
- ❖ Your response to the final verse paragraph.
- ❖ Where your sympathies lie at the end of this story – do you see any irony in the fact that the Merchant's wife is a commodity to be taken where she can, compared with Januarie's treatment and arrangement?

Task 4– (AO2; AO3)

Read the lines spoken by the Host (1245–1253) and discuss with a partner how he justifies his actions; compare his words to those of the Merchant in his Prologue.



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How did you do?

Task 1

- 1 and 2 Words used by the narrator to describe May: *faire, fresshe, bright, she* difference between her and Januarie in terms of age and vigour. Thro described using the imagery of spring, with *fresshe* recurring many tim as ironic as they suggest an innocence which May doesn't have, she is Damyan is seen sitting *ful myrie / an heigh*, words which suggest his y Januarie's words may appear poignant to the reader, especially as his simply, although the comparison with a parrot isn't very flattering! Th confidence with which he speaks as they are nearing the pear tree.
- The tree reminds us of the tree in the Garden of Eden; where Eve is te by taking the forbidden fruit, *about to experience forbidden fru*
- We also remember that Januarie has used the imagery of a tree to su sufficiently to marry a young wife; here is a tree which hides som
3. Dramatic irony is full on here; Januarie **has got a knave / that koude c** already climbed the tree! He comments on his own blindness without here for the reader. Notice that she gets to Damyan by standing on Jar her as she transgresses, a real humiliation.
4. Januarie's willingness to help may have been increased by hearing Ma that she may already be pregnant (is there a hint here for the reader to for her to have sex with Damyan?). *Stoupeth* reminds the reader of Jan juxtaposed so closely with Damyan's swift actions, the contrast betwe
- The false modesty of the narrator is amusing as he addresses the *ladi* and amusing, perhaps, as he is describing the behaviour of another lad which the Merchant tries to show that he is quite a refined character the social position of the rising merchant class at this time.
- It also prepares us for the crude language which is used to describe the *pullen up the smok, and in he throng* are not words the reader would behaviour of gentillesse and courtly love! There is nothing tender or n after the long build-up to the amorous meeting we are left with a bat claims Damyan or May might have to being refined members of socie Chaucer's Merchant in this tale is satirising the genre of courtly love a for someone who will never be considered to be aristocratic himself.

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Section C

One – Three Characters Who Don't Match

The success of the 'Tale' largely depends on the fact that the three main characters are expected of them. This is probably why Chaucer's work has such an appeal to everyone has failings, and that those failings can provide a rich source of comedy. We see characters being hypocritical or pompous, often pretending to be better than they are. It is comical when characters are not aware of their own failings.

Chaucer is very skilled at shaping the reader's view of a character, not always through ironic comment, understatement and allowing the inconsistencies between what is said and what is done to become apparent as a tale unfolds.

Task 1 – An honest knight? (AO2: AO3)

Use the grid below to help you make notes on Januarie. Find **suitable quotations** to support the statements.

The appearance...

His wealth and status mean that he can expect others to do his bidding; he is a figure of respect and authority	
His religious beliefs lead him to make (supposedly wise) decisions about his personal life	
He spends money lavishly, entertaining others and improving his environment – as one might expect of a wealthy man	
He is aware of his responsibilities to others in his household	
His care for his wife is shown in his concern when she is pregnant	

The reality...

His lack of respect for women has meant that he feels his soul is in danger	
His lavish entertainment is not shared by the narrator	
He expresses concern for others, e.g. in his household, which he doesn't follow up	
He arrogantly believes he is as fit as a young man	
He loses all the dignity one would expect in a knight when he has to accept his wife's lies	



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Task 2 – A dutiful wife? (A02; A03; A05)

This time make notes on how the reader can infer more than one thing about a character from a piece of text. Produce a grid such as the one below to show how a quotation can give positive and negative suggestions about a character. This time we are thinking about how May is portrayed. The first has been done for you as an example.

