

English Literature and History
Answer Key to Medieval Literature Questions

Caedmon

MULTIPLE CHOICE READING QUESTIONS

1. a
2. c
3. d
4. c
5. a
6. e
7. a
8. c
9. b
10. c

Beowulf

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. a
2. b
3. c
4. c
5. d
6. a
7. e
8. c
9. d
10. b

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Many of the heroes of the ancient world, such as Alexander the Great and Julius Caesar, traced their lineage back to some god.

Who is the alleged ancestor-god of Hrothgar? What purpose does it serve to trace a king's ancestry back to a god? Has this practice continued into the present?

While Alexander claimed to be a descendent of the chief of the Greek gods, Zeus, and Caesar a descendent of the goddess Venus, Hrothgar was said to be descended from Odin or Woden, the chief of the Germanic gods (who gave English-speaking people the name for the middle of the week, "Wednesday"). Obviously having a god as one's ancestor gives the leader more authority to rule and credibility as a leader: "It is no wonder that with such a lineage, Hrothgar became a mighty chief." Mythological ancestry has continued up to recent history, especially in Asian countries, such as Japan; for example, the Japanese emperor during World War II claimed to be a god, but when Japan surrendered to the Allied nations at the end of the war, the emperor had to declare that he was not indeed a god after all. Japanese revisionists, however, have claimed that he never renounced his divinity.

2. What is the irony regarding the building of Heorot when the purpose of the hall is contrasted with what happens in the narrative?

Heorot was built from the wealth of Hrothgar's victories in battle, but it stands helpless in Grendel's nightly sieges.

3. What happened in Beowulf's swimming race with Breca? Who won the race?

Breca wins technically, but Beowulf actually would have won, but heroically fought against sea creatures and is thus rewarded with the sword Nægeling from his liege lord Hygelac.

4. How is Beowulf able to defeat Grendel's mother? What does he bring home as a trophy?

Beowulf enters the deep waters of the fen and becomes embraced in the clutches of the she-monster. Beowulf loses his sword and Grendel's mother tries to pierce him with a knife, but his trusted

“weapon-proof” armor protects him. He uses a sword that he finds in the den (a giant’s sword), and with it kills Grendel’s mother and cuts off the head of Grendel, which he takes up to the surface of the water as a trophy.

5. What is Beowulf’s spoil when he defeats the dragon? Who helps him in his efforts?

The spoil is the treasure found in the dragon’s lair, which is used for the people’s use. The generous wealth that comes from the lair is proof of It is the warrior Wiglaf who helps his liege lord in his efforts against the dragon.

IDENTIFICATION

1. Nageling
2. Heorot
3. Denmark
4. Odin
5. Woden
6. Sweden
7. Hygelac

Mystery Word: *Grendel*

Everyman

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Be able to explain why the news that Death brings to Everyman is so troubling and shocking.

Everyman is very reluctant to go on his journey because he is not ready—he needs “more time to give a reckoning.” Death has presented himself to him when he has least expected him.

2. How does Everyman try to make a deal with Death?

He tries to bribe Death. He says, “I give you my solemn promise that if you’ll be kind, yes, I’ll give you a thousand pieces of silver, if you put off this matter for another day.”

3. What does Everyman expect from Fellowship? Why is it “natural” for him to expect it from him?

Fellowship calls Everyman a “bosom friend” and says that he would never leave him even if it means giving up his own life. Furthermore, Fellowship tells him “if anyone has wronged you, you can count on it, he’ll be revenged, even if he should knock me dead on the ground.” His hyperbole has dramatic irony, as the audience knows what is to be asked of him and that he will be unwilling to deliver what he has promised. His large promises give Everyman some room to hope that he’ll “prove his words”; however, when Everyman tells him his troubles—that without delay he has to go before the High Judge—, Fellowship reneges on his oaths, showing allegorically that no one can entrust his immortal soul to mortal friends.

4. What does Everyman expect from Kindred and Cousin, and how are these expectations seemingly “reasonable”?

When Everyman sees Kindred and Cousin, he counts on their helping him, as there is an obligation between family members that does not exist elsewhere. Both Cousin and Kindred affirm that “blood is thicker than water” by saying that they will live and die together and that “you can ask anything of family.” Again, there is dramatic irony in these statements, as the audience knows that they will not be able to fulfill their bold statements of allegiance to their kin.

5. What excuse does Goods give for not being able to help Everyman? What moral or spiritual message is brought out by the character Goods in the play?

Goods has more than one excuse. First, he tells Everyman that it is not in his “line of business” to go on such journeys. Then, he tells Everyman that his health is too fragile and that he “wouldn’t last the trip.” In the Sermon on the Mount, found in the New Testament book of Matthew, Jesus says that “No man can serve

two masters.” The two masters mentioned are essentially money and God. If one loves one, Jesus says, he will hate the other. Goods says that Everyman has loved him to his “everlasting damnation.” Goods admits that his intention is to “kill a man’s soul,” a spiritual message to those who make money their god.

