

THE PERFECTION LEARNING PARALLEL TEXT SERIES

# TEACHER GUIDE

*for*

# BRITISH LITERATURE

449 - 1798



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Cover Art: Illustration from Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, 1529

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1000 North Second Avenue, P.O. Box 500  
Logan, Iowa 51546-0500  
Tel: 1-800-831-4190 • Fax: 1-800-543-2745  
[www.perfectionlearning.com](http://www.perfectionlearning.com)

#76864  
ISBN-10: 0-7891-7406-5  
ISBN-13: 978-0-7891-7406-2

Printed in the U.S.A.

7 8 9 10 11 12 PP 17 16 15 14 13 12

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# Table of Contents

About <i>Parallel Text British Literature</i> . . . . .	4
Features of this Teacher's Guide . . . . .	4
Using <i>Parallel Text British Literature</i> in the Classroom. . . . .	5

## Unit One: The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods (449–1485)

from <i>Beowulf</i> translated by Burton Raffel . . . . .	6
from <i>The Canterbury Tales: The Prologue</i> by Geoffrey Chaucer . . . . .	6
from <i>The Pardoner's Tale</i> by Geoffrey Chaucer . . . . .	7
<i>Lord Randal</i> and <i>Get Up and Bar the Door</i> Anonymous . . . . .	8
from <i>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</i> by The "Pearl Poet" . . . . .	8
from <i>Le Morte d'Arthur</i> by Sir Thomas Malory . . . . .	9

## Unit Two: The Renaissance (1485–1660)

<i>Whoso List to Hunt</i> by Sir Thomas Wyatt . . . . .	9
<i>Sonnet 30</i> by Edmund Spenser . . . . .	9
<i>The Passionate Shepherd to His Love</i> by Christopher Marlowe and <i>The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd</i> by Sir Walter Raleigh . . . . .	10
<i>Sonnet 29</i> , <i>Sonnet 116</i> , and <i>Sonnet 130</i> by William Shakespeare . . . . .	10
<i>A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning</i> by John Donne . . . . .	11
<i>Meditation 17</i> by John Donne . . . . .	11
<i>Death Be Not Proud</i> by John Donne . . . . .	12
<i>On My First Son</i> and <i>Song: To Celia</i> by Ben Jonson . . . . .	12
<i>To the Virgins to Make Much of Time</i> by Robert Herrick and <i>To His Coy Mistress</i> by Andrew Marvell . . . . .	12
<i>To Lucasta, on Going to the Wars</i> by Richard Lovelace . . . . .	13
<i>How Soon Hath Time</i> by John Milton . . . . .	13
<i>When I Consider How My Light Is Spent</i> by John Milton . . . . .	13
from <i>Paradise Lost</i> by John Milton . . . . .	14

## Unit Three: The Restoration and the Enlightenment (1660–1798)

from <i>The Diary</i> by Samuel Pepys . . . . .	15
from <i>An Essay on Man</i> by Alexander Pope . . . . .	15
from <i>The Rape of the Lock</i> by Alexander Pope . . . . .	15
from <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> by Jonathan Swift . . . . .	16
<i>A Modest Proposal</i> by Jonathan Swift . . . . .	17
from <i>The Life of Samuel Johnson</i> by James Boswell . . . . .	17
<i>Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard</i> by Thomas Gray . . . . .	18

Unit One Copy Masters . . . . .	19
Unit Two Copy Masters . . . . .	21
Unit Three Copy Masters . . . . .	25

# Unit One: The Anglo-Saxon and Medieval Periods

from *Beowulf* (p. 15)

