

The General Prologue Assignment

The first important piece of literature in Middle English is Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of short stories. Before the first story begins, Chaucer writes a prologue to the tales known as "The General Prologue." Below is the first 18 lines of "The General Prologue." I want you to do the following with these lines:

- 1) Please TRANSLATE EACH LINE of the passage. You must go line-by-line.
- 2) Then, after you are finished with your translation, please write a 3-5 sentence summary of the 18 line in your own words.

Use the footnotes to help you, and also the words to the right of the passage replace the words with the little circle next to it.

The General Prologue

	Whan that April with his ^o showres soote ^o	<i>its/fresh</i>
	The droughte of March hath perced to the roote,	
	And bathed every veine ¹ in swich ^o licour, ^o	<i>such/liquid</i>
	Of which vertu ² engendred is the flowr;	
5	Whan Zephyrus eek ^o with his sweete breeth	<i>also</i>
	Inspired ³ hath in every holt ^o and heeth ^o	<i>grove/field</i>
	The tendre croppes, ^o and the yonge sonne ⁴	<i>shoots</i>
	Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,	
	And smale fowles ^o maken melodye	<i>birds</i>
10	That sleepen al the night with open ye ^o —	<i>eye</i>
	So priketh hem ^o Nature in hir corages ⁵ —	<i>them</i>
	Thanne longen folk to goon ^o on pilgrimages,	<i>go</i>
	And palmeres for to seeken straunge strondes	
	To ferne halwes, ⁶ couthe ^o in sondry ^o londes;	<i>known/various</i>
15	And specially from every shires ende	
	Of Engelond to Canterbury they wende,	
	The holy blisful martyr ⁷ for to seeke	
	That hem hath holpen ^o whan that they were seke. ^o	<i>helped/sick</i>

1. I.e., in plants.

2. By the power of which.

3. Breathed into. "Zephyrus": the west wind.

4. The sun is young because it has run only halfway through its course in Aries, the Ram—the first sign of the zodiac in the solar year.

5. Their hearts.

6. Far-off shrines. "Palmeres": palmers, wide-ranging

pilgrims—especially those who sought out the "straunge strondes" (foreign shores) of the Holy Land.

7. St. Thomas à Becket, murdered in Canterbury Cathedral in 1170.