Harp Song of Dane Women

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. How many lines are there in each stanza of the poem? What is the rhyme scheme of the poem? The meter?
There are three lines in each stanza. Three-lined stanzas are called “triplets,” or “tercets,” if rhymed. The rhyme scheme of each stanza of the poem is AAA. The meter of the poem is tetrameter.
2. Find at least two examples of alliteration in the poem.
The poem is highly alliterative. Alliteration is the repetition of initial sounds of words in one line of poetry. In stanza 2, line 3, the words “suns” and “stray” are alliterative. Some other alliterative lines include the following: “signs” and “summer” in stanza 4, line 1; “birch-buds” in stanza 4, line 2; “Side” and “sicken” in stanza 4, line 4; etc.
3. Who is the “old grey Widow-maker”?
The old grey Widow-maker is the sea, as it makes widows of women whose husbands drown.
4. Why is this poem appropriately named the “Harp Song of the Dane Women”?
The song is the complaint of the Danish women who stay at home by the hearth while their husbands cross the sea to battle and die.
5. Explain what the “bed” and the “arms” of the old grey Widow-maker are.
The “bed” is the sea floor where the bodies of the Danish men finally rest and the “arms” are the seaweed.

6. Who is the speaker in this poem? What characteristics are brought out about the speaker from her statements about the old grey Widow-maker and the men?

The speaker is the corporate voice of the Danish women. The women are left destitute of their husbands, and are pictured as “jealous” of the “woman” that lures their husbands from their side to cross the sea where they die.

7. What in particular does stanza 3 describe?

Stanza 3 describes the old grey Widow-maker—the sea.

8. What does the word *you* refer to in stanza 4?

The word “you” refers to the husbands who leave in summer.

9. What does stanza 5 describe? (Be specific.)

Stanza 5 describes the activity of the Danish men: they enter their ships to cross the sea on their raids, called in the poem “slaughters.”

10. The poem contrasts the domestic life of the woman and the adventures of the sea-roving men. Write down details from the poem that illustrate the contrast.

The words and phrases used to identify the life of the wives include “hearth-fire” and “home-acre,” found in stanza 1; “mirth and talk at tables” and “The kine in the shed and the horse in the stables,” found in stanza 6. These words describing domestic life are contrasted with the words that identify the men’s activity of sailing and raiding: “shouts and the slaughters,” “lapping waters,” and “ship in her winter quarters” of stanza 5.

Robin Hood Turns Butcher

VOCABULARY EXERCISE

1. palfrey
2. cudgels
3. cleaver
4. guild
5. rueing

6. askance
7. prodigal
8. rogue
9. dun
10. shrewd

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. c
2. b
3. a
4. c
5. e
6. c
7. c
8. a
9. c
10. e

Bannockburn by Robert Burns

VOCABULARY AND EXERCISES

1. a
2. c
3. c
4. b
5. d
6. b
7. e
8. a
9. e
10. d

READING COMPREHENSION EXERCISES

1. d
2. c
3. a
4. b
5. d

Geoffrey Chaucer

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. What examples does the author of this passage give that illustrate that the way of life was different in the Middle ages from that of today?

In contrast to today, people wore clothing that revealed the class that they belonged to.

2. Write down some of the contemporaries of Chaucer (people living at the same time).

Living at the time of Geoffrey Chaucer were King Edward III, King Richard II, (William) Langland, and (John) Wycliff. It certainly was an active, volatile time in England and Europe. Edward III (1312–1377), son of Edward II and Isabella had started the Hundred Years War with France; Richard II (1367–1400), the grandson of Edward III, reigned during turbulent time of the Wat Tyler uprising; William Langland (ca. 1332–ca. 1400) wrote one of the most famous Medieval works, the allegorical “Piers Plowman,” which is considered the greatest English Medieval poem written before Chaucer; and John Wycliff (ca. 1328–1384), the Reformer, wrote the first translation of the Bible into English from the Latin Vulgate.

3. What two men are often called the “Father of English Poetry”?
Caedmon is called the “Father of English Poetry” because he is the first known English poet, but there is only one extant poet attributed to him. Chaucer was the first great English poet.

4. To what class did Chaucer belong? Was he the son of a peasant, merchant or aristocrat?
In Medieval society, Chaucer belonged to the middle class. His father was a London wine merchant.
5. What does Chaucer's surname tell of his national heritage? What does his name mean?
Chaucer's name most likely indicates that his family came from France, as his name is from an old Norman word "chausseur," which means shoemaker.
6. When Chaucer worked as a page to a noble family who were his master and mistress? What duties did he perform as page?
Chaucer worked as a page in the household of a prince and princess—Lionel, who was the third son of King Edward III, and Elizabeth. His duties in the household most likely included waiting at table, holding candles, delivering messages, and other household duties.
7. How was Chaucer released from prison in France?
Having accompanied Prince Lionel to France during the Hundred Years' War, Chaucer was captured and thrown into prison. Edward III paid the ransom money of sixteen pounds, a considerable amount of money in the mid-1300's.
8. Whom did Chaucer marry?
Geoffrey Chaucer married one of the maids-in-waiting for Philippa, King Edward III's beloved wife.
9. During what king's reigns did Chaucer live?
Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340–1400) lived during the reigns of Edward III and Richard II.
10. Write down the name of the book that he wrote for his son.
What does the title mean? What does the author of the passage say that we can learn from the book?
Chaucer wrote a book "A Treatise on the Astrolabe" for his son Lewis. The book was an instructional manual on the astrolabe, an

instrument used to measure distance of the stars. The book indicates Chaucer's desire to educate his son in simpler language (in English). It also contains the phrase "Lord of English," referring to the king, from which we get the phrase "King's English."