Positive	Negative
<p><i>May is a compliant wife whose movements are controlled by others, reflected in the passive voice; this is appropriate for such a patriarchal society.</i></p>	<p><i>The bride was broght abedde as stille as stoon</i> (l.606)</p>
	<p><i>Down by his beddes side sit she than, Conforting him as goodly as she may.</i> (ll.722–723)</p>
	<p><i>Some tyrant is, as there by many oon, That hath an herte as hard as any stoon, Which wolde han lat him sterven in the place Wel rather than graunted him hire grace;</i> (ll.777–780)</p>
	<p><i>This fresshe May, whan she thise words herde, Beningnely to Januarie answered, But first and forward she bigan to wepe. 'I have,' quod she, 'a soule for to kepe As wel as ye, and also myn owne now, And of my wiffling I have tender flour,</i> (ll.973–978)</p>
	<p><i>Beth war, I prey yow; for, by hevne king, Ful many a man weneth to seen a thing, And it is al another than it semeth. He that misconceyveth, he misdemeth.'</i> (ll.1195–1198)</p>

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Task 3– A loyal squire? (AO2; AO3)

Like the two other main characters, Damyan is also not quite what he should be. He is totally at odds with the reality, showing up Januarie's lack of awareness.

Use the grid below to help you think about Damyan. Alongside Januarie's words, think of ways in which they might be misjudged or untrue; then add a comment to explain why you have chosen these.

Januarie's words	The truth about Damyan
<p>... 'Seynte Marie, how may this be, That Damyan entendeth nat to me? Is he ay sik, or how may this betide?' (ll.687–691)</p>	
<p>'He is a gentil squier, by my trouth' (l.695)</p>	
<p>He is as wys, discreet, and as secree As any man I woot of his degree (ll.697–698)</p>	
<p>And therto manly, and eek servisable (l.699)</p>	

Task 4– (AO5)

When you have completed the three tasks, in pairs, choose one of the three characterisations of 'The Merchant's Tale'. With one of you as the director and the other as the actor, perform the scene. Discuss how the role should be played. Prepare a tableau (or a short scene with some music) to show how you think this would work. Try to find ways of showing the discrepancy between the characters. You may be able to borrow some props from your school or college. Show your work to the class and be prepared to answer any questions as fully as possible.

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Two – What Makes it Amusing

Audiences are often amused by tales of hypocrisy, pompousness and characters who are ridiculous through their thoughts and actions, as we saw in the previous tasks. In this task, we will look more closely at some of the types of humour in 'The Merchant's Tale' and at some of the techniques used to achieve it.

Incongruity, where two things are hopelessly mismatched, or where an outcome that is not what might be expected, can often have a comic effect. One obvious example is the character of May in 'The Merchant's Tale'.

Task 1 – (A02)

Make a poster to show how Chaucer uses language to emphasise and ridicule the character of May. You will notice that some words and phrases are used repeatedly to describe May, which has a double effect – on the surface suggesting her youth and beauty, but reminding us that she is *by no means* innocent, so the word takes on a more loaded meaning far too often to be taken at face value.

Your poster should give at least **10** words or phrases with an explanation of techniques used. You may wish to use a word cloud format with annotations, following the example below. Your poster should display it to the class; do you notice any patterns in the kind of imagery or references to nature?

Chaucer's Use of Language to Achieve Humour

Fresshe

Repeated adjective suggests May's youth; repeated use of 'fresshe' makes reader question her innocence.

An alliterative image which becomes a recurring motif, an example of dramatic irony seen when May actually uses wax to get what she wants.

Task 2

You will sometimes find news stories of celebrities in the media emphasising their 'couple goals'. Find one or two stories from recent times and make a short study of how language is used to create a romantic image. Do you think this is a topic which is still often ridiculed?

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Task 3– Other targets of Chaucer’s humour (AO2; AO3; AO4)

Chaucer is known especially for his *satire* – using humour to point out faults and weaknesses in individuals and society. As well as allowing us to laugh at the vanity and self-centredness of the three main characters, he also targets institutions and conventions.

Find out
To find out
more
zzz

Match the statements below with the quotations overleaf. Note that there are more quotations than statements.

1. Chaucer’s experience in the royal court would have made the role of courtiers, hence his sarcastic jibe at one of Janek’s highlighting sycon’s and insincerity.



2. As in some of the other Canterbury Tales Chaucer is very critical of religion in some people’s lives and satirises religious hypocrisy.

3. Like the character of the Merchant many people in trade class were keen to portray the aristocracy as worldly and sophisticated (in other words, more like themselves) – far different from the characteristics which had previously been associated with them.

4. The genre of courtly love, more often found in literature than in life, was a rich source of humour – a highly refined code of conduct which was often ridiculed by use of parody.

5. Gentillesse, again a refined and complex code of behaviour, was a Norman French and, therefore, with the highest levels of sophistication, a veneer covering up people’s baser motives. It is also portrayed as the emerging middle class (for example the Merchant) who were consequently being satirised.



6. The excessive spending and self-indulgence of the very wealthy led to ludicrous situations; here Chaucer uses hyperbole and double entendre.

