Northern Broadsides

Education Resource Pack

The Canterbury Tales

This pack is broadly intended for students at Key Stage 4 and upwards.

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DRAMA

Tales from the Broadside

A synopsis of the play

The play opens with the poet, Chaucer, explaining how in the springtime of the year folk like to go on pilgrimages. He is himself staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, at the start of his own pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas Becket at Canterbury.

Suddenly a gang of 'nine and twenty' other pilgrims burst in and take over the place. The Host of the Tabard Inn welcomes everyone and proposes a little contest. On the way to Canterbury each pilgrim will tell a tale. Upon their return, the Host will provide a dinner as a prize for the best story.

They draw straws to decide who should go first, and so it falls to the Knight to begin. On the journey the pilgrims tell many tales, in many styles, until at last they come into Canterbury, where the Parson offers prayers of devotion and invokes the blessing of St Thomas on all.

THE PILGRIMS *and their tales…*

The Knight - An experienced campaigner, and of high status in the group, he embodies all the virtues of chivalry.

The Knight's Tale

Two princes of the city of Thebes, cousins Arcite and Palamon, are taken as prisoners of war by the Athenian Duke Theseus. Through the window of their prison cell they both set eyes on the lady Emilee and fall deeply in love.

After a time Theseus' friend, Duke Perotheus, pleads for Arcite's release. Theseus agrees and Arcite returns to Thebes. Both princes believe the other most fortunate: Arcite is free; but Palamon may look on Emilee every day.

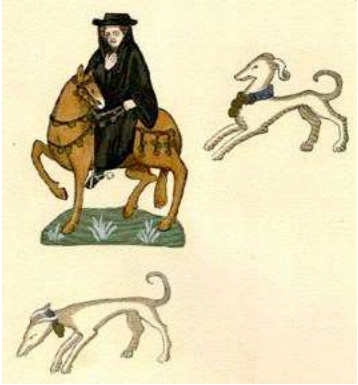
Arcite pines away in Thebes until Mercury appears to him in a dream, telling him that his destiny lies in Athens. Arcite returns to Theseus, disguised as a servant.

Arcite quickly rises in the Duke's household to become Theseus' squire. Then one night, Palamon escapes from prison and discovers his cousin, posing as a servant. Their fight draws the attention of Theseus who, on Discovering Arcite's true identity, and his rivalry with Palamon for Emilee, agrees to let them contest formally for her hand.

The two young princes prepare their armies for battle; Palamon praying to Venus (Goddess of Love) for victory, and Arcite placing his trust in the War God, Mars. Meanwhile Emilee, who doesn't really fancy getting married at all, prays to the Goddess Diana that she might stay single.

The day of battle arrives and, when Palamon is wounded, it appears that Arcite and the God Mars have won the day. But at the last moment, Arcite is thrown from his horse. As he dies, he gives Palamon and Emilee his blessing.

The Monk - A worldly man who regards the ancient rules of monastic life to be out of date. According to Chaucer, this monk is *'not a man to waste time in the choir / He loves his horses, greyhounds and the chase'.*



The Monk's Tale

In the original Canterbury Tales, the Monk tells no less than seventeen 'tragedies' about great men who, due to some fatal flaw, fall from grace. These men include Lucifer (Satan); Adam; Samson; Hercules and Nero – drawing on biblical, historical and Classical sources.

All these stories would have been very familiar in Chaucer's time, but they have little theatrical merit today. In his new version for Northern Broadsides Mike Poulton skilfully refocuses the function of the Monk within the narrative to comic effect. Following the Knight's tale, he begins bewailing 'in manner tragical', but it's soon apparent that he is going to be very boring, which offers an opportunity for the Miller to interrupt.

The Monk gets a second chance at the end of the first half, where Mike brings the interval curtain down as he is beginning his tale. The second half then picks up listen to the Monk some time later when the pilgrims, stiff with boredom, conclude his tale of Croesus – reiterating his recurring theme - that even the greatest men cannot escape the fickle finger of Fate, at which point the Knight interrupts him.

It's a neat solution from Mike Poulton, who manages to include the Monk's tale, without the audience having to listen to any of it.

The Miller - A drunkard and a thief. Chaucer warns us of the smutty nature of his tale saying, *'those who are for high morals and good taste / Should now be gone.'*

The Miller's Tale

An old carpenter has a new young wife, Alison, whom he guards jealously. Lodging with the newlyweds is a poor scholar, Nicholas, who earns his money through the study of astrology and the telling of fortunes. A lusty youth, he sets his cap at Alison and together they plot how they can get the carpenter out of the way.

Nicholas persuades the carpenter that he has seen Judgement Day predicted in the stars. A great flood is coming to end the world, and only he, the carpenter and Alison can be saved.

On the advice of Nicholas, the carpenter sets three barrels hanging in the rafters of the house, so that when the flood waters rise, they may cut the ropes and float free. On the eve of Judgement Day, (the following Monday), all three climb into their barrels; but Nicholas and Alison quickly climb back out of theirs and go back down to the bedroom to 'swyve' all night.