IDENTIFICATION

1. John
2. Poet
3. Thomas
4. wine
5. stories
6. France
7. pilgrim
8. Tabard
9. Canterbury
10. English
11. Tylor

Mystery Word: John of Gaunt

John of Gaunt was the "friend" of Chaucer. The death of his wife inspired Chaucer's poem "Dethe of Blaunche the Duchess."

The Pardoner's Tale by Geoffrey Chaucer

VOCABULARY AND EXERCISES

1. debauched
2. vainglory
3. absolve
4. gluttony
5. impious
6. blasphemy
7. brooch
8. avarice

9. apothecary

10. revolve

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. e

2. d

3. e

4. a

5. a

6. d

7. b

8. b

9. d

10. e

The Maid's Sword and Banner

VOCABULARY AND EXERCISES

1. d

2. e

3. c

4. e

5. a

6. b

7. a

8. c

9. d

10. b

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Who is the narrator in this story of Joan of Arc? How did he get to know Joan of Arc personally? (About two sentences)

The narrator is an eighty-two-year-old man who is recollecting his

youth, particularly his time working as a page and secretary of Joan of Arc. He knows Joan of Arc well as they grew up in the same village and were playmates. He also fought with her in the (French) Wars.

2. Name several details of this story would modern readers find difficult to believe as true? Why are they hard to believe? (About three sentences)

The narrator appears to be idealizing Joan of Arc with his high encomiums: "It is as if a little candle should speak of the eternal sun riding in the heavens"; he calls her "the most noble life that was ever born into this world save only One." His idealism makes the reader suspicious of the truthfulness of what he says about her. Perhaps most modern readers also question Joan of Arc's visions and voices.

3. What does the excitement over Joan of Arc's appointments reveal about Joan of Arc herself? In other words, why were even the most important people excited to be appointed to the humblest offices?

In the eyes of the narrator and others, Joan of Arc was a very important person, and thus she was likely to appoint important people—"men with great names and weighty influence."

4. Why did the Paladin not believe he had any chance of being appointed?

The Paladin thought that he was too humble for any position.

5. According to the narrator, what effect did Joan of Arc's appointment have on the Paladin?

According to the narrator, Joan of Arc had an ennobling effect on the Paladin. Joan of Arc says to the Paladin, "You began badly, but improved. Of old you were a fantastic talker, but there is a man in you, and I will bring it out." Her words made "the Paladin's face light up." The narrator then comments: "By the sound of that I think she has turned this braggart into a hero."

The Douglas Tragedy

ABOUT WORDS AND WORD ORIGINS

VOCABULARY AND EXERCISES

1. ere
2. mounted
3. briar
4. yon
5. eldest
6. spied
7. steed
8. wan
9. dappled
10. abide

READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. a
2. b
3. c
4. d
5. d
6. e
7. c
8. d
9. b
10. e

QUESTIONS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

1. Who is speaking in the first two stanzas of the poem?

The mother of Lady Margaret is speaking. In the second stanza, she is talking to her sons, who are the brothers of Lady Margaret.

2. Ballads of the Middle Ages are famous for their melancholy situations and eerie settings. What is the melancholy situation and eerie setting of the “Douglas Tragedy”?
The two lovers—Lord William and Lady Margaret are riding away in the gloom of night, “by the light of the moon.” She is choosing to abandon her family in favor of being with the one who loves her.
3. Much of the emotional drama of the poem is found in Lady Margaret. Who is Lady Margaret and what dilemma is she forced to face?
Lady Margaret is in the melancholy situation of choosing either to abandon her family or the one who loves her. No matter what she chooses, she will be unhappy.
4. This Scottish ballad also has a lot of pathos, or qualities that that bring out emotion in the reader. What is the pathos found in “The Douglas Tragedy”?
Anyone who is forced to take sides between two people that we love knows the emotional strain that Lady Margaret experiences. The pathos is found not only in the fact that her brothers fall in the fighting and she must dress her father’s wounds because of her decision, but also that the dear one for whom she has sacrificed her family is mortally wounded and eventually dies.
5. What is the significance of “Black Douglas” pulling the briar and flinging it into the lake? Why does he do it?
The briar, a thorny bush, grew out of Lord William’s grave and signifies Lord William himself and the fact that he proved a “thorn” in the lives of the Douglas family. The action, then, of Black Douglas, pulling the briar and flinging it into the lake, is a symbolic one and signifies his hatred of Lord William and his great dismay in the whole affair.