When you have matched the quotations with the statements above make detailed notes on a second poster for classroom display; show what is being held up as an object for criticism and the techniques (e.g. similes, hyperbole) which are used to achieve the satirical effect.

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A

Mercy, and that ye nat discovere me,
For I am deed if that this thing be kid.

(ll.730-731)

I have stonden in ful g
Abouten lords of ful h
Yet hadde I nevere wi

C

... I am hoor and oold
And almost, G... my pittes brinke;
Un... somewhat moste I thinke.

(ll.198-199)



Biforn hem stode inst
That Orpheus, ne of Th
Ne maden nevere swich

E

Up peril of my soule, I shal nat lien

(l.1159)

This gentil May, fulfill
Right of hire hand a let
In which she grauntet

G

As whoso tooke a mirour, polished bright,
And sette it in a commune market-place

(ll.370-371)



Ladies, I prey yow tha
I kan nat glose, I am a
And sodeynly anon th
Gan pullen up the smol

I

Yet were me levere houndes had me eten,
Than that myn heritage sholde falle
In straunge hand

(ll.226-228)

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Three – Chaucer's Language

As we spend a lot of time concerned with deciphering the meaning of Middle English, Chaucer's language differs in register and tone in many ways. Sometimes the register is colloquial.

Task 1 – (AO2)

Look at the six extracts below and the descriptions of Chaucer's language which are given. Match them up and check your answers with the key.

A

O Januarie what mighte I do to please,
Thogh thou mightest be as shippes saille?
For as goode as I am, deceyved be
As to be doon whan a man may se.

I have a wyf, that is a good wyf,
For thogh the world is full of folk,
She wolde him never forsake.

C

And certainly, as sooth as God is king,
To take a wyf it is a glorious thing,
And namely whan a man is oold and hoor;
Thanne is a wyf the fruit of his tresor.

Parfourned has he, and he is a good man,
No lenger may he be a man,
On the orisonte of the world.

E

And with that word she saugh wher Damyan
Sat in the bussh, and coughen she bigan,
And with hir finger signes made she
That Damyan sholde climbe upon a tree,
That charged was with fruit, and up he wente.

'Out, help; allas!
As dooth the nede,
'O stronge lady,
And she answerde him.

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1. Chaucer's writing is direct and shows the ability to dramatise situations by using colloquial expressions and imagery which are accessible and familiar to the audience.
2. Chaucer uses the narrative to suggest the character of his narrator: he uses a technique involving a technique known as periphrasis or circumlocution. The effect is to suggest and show that the narrator has the skills and vocabulary one would expect of a merchant.
3. In addressing fellow pilgrims the Merchant reveals his own domestic situation in a straightforward and confessional, revealing his exasperation while foreshadowing the events which follows. The imagery is meant to be humorous and is exaggerated (hyperbole) for a wide audience.
4. The tone is refined and sophisticated, using literary techniques such as apostrophe. The narrator addresses the character, the knight, directly – standing back from the action. Lines 1-4 establish the rhyme in a pithy manner – end-stopping each couplet. The reference to January's end and invites the reader to stop and think. The effect is to suggest an educated and wise which, conscious of his status as a merchant, he may be expected to be.
5. Writing in a direct narrative style, giving an account of the facts, Chaucer moves the story forward. Note the simple syntax, using repeated expressions – beginning lines with conjunctions. Onomatopoeia also helps to dramatise the situation. While achieving a business-like tone, the earthy nature of what is to follow, Chaucer still uses imagery which here is suggestive of the virility of the younger man. The highly refined language of courtly love is certainly contrasted.
6. The narrator is given a sententious tone by Chaucer. He sounds slightly pompous, achieved through the contrast in natural imagery (reflecting the disparity in wealth). The overall effect is ironic, a very typical Chaucerian effect.

How did you do?

A-4; B-3; C-6; D-2; E-5; F-1

Brush up your vocal

Some of the words used to describe the use of language may be unfamiliar: *circumlocution*, *confession*, *hyperbole*, *apostrophe*, *se*

Check their meanings in a
websites suggested in Sec

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Four – Chaucer’s Imagery and How It Helps the Themes

As you read the text you may notice that the types of imagery used by Chaucer can be grouped into three main categories. In this task we shall be looking at three groups: imagery from **the natural world**, **merchandise**, and the imagery of **religion**.

Task 1– (AO2)

Collect 10 examples of how Chaucer uses imagery (metaphor, simile; personification) from **the natural world** and explain what they add to our understanding of the text. Draw on the example given as a starter to help you. Be sure to include examples which involve the main characters in the ‘Tale’.

