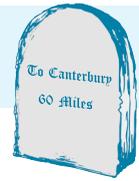


Selections from The Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale

Before the Pardoner begins his Tale, he reveals its moral, and offers some startling insight into the true purpose of his preaching.



? In what way is the Pardoner a “Do as I say, not as I do” kind of person?

A. He preaches against avarice and greed, but is only interested in accumulating as much gold as he can for himself by means of unethical methods.

? What is the Pardoner’s “principal intent” (line 18)?

A. His “principal intent” is to acquire as much money for himself as he possibly can.

? What aspect of human nature does the Pardoner exploit in order to attain his goal?

A. He knows that people love to hear a good story, so he uses them extensively in his sermons.

? CHECKQUIZ: THE PARDONER’S TALE

Multiple-Choice

Correct answers are indicated in **bold-face**.

- As “The Pardoner’s Tale” begins, the three roisterers are sitting together
 - in a tavern.**
 - in church.
 - in a coach.
 - under a tree.
- Since this story’s setting is England in the fourteenth century, the funeral bell is tolling for a friend who probably died of
 - leprosy.
 - tuberculosis.
 - poison.
 - bubonic plague.**
- The pledge of the three roisterers to seek out Death and kill him is primarily a result of their
 - bravery.
 - cowardliness.
 - drunkenness.**
 - religiosity.
- The old man whom the roisterers meet and insult on the way is
 - philosophical.**
 - rude.
 - arrogant.
 - impatient.
- The old man tells the roisterers that Death can be found
 - drinking in taverns and beer halls.
 - up a crooked way, under a tree.**
 - down a steep ravine, under a rock.
 - in their own back yards.
- After the three roisterers find the gold florins, they draw lots to determine who will
 - kill the old man.
 - go to town and return with food and drink.**
 - poison the wine.
 - get the largest share of the treasure.
- The youngest roisterer is killed when his companions
 - strangle him.
 - throw him from a cliff.
 - stab him.**
 - report him to the local authorities, who hang him for robbery.
- The older two roisterers
 - escape with the gold florins to a distant town.
 - repent and distribute the gold among the poor.
 - fight over the gold and kill each other.
 - accidentally drink poison.**
- This tale’s central theme is
 - Think before you drink.
 - Give honor to the elderly.
 - Love of money is the root of all evil.**
 - Death be not proud.

In what way is the Pardoner a “Do as I say, not as I do” kind of person?

The Pardoner’s point here is that he does not care what happens to the souls of his listeners.

What is the Pardoner’s “principal intent” (line 18)?

What aspect of human nature does the Pardoner exploit in order to attain his goal?

“...Of avarice and of all such wickedness
Is all my preaching, thus to make them free
With offered pence, the which pence come to me.
For my intent is only pence to win,
And not at all for punishment of sin. 5
When they are dead, for all I think thereon
Their souls may well black-berrying* have gone! ...
“But briefly my intention I’ll express;
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness.
For all my theme is yet, and ever was, 10
‘*Radix malorum est cupiditas.*’*
Thus can I preach against that self-same vice
Which I indulge, and that is avarice.
But though myself be guilty of that sin,
Yet I, myself, these other folk can win 15
From avarice and lead them to repent.
But that is not my principal intent.
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness;
This should suffice of that, though, as I guess.
Then do I cite examples, many a one, 20
Out of old stories and of time long gone,
For vulgar people* all love stories old;
Such things they can re-tell well and can hold.
What? Think you that because I’m good at preaching
And win me gold and silver by my teaching 25
I’ll live of my free will in poverty?
No, no, that’s never been my policy!
For I will preach and beg in sundry lands;
I will not work and labor with my hands,
Nor baskets weave and try to live thereby, 30

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

black-berrying — wandering off to pick blackberries.

Radix malorum est cupiditas — (Latin) “The root of evil is love of money.”

vulgar people — here, illiterate, unsophisticated commoners.

