



The Canterbury Tales

Identify and Analyze Sarcasm

Sarcasm is the use of irony to mock someone or something. A sarcastic comment implies the opposite of what the speaker actually says.

As the narrator in *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer sometimes uses sarcasm to satirize the social classes of his day.

1. Below are examples of sarcasm from *The Canterbury Tales*. Read each example of sarcasm and write a few sentences explaining what Chaucer really means by the words.

Speaking about the Monk:

He gave not for that text a plucked hen,
That said hunters should not be holy men,
Nor that a monk when he neglects his vows,
Is like a fish out of water . . .
And I said his opinion was good:
Why should he study, and make himself a nut,
Upon a book in cloister always to pore,
Or work with his hands and labor,
As Augustine bid? How shall the world be served? (General Prologue, p. 11)

What Chaucer really means:

The Monk should follow his vows and the rules of his religious order—studying in his cloister and labouring rather than indulging in hunting.

Speaking about the Physician:

And yet he was not quick to spend,
He kept what he earned in time of plague,
For gold is good for the heart in medicine;
Therefore gold he loved especially. (General Prologue, p. 25)

What Chaucer really means:

Speaking about the Wife of Bath:

She was a worthy woman all her life:

Husbands at church door she'd have five,

Not counting other company in youth—

But we need not speak of them right now— (General Prologue, p. 25)

What Chaucer really means:

2. Find two more examples of sarcasm in *The Canterbury Tales*. Record each example here. Be sure to include the page number, and then explain what Chaucer really means.

Additional example 1:

What Chaucer really means:

Additional example 2:

What Chaucer really means:

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

RL.11-12.6 Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).

L.11-12.3 Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

L.11-12.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on *grades 11–12 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.