## ■ Recall Questions

1. What is the name of the monster that terrorizes Herot?

*The monster's name is Grendel.*

2. Why did Beowulf and his men go to Denmark?

*They went to help the Danes battle Grendel.*

3. What does Beowulf hang from the rafters of Herot?

*He hangs Grendel's arm (claw).*

4. Where does Grendel live?

*He lives at the bottom of a lake (marsh).*

5. Whom does Beowulf battle at the bottom of the lake?

*He battles Grendel's mother.*

6. How does Beowulf die?

*He is mortally wounded by a dragon.*

## ■ Questions for Interpretation & Analysis

7. Why does Grendel invade Herot and attack Hrothgar's men?

*Suggested response: The beginning of the poem states that the monster is enraged by the festive sounds coming from the hall. This suggests that Grendel is jealous of the spirit of brotherhood enjoyed by the men, of which he has no part.*

8. Based on the story of *Beowulf*, what personal traits did the Anglo-Saxons admire in their heroes?

*Suggested response: The Anglo-Saxons admired selflessness and brotherhood: Beowulf comes from another country to the Danes' aid even though he doesn't know them; determination: Beowulf does not give up in his fight against Grendel or Grendel's mother even after his weapon fails him; bravery: Beowulf and his 14 men set a trap for Grendel by spending the night at Herot, where the monster is most likely to come; pride: Beowulf boasts of his intent to kill the monster and longs "only for fame"; strength: Beowulf is stronger than "anyone anywhere in this world" and is able to lift a sword "that no ordinary man could lift." He also fights Grendel bare-handed and is willing to do the same with Grendel's mother.*

9. The introduction states that the story of *Beowulf* has both Christian and pagan themes. How do these themes sometimes seem in conflict?

*Suggested response: Beowulf's killing of Grendel and Grendel's mother contrasts with the Christian belief of "turning the other cheek." King Hrothgar's glorious throne*

*is protected by God, yet his advisors make sacrifices to the Devil, hoping to enlist his help against Grendel. When Beowulf is fighting Grendel, the "wicked killer fought for his freedom, / wanting retreat instead of flesh, / desiring nothing but escape" yet instead of showing Christian mercy, Beowulf tears Grendel's arm off and displays it as a tribute to his victory. Beowulf's defeat of Grendel causes Grendel to discover "what it meant / to feud with Almighty God," yet Grendel is able to bewitch Beowulf's men's weapons so that they cannot hurt him. Finally, Beowulf seems to be a mix of two ideals: the heroic warrior of the pagans and the humble servant of the Christians.*

10. One device characteristic of Old English poetry is the use of *kennings*, formalized metaphorical phrases used in place of simple nouns. For example, rather than use the term "sun," a poet might use "sky-candle." In place of "blood," "battle-dew." Find kennings in *Beowulf* that describe Beowulf, Grendel, and Grendel's mother.

*Suggested responses: Beowulf—strong-hearted wakeful sleeper (line 162); Higlac's follower (line 173); who was stronger / Than any man on earth (lines 204–205); the Geats' / Proud prince (line 364–365); the battle's only survivor (line 443); that noble leader of sailors (line 447). Grendel—mankind's enemy (line 79); hell's captive (203). Grendel's mother—greedy she-wolf (line 323); mighty water witch (line 344).*

from *The Canterbury Tales:*  
*The Prologue* (p. 48)

## ■ Recall Questions

1. Why are people gathered at the Tabard Inn?

*They are going on a pilgrimage to Canterbury.*

2. What people does the narrator describe in the prologue?

*He describes all the pilgrims who are going to Canterbury.*

3. What "holy relics" does the Pardoner claim to have?

*He says he has the Virgin Mary's veil and a piece of the sail from St. Peter's boat.*

4. What does the innkeeper suggest as entertainment for the pilgrims as they travel?

*He suggests that each person tell stories on the way to and back from Canterbury.*

## ■ Questions for Interpretation & Analysis

5. Chaucer's 29 pilgrims represent three of the dominant groups that made up medieval society in

England: the feudal group, the church group, and the city group. Why do you think Chaucer chose not to include any royalty?

