GEOFFREY CHAUCER

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

- Born sometime between 1340 & 1343 in London, England
- Died October 25th, 1400
- First poet to have been buried in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey.
- In 1566, a monument was erected there in memory of Geoffrey Chaucer.
- Known as the Father of English literature
- Widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages.

CHAUCER

- Chaucer popularized the literary use of the vernacular.

- Vernacular - the native language of a specific population, as opposed to a language of wider communication that is not native to the population.

- Example: Chaucer was a crucial figure in developing the legitimacy of the vernacular – using Middle English in his writing – at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin. English was considered the common man's language and was thought too inferior to use in the works of literature.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- Written in Middle English
- It is a long narrative poem, detailing the meeting and journey of a group of travelers making a pilgrimage.
- A collection of stories organized in a frame narrative or frame tale.
- A story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims.
- The focus is not of the journey, but on the pilgrims and the stories they share during the journey.
- The stories are being told to pass the time as the pilgrims travel…to make the time go by faster.
- Each character tells a tale.

CANTERBURY CATHEDRAL

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- The stories are told as they travel, on a spring day in April, from London to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket at Canterbury Cathedral

- Canterbury Cathedral is located in Canterbury & is one of the oldest and most famous Christian structures in England.

- Each character tells a tale - the prize is a free meal at the Tabard Inn upon their return.

- The journey begins at the Tabard Inn where all the pilgrims gather and will end at the same place.

- There are a total of 30 people (or pilgrims).

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- During the time of the story, people only socialized within their own social status.

- Example: the rich did not socialize with the poor or middle class...the middle class did not socialize with the poor or the rich (upper class)...the poor did not socialize with the middle class or the upper class.

- This tale is of a group of people that make-up all social classes - the group is diverse in that the pilgrims come from all social classes.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- In Chaucer's day, a leisurely journey to Canterbury on horseback probably took 3-5 days, with stops at inns along the way.

- Spring rains probably made the dirt road connecting London and Canterbury muddy in spots with water pooling in holes and ruts.

- Robbers were a constant danger on rural roads. However, armed pilgrims traveling in a large group, like those in *The Canterbury Tales*, were probably safe.

WESTMINSTER ABBEY

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- Why would people travel to the shrine of Saint Thomas à Becket? For many reasons: healing, prayer, for many Christian purposes; however, many people also travelled the route of the pilgrimage for bad or evil purposes. Some made the journey to rob others along the route or to steal from those they were travelling with.

The Canterbury Tales

- In medieval Christianity, pilgrimages – long, annual trips to holy places – were a popular way to express religious devotion. Canterbury, a town 55 miles southeast of London, was a major destination for English pilgrims. The cathedral in Canterbury was the site of Archbishop Thomas à Becket's murder in 1170. Days after the murder and three years before Becket was made a saint, people began flocking to the cathedral to pay their respects.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- Chaucer did not finish the book before his death. Originally, Chaucer had intended to have each character tell two tales during the journey to Canterbury and two tales on the return trip. The finished product is not what Chaucer had intended for the book when he began working on it in his early 40s.

POET'S CORNER @ WESTMINSTER ABBEY

The Canterbury Tales

- The book contains a lengthy "Prologue" that is narrated by "The Host," Harry Bailey (which is actually Chaucer) and consists of a brief description of each of the travelers, introducing each one of them.

- Before each story that a pilgrim relates to the other pilgrims, we also have a small (short) prologue that lets the reader (you) know what is going on during the journey between the stories...revealing talk between the pilgrims and much about themselves.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

I. THE PROLOGUE – CHARACTER DESCRIPTIONS

II. THE KNIGHT'S TALE – PROLOGUE

III. THE KNIGHT'S TALE

IV. THE MILLER'S TALE – PROLOGUE

V. THE MILLER'S TALE

VI. THE REEVE'S TALE – PROLOGUE

VII. THE REEVE'S TALE

VIII. ETC...

Changes in the Catholic Church during Chaucer's Time

- There were conflicts between the Church and secular leaders about who should appoint Church leaders. This led to important changes like the creation of the College of Cardinals to elect popes. It also led eventually to the Concordat of Worms in which the Church got the right to appoint all its own bishops.

- It was in the Middle Ages that the Church started to be strict about requiring clergy to be celibate.

- There was the split between the Roman Catholic Church and what is now called the Eastern Orthodox Church.

- Monasteries were made a much more important part of the Church.

Chaucer's Time & the difficulties

- Political and religious unrest
- The "Black Death" (1348-1350)

    Also know as the Bubonic Plague.

