

# Candidate Style Answers

OCR GCSE English Literature J360

Unit A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts - Controlled Assessment Task

This Support Material booklet is designed to accompany the OCR GCSE English Literature specification for teaching from September 2010.

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## **A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts**

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# Introduction

OCR has produced these candidate style answers to support teachers in interpreting the assessment criteria for the new GCSE specifications and to bridge the gap between new specification release and availability of exemplar candidate work.

This content has been produced by subject experts, with the input of Chairs of Examiners, to illustrate how the sample assessment questions might be answered and provide some commentary on what factors contribute to an overall grading. The candidate style answers are not written in a way that is intended to replicate student work but to demonstrate what a “good” or “excellent” response might include, supported by examiner commentary and conclusions.

**As these responses have not been through full moderation and do not replicate student work, they have not been graded and are instead, banded “middle” or “high” to give an indication of the level of each response.**

Please note that this resource is provided for advice and guidance only and does not in any way constitute an indication of grade boundaries or endorsed answers.

# Unit A661 Literary Heritage Linked Texts

## Literary Heritage Poetry

### Question

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#### Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

**Compare the ways in which Chaucer portrays the Wife of Bath and the Miller in the General Prologue.**

**You should consider:**

- the physical appearance and personality of each character
- how Chaucer makes you feel about each character
- the language he uses

### Candidate A

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Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* is an incomplete collection of stories told by a group of pilgrims going to visit the shrine of Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The Host of *The Tabard Inn* in Southwark says that each pilgrim should tell two stories on the pilgrimage to Canterbury and two stories on the way back. The General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* describes the pilgrims. They include all classes of society, going from a Knight down to a Plowman. The Wife of Bath and the Miller are two larger-than-life characters in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* and Chaucer gives a detailed description of both of them.

I think that in some ways The Wife of Bath and the Miller have a lot in common. I don't believe that they are people that, if you met them today, you would really trust. The Miller is dishonest and the Wife of Bath has been married five times!

Chaucer's description of the Wife of Bath is very detailed. He tells us that she is a skilled cloth-maker, better than cloth-makers in Ypres and Gaunt, both of them rich and important cloth-weaving cities in Flanders. This means she is a business-woman, which I think was rather unusual in those days, as women stayed very much in the background and ran the home. The only other woman on the pilgrimage to Canterbury is the "Nonne, a Prioress", who has another "Nonne" with her "That was hir chapeleyn". Although the Prioress seems rather too obsessed with trying to be a lady, she is probably on the pilgrimage for religious reasons. The Wife of Bath doesn't seem on the pilgrimage for religious reasons, though we know she goes to church as

In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon  
That to the offringe bifore hire sholde goon.

This may mean that she was the most important "wif" in the congregation or that she just liked to be centre-stage and noticed. If any other woman pushed in front "certeyn so wroth was she" which means she was very angry. If she got cross about things like that, I don't think she was very religious.

Chaucer describes the Wife of Bath in detail. He tells us she wore "coverchiefs", or hats, of very good quality. Maybe she was showing off her skill in cloth-making. Chaucer tells us that on

Sundays her hats “weyeden ten pound”, which I think means they were very showy. Her stockings too are very showy, being bright red: “Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed” and match her face which is “reed of hewe”.

Chaucer says “She was a worthy woman al hir live” which I think is ironic as she is worthy because she has married five husbands “at chirche dore”. (Until the sixteenth century, the wedding ceremony took place at the church door and was followed by a nuptial mass at the altar.) She is obviously very interested in men, and Chaucer shows this by referring to her “hipes large”.

Chaucer describes the Miller like the Wife of Bath in physical terms. He is “a stout carl for the nones” or an especially muscular churl (a low figure in the caste system). Unlike the Wife of Bath, he doesn’t seem to have been on many pilgrimages; the Wife of Bath has been in Jerusalem three times so she is a great traveller. Chaucer says that the Miller always wins the first prize in wrestling matches and “Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre”. This means that he could heave doors off their hinges, so either he ran at them when he was violent, or broke them down if he was house-breaking. Chaucer describes him using animal imagery. His beard “as any sowe or fox was reed”, the same colour as the Wife of Bath’s “hosen”, and he has a wart on his nose with hairs on it that were “Reed as the brustles of a sowes eris”. I think that by using this animal imagery Chaucer is saying that the Miller is more like an animal than a human. The pig is dirty and greedy and the fox is known to be cunning, so Chaucer is telling us that the Miller is dirty and cunning. He also tells dirty stories. “He was a janglere and a goliardeys”, meaning that he was a buffoon. When he tells his tale later in *The Canterbury Tales* it is rather a rude one. Chaucer tells us that, unlike the Wife of Bath, the Miller is not honest. “Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries.” As might be expected of such a “thikke knarre” he is loud and noisy, blowing a bagpipe when the pilgrims leave London. He leads the procession, showing that, like the Wife of Bath, he likes to be noticed.

Both the Wife of Bath and the Miller are lively noisy characters, not like the Clerk of Oxenford, who like to be noticed. The Wife of Bath likes men but seems to be harmless, but Chaucer makes the Miller rather violent and probably dangerous when angry or drunk.

## Commentary

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*The response gives some explanation of points of connection and gives a reasonably developed comparison of ways in which Chaucer conveys the characters of the two figures. A sound middle response.*

## Candidate B

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In Chaucer’s *General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* The Wife of Bath and the Miller stand out as particularly dominant characters. Chaucer draws attention to the physical characteristics of both of them and leaves the reader with a strong impression of their personalities. The Miller seems potentially violent and dangerous, while the Wife of Bath seems dangerous only to vulnerable men!

