

The Prologue from The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer
Literary Analysis: Characterization

Characterization is the writer's act of creating and developing the personality traits of a character. Chaucer uses both **direct characterization**—that is, stating facts about a personality directly—and **indirect characterization**—that is, revealing personality through details of appearance, thoughts, speech, and/or actions—to develop the vivid personalities of the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*.

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passages from the Prologue. In each passage, circle any direct statements about the character's personality. Underline statements about the character's appearance, speech, and/or behavior that reveal his or her personality indirectly. Then, on the lines that follow, summarize what the passage conveys about the character's personality.

1. There was also a Nun, a Prioress, / Her way of smiling very simple and coy. / Her greatest oath was only "By St. Loy!" / And she was known as Madam Eglantyne. / And well she sang a service, with a fine / Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly, / And she spoke daintily in French, extremely, / After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe; / French in the Paris style she did not know. / At meat her manners were well taught withal / No morsel from her lips did she let fall, / Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep; / But she could carry a morsel up and keep / The smallest drop from falling on her breast.

2. A Sergeant at the Law who paid his calls, / Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul's / There also was, of noted excellence. / Discreet he was, a man to reverence, / Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.

3. A worthy woman from beside Bath city / Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity. / In making cloth she showed so great a bent / She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent. / In all the parish not a dame dared stir / Towards the altar steps in front of her. / And if indeed they did, so wrath was she / As to be quite put out of charity. / Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground; / I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound, / The ones she wore on Sunday on her head. / Her hose were of the finest scarlet red / And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.

4. The Miller was a chap of sixteen stone. / A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone. / He did well out of them, for he could go / And win the ram at any wrestling show. / Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast / He could heave any door off hinge and post, / Or take a run and break it with his head.