Because I will not beg in vain, say I
 For though I am myself a vicious man,
 Yet I would tell a moral tale, and can,
 The which I'm wont* to preach more gold to win.
 Now hold your peace! My tale I will begin." 35

Here ends *The Pardoner's Prologue*

The Pardoner's Tale

FOCUS: IRONY

... Now these three roisterers,* whereof I tell,
 Long before prime* was rung by any bell,
 Were sitting in a tavern for to drink;
 As they sat they heard a small bell clink
 Before a corpse being carried to his grave; 40

A CLOSER LOOK

It was common practice to ring a **bell** during a funeral procession.

Whereat one of them called unto his knave*:
 "Go run," said he, "and ask them civilly
 What corpse it is that's just now passing by,
 And see that you report the man's name well."
 "Sir," said the boy, "it needs not that they tell. 45
 I learned it, ere you came here, full two hours;
 He was, by gad, an old comrade of yours;
 And he was slain, all suddenly, last night,
 When drunk, as he sat on his bench upright;
 An unseen thief, called Death, came stalking by, 50
 Who hereabouts makes all the people die,
 And with his spear he clove* his heart in two
 And went his way and made no more ado.

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

wont — likely; accustomed.
roisterers — revelers; ruffians.
prime — morning worship.
knave — here, servant.
clove — split.

THE PARDONER'S TALE 59

WRITING WORKSHOP: PROLOGUE

(see pages 56 and 57)

1. Possible answers include:

a. Direct statement: 1. Knight: lines 43-45, 63. 2. Squire: lines 77, 79, 81, 87. 3. Yeoman: line 98. 4. Prioress: lines 101, 117-118, 129. 5. Monk: lines 130-131, 150. 6. Merchant: lines 165, 170, 174. 7. Clerk: lines 177, 183-187. 8. Franklin: lines 202-203, 205, 224, 229-230. 9. The Guild-workers: lines 233-234. 10. Cook: line 251. 11. Sailor: lines 267, 274. 12. Physician: lines 281-283, 288, 291-298, 313. 13. Parson: lines 314, 316, 318-319, 321, 325, 332. 14. Ploughman: lines 357-358. 15. Miller: lines 369, 382. 16. Summoner: lines 390, 396-398, 407. 17. Pardoner: lines 446-447.

b. Character's profession: 1. A knight. 2. A squire. 3. A yeoman; a forester. 4. A prioress; a nun. 5. A monk; an outrider. 6. A merchant. 7. A clerk; a scholar. 8. A franklin; a householder. 9. The guild-workers: a haberdasher, a carpenter, a weaver, a dyer, a rug-maker. 10. A cook. 11. A sailor. 12. A physician. 13. A parson. 14. A ploughman. 15. A miller. 16. A summoner. 17. A pardoner.

c. Character's speech or thoughts: Not applicable to *The Prologue*.

d. Indirect characterization by others: the Merchant. "No one could say he was in debt," line 171.

e. Physical description: 1. Knight: lines 68-69. 2. Squire: lines 73, 82-83. 3. Yeoman: lines 91, 97. 4. Prioress: lines 104, 112. 5. Monk: lines 152-155, 159. 6. Merchant: lines 161-162. 7. Clerk: lines 179-181. 8. Franklin: line 201. 9. Guild workers: lines 238. 10. Cook: line 255. 11. Sailor: line 263. 12. Physician: line 308. 13. Parson: line 315. 14. Ploughman: line 365. 15. Miller: lines 366-367, 373-380. 16. Summoner: lines 388-389, 394-395. 17. Pardoner: lines 420-421, 428.

JOURNAL WORKSHOP: PROLOGUE (see page 57)

2. Students' answers will vary. Some students may say that exposing corruption to the light of day is the first step toward eliminating it, and therefore argue that Chaucer did indeed have a moral purpose in authoring *The Canterbury Tales*. Others may argue that Chaucer's tone throughout *The Prologue* is not serious enough to support the idea that he intended to teach moral lessons.