*Suggested response: Perhaps the presence of someone from the royal court would have intimidated the pilgrims and changed the content of their stories.*

6. With 29 pilgrims to introduce, Chaucer could not develop any of them in-depth. Instead, he chose a few well-worded details for each that revealed his or her character. Review the description of the cook, for example. What detail might "immortalize" him in readers' minds? How might this make readers feel about the cook?

*Suggested response: The cook has "an ulcer on his knee." Students may respond that readers would be less than anxious to taste a dish prepared by someone with an open sore that might have been caused by poor hygiene or disease.*

7. Review the descriptions of several other pilgrims. What "telling details" reveal the personality and character of each?

*Responses will vary.*

8. Choose two pilgrims that seem to have won Chaucer's approval and two who seem least worthy in Chaucer's eyes. What words or phrases led to your choice?

*Suggested response: Chaucer seems to approve of the knight and the student cleric. The knight is wise yet modest and "never [says] a single rude thing / in all his life to anyone." The cleric "never [says] a word more than he [has] to" and is extremely respectful and to the point. Neither seems to care much for material things; the knight has fine equipment but is not gaily dressed, while the cleric preferred books to costly clothes and musical instruments. Chaucer seems to disapprove of the "wild and merry" friar and the franklin. The friar "has a license to beg," boasts that he is "more qualified to hear confessions / than even a priest," and forgives sins in exchange for money. He also talks people out of money who have none to spare, thinks he is above showing charity toward "filthy lepers," and wears expensive clothing, indicating that he is using the money he begs for his own pleasure. The franklin lives "for pleasure," believing that the only true happiness is in sensual delight. He seems almost obsessed with fine food and wine and is overly demanding of his cook. He keeps a silk purse of money on his belt and a dagger nearby, indicating his love of money, and he collects taxes, no doubt from the poor, tirelessly and is a "model among wealthy landowners."*

9. If you were a pilgrim who joined the group late, which of the travelers would you choose to travel next to? Which would you definitely avoid? Whose story would you be most interested in hearing?

*Responses will vary.*

## from *The Pardoner's Tale* (p. 102)

### ■ Recall Questions

1. What is a "pardoner"?

*A pardoner is someone who relieves people of their sins by selling them a written pardon and/or a holy relic.*

2. What does the pardoner really care about when he preaches about greed and selfishness?

*He cares about becoming rich.*

3. Whom do the three friends set out to kill?

*They set out to kill Death.*

4. When the three friends looked under a tree for Death, what did they find instead?

*They found a pile of golden coins.*

5. How do the three friends decide which of them will go to town for bread and wine?

*They draw straws.*

6. What did the two friends who stayed to guard the gold decide to do when the third returned?

*They decided to kill him and split his share of the gold.*

7. What did the young man who went to town decide to do when he rejoined his two friends?

*He decided to poison them and keep all the gold for himself.*

8. Who actually ended up with the gold?

*No one. The young rioter was killed by the other two, who then unknowingly killed themselves by drinking the poisoned wine.*

### ■ Questions for Interpretation & Analysis

9. How does the pardoner's tale reflect his character?

*Suggested response: The tale is of three young men who attempt to outmaneuver others to get what they want, just as the pardoner lies and cheats people out of money to do the same. Also, the three men set out to destroy death in the interest of the village, but when they find the gold, their interest is only in themselves. The pardoner sets out to save people, but his goal all along is a selfish one: to become richer.*

10. Irony occurs when appearances are at odds with reality. The characters in the pardoner's tale have ironic speeches. Cite several instances where they are saying far more than they think they are.

*Suggested response: The wickedest rioter says, "Who would have guessed / this morning would be our lucky day?" and he tells the rioter who stays with him that he "needn't doubt / my word. I won't betray you," yet at the end he chooses the bottle with the poison in it and gives*

Sample

**Perfection Learning® Corporation**  
Logan, Iowa 51546-0500

#76864

ISBN-10: 0-7891-7406-5  
ISBN-13: 978-0-7891-7406-2



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