



Poetry Recitation & Copywork

Poetry Selections

This session's featured poet is Geoffrey Chaucer. We've included four poetry selections for your kids and teens with **listening links** so they can hear the poetry in Middle English, as well as links to **interlinear translations or paraphrases** to better understand what they are hearing.

Have fun with these poems by letting your students listen to each one first and see just how much they understand. *Can they pick out words? Do they understand the gist of the poem?*

- "Whan that Aprill..." (opening lines from Canterbury Tales)
- Controlling the Tongue
- The Love Unfeigned
- Balade

For copywork, we have included Zaner-Bloser style handwriting sheets for primary, elementary, and cursive, as well as college-ruled for older students. The poems and content we have chosen are:

- The Lady of Shalott
- O Come, O Come, Emmanuel (& Veni, Veni Emmanuel)
- Knights' Code of Chivalry

"Some say that the age of chivalry is past, that the spirit of romance is dead. The age of chivalry is never past, so long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth."

~ Charles Kingsley



Geoffrey Chaucer

c. 1343 - October 25, 1400

Geoffrey Chaucer was an English poet, author, philosopher, and diplomat, and is widely regarded as the father of English literature. His most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*, revolutionized English poetry and storytelling, shaping the future of the English language. Chaucer was one of the first writers to use Middle English in a major literary work, at a time when Latin and French dominated the written word.

Chaucer was born around 1343, most likely in London, to a prosperous family of wine merchants. His father, John Chaucer, was a respected vintner and held connections with the royal court, which likely helped the young Geoffrey to gain early exposure to courtly life

and education. Although little is known about his formal schooling, Chaucer was well-versed in Latin, French, and Italian, indicating a strong education.

In his early years, Chaucer served as a page in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster, which provided him access to the aristocratic and intellectual circles of England. This experience helped shape his understanding of courtly manners, politics, and literature.

The beginning of his adult life was marked by his service in the Hundred Years' War, and in 1359, he was part of an English campaign in France under King Edward III. He was captured during a siege, but was later ransomed for £16 (equivalent to over £14,500 by today's standards!) which suggests how important he was.

After returning to England, Chaucer became a royal servant and was trusted with several diplomatic missions to France, Italy, and Spain. These journeys exposed him to the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, which profoundly influenced his literary style.

Throughout his life, Chaucer held numerous prestigious positions, including being a controller of customs and exports, a clerk of the king's works where he supervised royal building projects, and a member of Parliament. And throughout all his political duties, Chaucer wrote extensively, producing poetry that reflected the complexity of medieval society. Some of his notable early works include *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, and *Parliament of Fowls*.

Around 1387, Chaucer began writing *The Canterbury Tales*, his most ambitious and influential work. The book contains a collection of stories told by 30 pilgrims on a journey from London to Canterbury, and provides a rich tapestry of medieval English life, featuring characters from different social classes, including a knight, a miller, a prioress, a merchant, a cook, and a pardoner.

Each tale reflects the storyteller's personality, blending humor, morality, satire, and deep philosophical insights. Chaucer's use of iambic pentameter and rhymed couplets marked a turning point in English poetry, laying the foundation for later poets like William Shakespeare. Although *The Canterbury Tales* was unfinished at Chaucer's death, its impact on English literature was profound.

Chaucer's later years were marked by political turbulence, and he lost favor at court during the reign of Richard II, though he was later granted a pension by King Henry IV in 1399. He died on October 25, 1400, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. His tomb became the first in what would later be known as *Poets' Corner*, where many of England's greatest writers, including Shakespeare and Charles Dickens, would be laid to rest.

Yet Geoffrey Chaucer's work remains a c

ornerstone of English literature. He transformed storytelling by making English a liter

ary language, capturing the richness of human nature with wit, realism, and social commentary. His influence can be seen in poets such as John Dryden, Alexander Pope, and T.S. Eliot.

Geoffrey Chaucer Selections

“Whan that Aprill...”

(Opening lines from *The Canterbury Tales*)

[Listen here.](#)

[Interlinear translation here.](#)

Whan that Aprille 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 Zepirus eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,
And smale foweles maken melodye,
That slepen al the nyght with open ye,
So priketh hem Nature in hir corages,
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

The Love Unfeigned

[Listen here.](#)

[Paraphrase here.](#)

O YONGE fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with your age,
Repeyeth hoom from worldly vanitee,
And of your herte up-casteth the visage
To thilke god that after his image
Yow made, and thinketh al nis but a fayre
This world, that passeth sone as floures fayre.

