



The Canterbury Tales Character Motivations

In literature, **motivation** is a character's reason for experiencing an emotion, taking an action, or pursuing a goal. It is the reason a character does and says what he or she does and says. Motivation and action have a cause and effect relationship.

The characters in *The Canterbury Tales* include both the pilgrims and the people in the tales that they tell. Both the tale-teller and the tale's characters have motivations for what they say and do. Sometimes the motivation is explicit, or stated. Sometimes a reader must infer the motivation.

Read the two examples of motivation and action from *The Canterbury Tales* below.

Motivation		Action
In "The Knight's Tale," Arcita is lovesick for Emily after he is forced to leave Athens.		Arcita returns to Athens and goes incognito as a servant in the court to be close to Emily.
Text Evidence: "Now truly, however sore it may make me hurt," / Said he, "to Athens right now I will head; / Even dread of death will not keep me from / Seeing my lady, whom I love and serve." (p. 77)		
Motivation		Action
In "General Prologue," the Friar has affairs with women and wants to cover them up.		The Friar arranges and pays for marriages of many young women.
Text Evidence: "A FRIAR there was, a lecher and a merry, / A licensed beggar, with his own territory. / Among the orders four was none who knew / So much of dalliance and fair language." (p. 13)		
Inference: The Friar is a "lecher" and knows "much of dalliance" (casual sexual relationships). Knowing that clergy should act morally, we can infer that he has had affairs, probably resulting in pregnancies, and wants to keep his immoral behavior hidden. To hide that fact, he arranges the women's marriages.		

In the graphic organizer below, identify the motivation behind the action or the action that is the result of the motivation. Include text evidence. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, write 2-3 paragraphs explaining how love and desire are the motivation behind many characters' actions in *The Canterbury Tales*. Select three more examples beyond the ones in the chart to include in your paragraphs. Support your claims with text evidence.

Motivation		Action
		In "The Miller's Tale," Alison agrees to make love with Nicholas after initially rejecting him. (p.175)
Text Evidence:		

Motivation		Action
In "The Nun's Priest's Tale," Pertelote tells Chanticleer he has lost her heart and her love because he is afraid of his dream. (p. 543)		
Text Evidence:		

RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.

RL.11-12.3 Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).