The Prologue from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

**Build Vocabulary**

**Spelling Strategy** The *shun* sound at the end of a word can be spelled -tion, -sion, or -ion. When adding the suffix -ion to a word ending in a silent letter e, the e is usually dropped. For example, when adding -ion to the word prevaricate, the silent e is dropped to form prevarication.

**Using the Suffix -tion**

**A. DIRECTIONS:** Change each verb into a noun with the suffix -tion. Then fill in each blank in the sentences with the appropriate noun.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>contribute</td>
<td>navigation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recreate</td>
<td>decoration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. The Knight has in his possession fine horses but wears clothes lacking _____________________.
2. The Monk prefers hunting for ____________________ to poring over books and tilling the soil.
3. The Friar gives absolution and an easy penance to those who accompany their confessions with a large financial _____________________.
4. When it comes to getting a boat from one destination to another, apparently none can compare with the Skipper at _____________________.

**Using the Word Bank**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
<th>verb</th>
<th>noun</th>
<th>noun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>solicitous</td>
<td>garnished</td>
<td>absolution</td>
<td>commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sanguine</td>
<td>avouches</td>
<td>prevarication</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**B. DIRECTIONS:** Write the word from the Word Bank that best completes each of the following sentences.

1. The Franklin is probably most ____________________ when he is dining, since eating well gives him tremendous pleasure.
2. The Friar believes that ____________________ should come at a price so that people experience painful consequences for their sinful actions.
3. The Miller ____________________ that just by feeling grain with his thumb he can tell how much it is worth, which is a fairly bold assertion.
4. The Knight’s son’s garments are ____________________ with embroidery.
5. The innkeeper is a ____________________ host, doing all he can to make sure his guests are comfortable and happy.
6. A Pardoner given to ____________________ ought to be afraid of excommunication.
7. The Friar claims to have a ____________________ from the Pope to hear confessions.
The Prologue from The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

Grammar and Style: Past and Past Perfect Tenses

Tenses of verbs indicate when events happen. Writers use the past tense to show that an action or a condition began and ended at a particular time in the past. They use the past perfect tense to clarify that an action or a condition ended before another past action began.

The past tense is formed by adding -ed or -d to the base form of the verb. The past perfect tense uses the helping verb had before the past participle of the main verb. This passage from “The Prologue” contains both the past tense and past perfect tense.

He had his son with him, a fine young Squire,
A lover and cadet, a lad of fire
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed. past perfect tense
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed. past tense

A. Practice: Read the following sentences. On the line that follows each sentence, list each verb and identify its tense as past or past perfect.

1. The Knight had followed the chivalric code and had achieved success in many battles.

2. The Yeoman had burnished his hunting horn clean before he dangled it from a baldric of bright green.

3. According to the narrator, the Nun had learned fine table manners and so never dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep.

4. The Oxford Clerk had found no preferment in the church or more worldly employment but, instead, just lived off loans from his friends.

5. The Franklin had stocked his house with fine wine and all sorts of rich foods and then arrayed his hall table with places for guests.

B. Writing Application: Read each sentence. On the line that follows it, rewrite it, using the correct form of the verb that appears in brackets.

1. Chaucer [intend] to write 124 tales, but [complete] only 24 by the time he died.

2. The narrator [decide] to go to Canterbury before he met the other pilgrims but [agree] to travel with them once he made their acquaintance.

3. The narrator [want] to write down what he [observe] of each pilgrim while he still had the time and space to do so.
Name _____________________________________________________ Date ___________________

The Prologue from *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer

Reading Strategy: Analyzing Difficult Sentences

When you encounter long or involved sentences that seem too difficult to understand, asking yourself *who, what, when, where, why,* and *how* questions can help you figure out their meaning.

**DIRECTIONS:** Read the following sentences from “The Prologue.” Then answer the *who, what, when, where, why,* and/or *how* questions following them to decode their meaning.

He knew the taverns well in every town / And every innkeeper and barmaid too / Better than lepers, beggars and that crew, / For in so eminent a man as he / It was not fitting with the dignity / Of his position, dealing with a scum / of wretched lepers; nothing good can come / Of dealings with the slum-and-gutter dwellers, / But only with the rich and victual-sellers.

1. What and whom did he know well? ______________________________________________________
2. Whom didn’t he know as well? Why? _____________________________________________________
   
   If, when he fought, the enemy vessel sank, / He sent his prisoners home; they walked the plank.
3. What did he do? _______________________________________________________________________
4. How did he do this? _____________________________________________________________________

They had a Cook with them who stood alone / For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone, / Sharp flavoring-powder and a spice for savor.

5. Who “stood alone”? _____________________________________________________________________
6. For what did he stand alone? ____________________________________________________________

A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded; No one alive could talk as well as he did / On points of medicine and of surgery, / For, being grounded in astronomy, / He watched his patient’s favorable star / And, by his Natural Magic, knew what are / The lucky hours and planetary degrees / For making charms and magic effigies.

7. Whom is this about? ____________________________________________________________________
8. What can he do? _______________________________________________________________________
9. How does he treat his patients? __________________________________________________________
   
   But best of all he sang an Offertory, / For well he knew that when that song was sung / He’d have to preach and tune his honey-tongue / And (well he could) win silver from the crowd, / That’s why he sang so merrily and loud.
10. What does he do best? __________________________________________________________________
11. What does he know he’ll have to do when he’s done singing? ________________________________
12. Why does he sing so merrily and loud? ___________________________________________________
The Prologue from The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer

Literary Analysis: Characterization

Characterization is the writer’s act of creating and developing the personality traits of a character. Chaucer uses both direct characterization—that is, stating facts about a personality directly—and indirect characterization—that is, revealing personality through details of appearance, thoughts, speech, and/or actions—to develop the vivid personalities of the pilgrims in The Canterbury Tales.

DIRECTIONS: Read the following passages from “The Prologue.” In each passage, circle any direct statements about the character’s personality. Underline statements about the character’s appearance, speech, and/or behavior that reveal his or her personality indirectly. Then, on the lines that follow, summarize what the passage conveys about the character’s personality.

1. There was also a Nun, a Prioress, / Her way of smiling very simple and coy. / Her greatest oath was only “By St. Loy!” / And she was known as Madam Eglantyne. / And well she sang a service, with a fine / Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly, / And she spoke daintily in French, extremely, / After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe; / French in the Paris style she did not know. / At meat her manners were well taught withal / No morsel from her lips did she let fall, / Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep; / But she could carry a morsel up and keep / The smallest drop from falling on her breast.

2. A Sergeant at the Law who paid his calls, / Wary and wise, for clients at St. Paul’s / There also was, of noted excellence. / Discreet he was, a man to reverence, / Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.

3. A worthy woman from beside Bath city / Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity. / In making cloth she showed so great a bent / She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent. / In all the parish not a dame dared stir / Towards the altar steps in front of her. / And if indeed they did, so wrath was she / As to be quite put out of charity. / Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground; / I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound, / The ones she wore on Sunday on her head. / Her hose were of the finest scarlet red / And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.

4. The Miller was a chap of sixteen stone. / A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone. / He did well out of them, for he could go / And win the ram at any wrestling show. / Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast / He could heave any door off hinge and post, / Or take a run and break it with his head.