- The Peasants' Revolt (1381)

    The **Peasants' Revolt**, **Wat Tyler's Rebellion**, or the **Great Rising** of 1381 was one of many revolts in medieval Europe & one of the most extreme. The revolt was a failure but increased awareness in the upper classes of the need for the reform of feudalism in England and the appalling misery felt by the lower classes as a result of their enforced near-slavery.
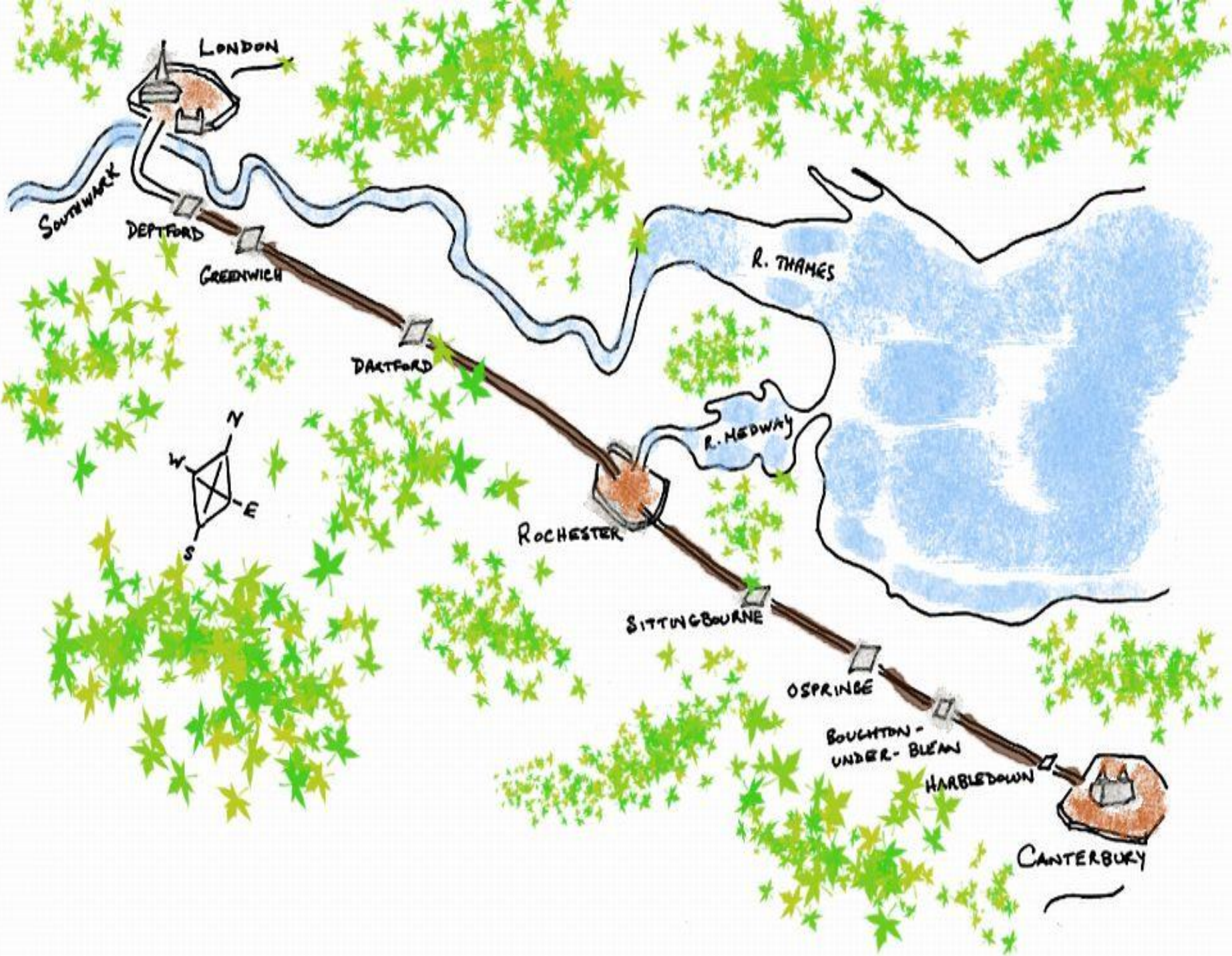
London

Southwark

Deptford

Greenwich

Dartford

N
W   E
S

R. Thames

R. Medway

Rochester

Sittingbourne

Ospringe

Boughton-
under-Blean

Harbledown

Canterbury

CHAUCER & TCT:
VOCABULARY – LITERARY TERMS (15):

