Timeline

The Dark Ages

400-500s  "Events" of Beowulf take place

450-900s  Anglo-Saxon society rules in England

600-1000s Monks spread Christianity in England

1000s Christians in England record Anglo-Saxon stories
The Middle Ages

1066  William the Conqueror, a French King, invades England

1095  The Catholic Church calls for the first holy war known as the First Crusade
1337  The Hundred Years' War begins in England

1347  The Black Death reaches Europe, beginning in Italy and spreading through the continent

1387  Geoffrey Chaucer begins writing "The Canterbury Tales"
The Canterbury Tales

- Chaucer lived during an age of transition and change in England

- Literacy spread, works written in English for the first time

- War and Plague upended old social norms, lead to new English rulers and way of life -> spread of reforms (Magna Carta in 1215)

- Influence of the Church on everyday life grew
○ **Canterbury Tales** was unique - beginning of an age of literature about every different class of people

○ Stories were in English, and they weren't just about kings, warriors, and dragons anymore

○ This book was so important, that the King of England started speaking English instead of French
○ Chaucer makes himself a character in the story - early example of a first-person narrator

○ This story uses a framing narrative - it is a series of stories-within-a-story

○ The framing narrative depicts a religious pilgrimage - The Canterbury Cathedral was the most popular pilgrimage site in Medieval England due to a murder that had happened there.
- Murder of Thomas Becket - friend of King Henry II. He was the Archbishop of Canterbury and was killed by political enemies. The Church named him a saint after his death.

- Pilgrimages were SUPER important in Medieval culture

- All social classes - nobility and peaseants - were expected to complete religious pilgrimages (to fight, to honor, to pay tribute to God)

- Required b/c of the Church power: they owned most of the land in Europe and had the power to tax anyone, make their own laws, hold their own trials. They could even charge kings with crimes.

- The Crusades were a military example of a pilgrimage
The Prologue

Depicts the beginning of a pilgrimage

Offers **social commentary** - opinions and moral judgements of different people and classes.

Features members of all 3 major social classes

- The Merchant Class - peasants, workers, traders, etc.
- The Ecclesiastical Class - members of church like nuns, monks
- The Nobility Class - knights, squires, dukes, etc.
The Prologue is told from Chaucer's point of view. He uses both direct and indirect characterization to introduce the different pilgrims.

**Direct**: Statements about that person's personality, beliefs, motivations, etc. Direct information about their character.

**Indirect**: Descriptions and details about the character that indirectly reveal something about their personality.

For example, the Knight is directly characterized as "honorable" and "chivalrous." He is indirectly characterized as humble, as Chaucer points out that he "is not gaily dressed."