Quotation	Technique	
Myn herbe and alle my lymes been as grene As laurer...	Simile	In seeing 'evergreen' recognises but also knowledge vigour Thus to the iron

Task 2– (AO2; AO3)

The examples below are images drawn from the world of wealth and merchandising, familiar to the narrator, as a merchant. They may also reflect on the mercenary nature of the Merchant who ought to be above such considerations. Chaucer’s skill as a writer here is even more apparent as he constructs the Merchant’s character, showing him as someone who primarily thinks in terms of his keenness to show he is familiar with the codes of other worlds. So maybe this imagery for a modern reader may highlight the patriarchal nature of society, underpinning a possession.

For each of the examples given below identify the technique used and make a comment on its effect.

1. *Thanne is a wyf the fruit of his tree* 1.58
2. *As whoso tooke a mirror for a bright,
And he it saw in a comune market-place* 11.371–373
3. *She was nat his pleying worth a bene* 1.642
4. *And whan he wolde paye his wyf hir dette* 1.836
5. *Al be it so that no man finden shal
Noon in this world that trotteth hool in al* 11.325–326
6. *Oold fish and yong flesh wolde I have ful fain.
Bet is ... a pyk than a pickerel* 11.206–207

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Quotation	Technique	

Task 3– (A02; A03; A04)

Januarie is keen to point out to his friends that salvation is one of his motives for no longer having 'illicit' sexual relationships he will be obeying Christian teaching and going to hell when he dies. Some readers may find evidence of Chaucer satirising contemporary society and presents these people's lives. There are recurring references to religion in the 'Prologue' and 'Tale'. Metaphors, similes and allusions to the scriptures and Church practices.

With a partner find religious imagery to justify each of the eight statements below to help, but in a random order!

- Matrimony is seen as a holy contract but the metaphor is used to describe it as a prison.
- Marriage is traditionally seen as reflecting Christ's relationship with the Church.
- Sinners are presented as missing God's gift.
- Happy marriage is presented as a metaphor for heavenly bliss.
- A different marriage may be seen as a metaphor for purgatory.
- Metaphors to show love and devotion are taken from the Bible.
- A character is presented like Satan in the Garden of Eden.
- Just as for Eve, a woman is tempted to seek forbidden 'fruit' in a tree.

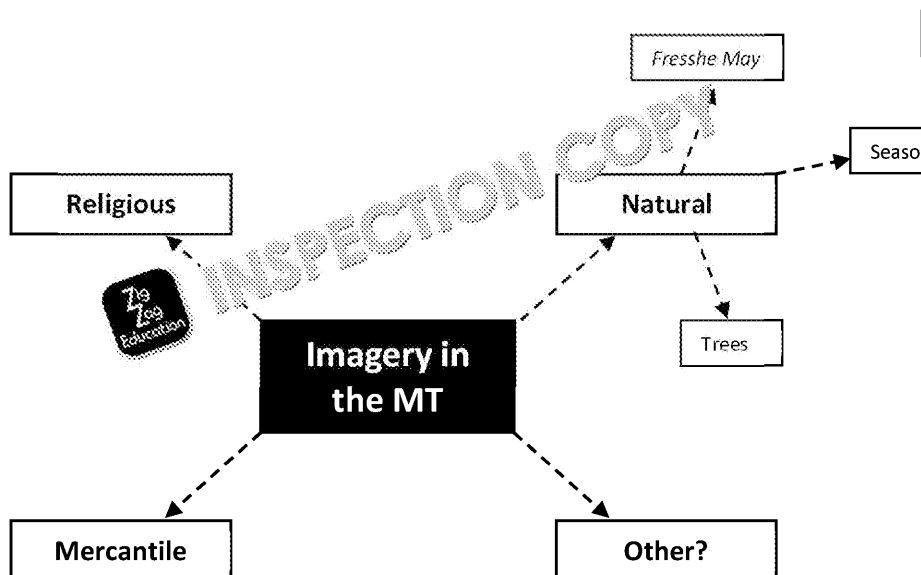
Line references to help you: 172; 998; 458; 191; 48/49; 435; 943; 931

Key

A-48/49; B-172; C-191; D-435; E-458; F-931; G-943; H-998

Task 4– (A02)

In a small group produce a classroom poster (or, individually, notes for your own 'Merchant's Prologue and Tale' and how it helps to illustrate the themes. Use the 3 above as a starting point. You may wish to do it in the form of a mind map; the one below to get you thinking.



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