And loveth him, the which that right for love
Upon a cros, our soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevne a-bove;
For he nil falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al hoolly on him leye.
And sin he best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feyned loves for to seke?

Geoffrey Chaucer Selections

Controlling the Tongue

[Listen here.](#)

[Interlinear translation here.](#)

My son, keep well thy tongue, and keep thy friend.
A wicked tongue is worse than a fiend;
My son, from a fiend men may them bless.
My son, God of his endless goodness
Walled a tongue with teeth and lips eke,
For man should him avise what he speak.
My son, full oft, for too much speech
Hath many a man been spilt, as clerkes teach;
But for little speech avisely
Is no man shent, to speak generally.
My son, thy tongue shouldst thou restrain
At all time, but when thou dost thy pain
To speak of God, in honour and prayer.
The first virtue, son, if thou wilt lere,
Is to restrain and keep well thy tongue;
Thus learn children when that they been young.
My son, of muckle speaking evil-avised,
Where less speaking had enough sufficed,
Cometh muckle harm; thus was me told and taught.
In muckle speech sin wanteth nought.
Wost thou whereof a rakel tongue serveth?
Right as a sword forcutteth and forcarveth
An arm a-two, my dear son, right so
A tongue cutteth friendship all a-two.

Truth

[Listen here.](#)

[Paraphrase here.](#)

Fle fro the pres, and dwelle with sothefastnesse,
Suffise thin owen thing, thei it be smal;
For hord hath hate, and clymbyng tykelnesse,
Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal.
Savour no more thanne the byhove schal;
Reule weel thiself, that other folk canst reede;
And trouthe schal delyvere, it is no drede.

Tempest the nought al croked to redresse,
In trust of hire that tourneth as a bal.
Myche wele stant in litel besynesse;
Bywar therfore to spurne ayeyns an al;
Stryve not as doth the crokke with the wal.
Daunte thiself, that dauntest otheres dede;
And trouthe shal delyvere, it is no drede.

That the is sent, receyve in buxumnesse;
The wrestlyng for the worlde axeth a fal.
Here is non home, here nys but wyldernesse.
Forth, pylgryme, forth! forth, beste, out of thi stall!
Know thi contré! loke up! thonk God of al!
Hold the heye weye, and lat thi gost the lede;
And trouthe shal delyvere, it is no drede.

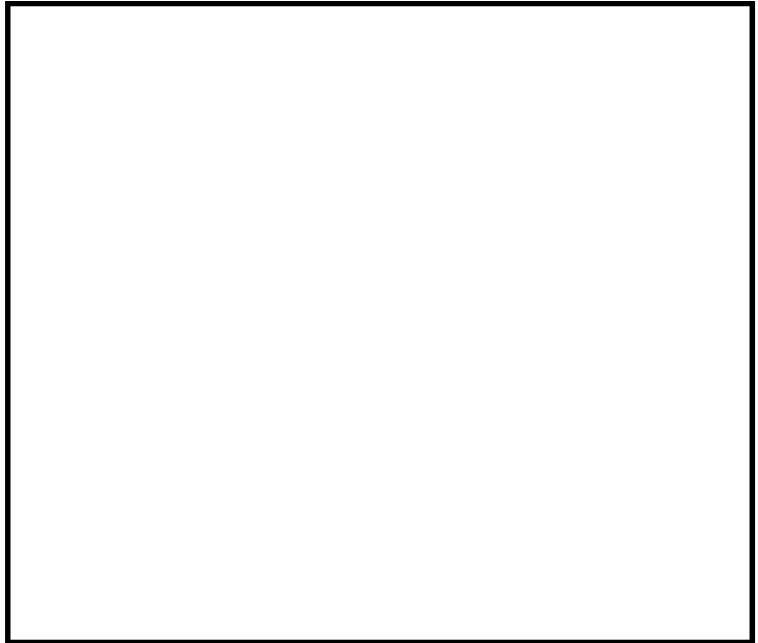
Therefore, thou Vache, leve thine olde
wrechednesse;
Unto the world leve now to be thral.
Crie hym mercy, that of hys hie godnesse
Made the of nought, and in especial
Draw unto hym, and pray in general
For the, and eke for other, hevenelyche mede;
And trouthe schal delyvere, it is no drede.

Poetry Study

Title:

Type of Poem:

Use the box to at right to draw a picture of what the poem brings to mind.



Write one thing you liked and did not like about the poem:

Write three adjectives about the poem.

Compose a few lines of your own poem inspired by this work