The Wife of Bath, perhaps unusually for a woman, is part of the pilgrimage. The Prioress, accompanied by another nun who is “hir chapeleyne”, is the only other woman making the pilgrimage to Canterbury, and she might be going for religious reasons. The Wife of Bath, though a church-goer (unlike the Miller) does not seem to be travelling for religious reasons. She is a serial pilgrim:

“At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne  
In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne.”

These were all famous centres of pilgrimage, but the Wife of Bath's reasons for visiting them are unclear. Chaucer tells us, "She koude muchel of wandringe by the weye", hinting that she wandered off the main track possibly with a man that she fancied. This is supported by Chaucer's statement that "Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde five/Withouten oother compaignye in youthe". Chaucer emphasises the Wife of Bath's physicality. She is "gat-toothed", in medieval times a sign of wantonness; she has "hipes large", a "boold" face that was "reed of hewe" and knows "remedies of love" implying knowledge of love potions and aphrodisiacs. Chaucer associates the colour red with her (as he does with the Miller); her "hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed", the colour suggesting lust as in the phrase "a scarlet woman". She also wears "a paire of spores sharpe" showing that she likes to be in control and dominate.

The Wife of Bath is an independent woman who is a skilled cloth-maker, even more skilful, Chaucer says, than the weavers of Ypres and "Gaunt", cities famous for the skill of their weavers. Chaucer describes what she wears, on Sundays, just as he describes what the Miller wears. However, whilst the Miller is wearing his workaday outfit ("A whit cote and a blew hood wered he"), the Wife of Bath shows off her skills and herself in a very large hat that was "as brood as is a bokeler or a targe" (a shield). Chaucer comments that the ones she wore on a "Sonday" "weyeden ten pound". They must have been enormous, and hardly comfortable to wear. She is mounted comfortably on "an amblere", which would have allowed her plenty of opportunity to talk to other pilgrims.

Chaucer shows that she is an outgoing woman who likes socialising: "In felaweship wel koude she laughe and carpe" and when that company is mostly male, as it is on this pilgrimage, her laughter and chatter were probably very flirtatious. She also has a sense of her own importance: if any woman preceded her to "the offringe", she would be furious and "out of alle charitee". Obviously she is not a woman to be crossed.

She is clearly a very physical, sensual figure. But Chaucer notes one physical defect, which is her deafness: "she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe." It is only later, when she gives the prologue to her own Tale, that the reader discovers that she is "somdel deaf" because her fifth husband boxed her ear after she had torn three pages from the book he was reading!

Chaucer dwells on the sensual qualities of the Wife of Bath and dwells too on the physical qualities of the Miller. He is "a stout carl ... Ful big he was of brawn and eek of bones". Where the Wife of Bath had "hipes large", the Miller is "short-sholdred" and a "thikke knarre". He has the build of a wrestler and Chaucer claims that when the Miller wrestles he always wins the ram, the prize given to the champion. The Wife of Bath's face is "fair" and therefore attractive, quite unlike the face of the Miller, which Chaucer describes in detail. He has a red "berd" that was broad like a spade. Chaucer says

Upon the cop right of his nose he had  
A werte, and thereon stood a toft of heris,  
Reed as the bristles of a sowes eris.

The enjambment allows the "werte" to be highlighted at the beginning of the line. Perhaps more importantly, Chaucer's simile comparing the hairs to the bristles in a sow's ears suggests that the Miller is dirty and animalistic. The colour of his "berd" has already been compared to a sow's colouring, so this second reference emphasises his dirtiness. The "berd" is also associated with the colour of a fox, a simile which suggests that, like the fox, he is cunning. His nose is ugly and dirty: "His nosethirles blake were and wide" and he has a "mouth as greet ... as a great forneys", which not only suggests foul breath but associates him with hell, as hell in medieval painting was often represented as a gaping mouth. The Miller's physical ugliness hints at a moral ugliness, which Chaucer develops elsewhere in his portrait.

His physical foulness is matched by his stories, "moost of sinne and harlotries" and his dishonesty. Chaucer condemns him directly, unlike his portrayal of the Wife of Bath, when he describes him as "a janglere and a goliardeys" indicating that he is rowdy buffoon. Like the fox, he is cunning and secretive in some ways, unlike the open and sociable Wife of Bath. The Miller cheats his customers; he steals some the grain they bring to him for grinding and charges them double the

price: "Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries". His "thombe of gold" has brought him much wealth.

Chaucer does not record what sort of horse the Miller is riding. He does make clear that the Miller is noisy and rowdy as he "broghte us out of towne" playing the bagpipes. His rowdiness and violence are shown in the way he can heave doors off their hinges or break them "at a renning with his head", which perhaps is a drunken party-piece.

Chaucer brings these two characters to life by describing their clothing, their habits and mannerisms, and, particularly in the case of the Miller, by the detail of the language he uses to portray them. They are perhaps making the pilgrimage for very different reasons. The Wife of Bath might be seeking a man, whilst the bagpipe-playing Miller seems to be taking a holiday!

## Commentary

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*This is a perceptive exploration of points of connection between the portraits of the Wife of Bath and the Miller. It shows discrimination in analysing ways in which meaning is created. A good higher response.*