1) <u>Allusion</u>: making an indirect reference to prior knowledge

2) <u>Characterization</u>: techniques writers use to develop characters

3) <u>Frame Story / Framed Narrative</u>: a story told within a narrative setting or frame – hence creating a story within a story

4) <u>Inference</u>: the act or process of inferring – to conclude from evidence – to lead to a conclusion

5) <u>Ironic Tone</u>: to speak in a light-hearted or joking manner, somewhat ironic – sarcastically, but not quite as mocking

CHAUCER & TCT:
VOCABULARY – LITERARY TERMS (15)

6) Irony: a contrast between expectation and reality – often surprising the reader or viewer

7) Middle English: English from about 1100-1500

8) Narrator: the person or voice that tells the story – a character in the story or a voice outside the action

9) Prologue: the preface or introduction to a literary work – addressed to the audience

10) Romance: a long fictitious tale of heroes and extraordinary or mysterious events

CHAUCER & TCT: VOCABULARY – LITERARY TERMS

11) <u>Sarcasm</u>: a cutting, often ironic remark

12) <u>Satire</u>: Irony or caustic wit used to expose or attack human folly

13) <u>Standard English</u>: refers to a form of the English language accepted as the norm – normal language used daily

14) <u>Stereotype</u>: characters who conform to a fixed pattern or are defined by a single trait

15) <u>Tone</u>: an expression of a writer's attitude toward a subject

CHAUCER & TCT: VOCABULARY – READING TERMS (25)

1) <u>Accrue</u>: to come as gain; accumulate
2) <u>Adversity</u>: hardship; misfortune
3) <u>Agility</u>: an ability to move quickly & easily; nimbleness
4) <u>Benign</u>: gentle; mild
5) <u>Courtliness</u>: refined behavior; elegance
6) <u>Deferred</u>: to postpone
7) <u>Diligent</u>: painstaking; hard-working
8) <u>Discreet</u>: prudent; having or showing good judgment in conduct – especially in speech

CHAUCER & TCT:
VOCABULARY – READING TERMS (25)

9) <u>Disdain</u>: a show of contempt; scorn

10) <u>Dispatch</u>: promptness; efficiency

11) <u>Duress</u>: compulsion by means of threat

12) <u>Eminent</u>: standing out above others; high-ranking; prominent

13) <u>Engendering</u>: engender – to produce; beget; procreate; to cause to exist or to develop

14) <u>Frugal</u>: careful with money; thrifty

15) <u>Guile</u>: clever trickery; deceit

16) <u>Malady</u>: a disease or disorder; ailment

CHAUCER & TCT:
VOCABULARY – READING TERMS (25)

17) <u>Mode</u>: a current fashion or style

18) <u>Obstinate</u>: not easily subdued, remedied, or removed; stubborn

19) <u>Personable</u>: pleasing in behavior & appearance

20) <u>Pilgrimage</u>: a journey to a sacred place or with a lofty purpose

21) <u>Repine</u>: to complain; fret

22) <u>Sedately</u>: in a composed, dignified manner; calmly

23) <u>Stature</u>: natural height (as a person) in an upright/standing position

24) <u>Statute</u>: a law

25) <u>Wield</u>: to handle skillfully

CHAUCER & THE CANTERBURY TALES

- A LOOK AT MIDDLE ENGLISH

- The Canterbury tales was written in Middle English, a newer version of the Anglo-Saxon period's Old English. Although it "looks" much more like the Modern English we write and speak today, it's pronunciation is still quite different.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

- **The Prologue - Middle English**

- Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
  The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
  And bathed every veyne in swich licour
  Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
  Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
  Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
  Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
  Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
  And smale foweles maken melodye,
  That slepen al the nyght with open ye
  (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);

- **The Prologue – Modern English**

- When April with his showers sweet with fruit
  The drought of March has pierced unto the
  root And bathed each vein with liquor that has
  power To generate therein and sire the flower;
  When Zephyr also has, with his sweet breath,
  Quickened again, in every holt and heath,
  The tender shoots and buds, and the young
  sun Into the Ram one half his course has run,
  And many little birds make melody
  That sleep through all the night with open eye
  (So Nature pricks them on to ramp and rage)-

CHAUCER PRE-ACTIVITY

- STORY TIME:
- Recall a time when you and some friends (or family) told funny stories about growing up.
- What situations inspire people to tell stories?
- What role does an audience play in making the telling of a story more interesting?
- Put your thoughts on paper for the next few minutes.
- Be prepared to share some of these thoughts with the class if you are called on during the discussion of storytelling.