In the middle of the night the Parish Clerk, Absolon, passes beneath the bedroom window of Alison and lusty Nicholas. Absolon is in love with Alison and begins to sing at her window. When she appears to scold him he begs a kiss of her. She agrees, but sticks her bottom out of the window, which he kisses 'ful savourly'.

Realising that he has kissed an 'arse', Absolon decides to get his own back. He fetches a poker from the fire of the local smith, and returns to beg another kiss from Alison; only this time it's Nicholas who sticks his bum out, farting in Absolon's face, who is 'half blind ere its force is spent'. Nevertheless, Absolon can see well enough to find his mark with the red hot poker!

As Nicholas screams in pain at his burning bum and calls for 'water, water', the carpenter thinks this is the flood rising and cuts the ropes on his barrel. He plunges to the ground, breaking his arm in the fall.

The tale concludes with all the neighbours laughing at the foolish' cuckolded carpenter, and a general roundup of the injuries: Alison is well 'swyved'; Absolon has 'kissed her nether eye'; Nicholas is 'scalded in the towt'.

The Reeve - An official charged with managing the lands and estate of a lord. This particular reeve, named Osewald, is a corrupt and cunning man who has '*grown rich by filching anything he can'*.

Being a carpenter by trade, he takes offence at the Miller's tale and tells a story in response.

The Reeve's Tale

Set in the town of Trumpington, this is the tale of a dishonest miller, who lives with his wife, their buxom daughter, Maylin and a babe-in-arms. The miller is known to be a thief; filching a portion of the flour and corn that is brought to him for grinding. However, no-one can prove it, and the miller simply denies it.

Two young scholars, John and Aleyn, beg the Master of their College to give them leave to take the next load of corn for grinding, so they can see how it's done – but mainly so they can make sure the miller doesn't steal any flour.

They post themselves at each end of the milling process, watching the corn go in and the flour come out – but while they are distracted, the miller sets their horse loose. They come out to find that their horse has run onto the fen; and while the scholars are off chasing it, the miller steals some of their flour.

By the time the horse is caught it's too late to set off home; and so, for a price, the miller feeds the young scholars and makes up a bed for them in the one bedchamber, where everybody sleeps.

A chorus of farts and snores from the miller and his family keeps the two scholars awake. They know they have been duped, and Aleyn is feeling decidedly 'lusty'. He creeps over to Maylin's bed and gets in. She doesn't object and 'swyveing' sounds can soon be heard.

Meanwhile, John tries another tactic. He moves the baby's cot from the foot of the miller's bed to the foot of his own. So, when the miller's wife gets up in the night to 'piss' she returns to the wrong bed. More 'swyveing'.

Just before dawn, Aleyn leaves Maylin's bed to return to John, but makes the same mistake as the miller's wife. He gets into the bed without the cot – which is, of course, the miller's bed.

In the ensuing fight, the miller gets a good kicking and the scholars retrieve their stolen flour. And the Reeve is quits with the Miller.

The Cook - Roger Hodge from Ware – a good cook, we're told, and *'blancmanges are his specialitee'*. However, his personal hygiene leaves something to be desired even by medieval standards; not to mention the nasty, itchy ulcer on his knee.

The Cook's Tale

The Cook begins a tale of 'harlotry', about an apprentice, who enjoys drinking, gambling and swyveing more than honest work and is sacked by his master. He goes to live with a friend and his wife. The friend is also a lover of dice, drink and women; and his wife uses a shop as a front for prostitution…

The story is so vulgar and told in such coarse terms that it proves too much for the pilgrims who have already sat through the Reeve's tale and the Miller's, and can take only so much filth. The Cook is cut short in favour of the Monk, who has another go at telling his 'tragical' tale…

Interval

The Squire - This likely lad is a bit flashier than his father, the Knight. He imagines himself to be something of a ladies man, but only the Pardoner seems to fancy him.

The Squire's Tale

A faltering start to this tale, as the Squire can't quite remember it right. The Pardoner and Summoner bait him while he tries to get a grip of his story.

You have to listen carefully to glean that it's about a King called Cambyuskan in the land of Tartary, who is given three magic presents by a young knight: a flying horse made of brass; a mirror in which may be seen the truth in men's souls; and a ring, which enables the wearer to understand the magic of birds.

The King then gives the magic ring to his daughter, who sees a falcon on a tree – wounding herself because her heart has been broken.

The Squire then switches briefly back to the King, then promises another tale altogether, and becomes so confused that no-one can follow the plot. The Host comes to the rescue, but the Squire is dejected at not being able to finish his tale.

The Pardoner - This corrupt priest epitomises the worst excesses of the medieval Church, selling divine absolution in exchange for cash, and *'piggy's bones'* as holy relics.

There is self conscious irony in his moral fable, which demonstrates that greed is the root of all evil.

The Pardoner's Tale

A moral tale of three rich young men, who waste their lives and money in an excess of drinking, gambling and womanising. One night, while they are sitting in a tavern, 'soaked in drink', they hear a death-bell ringing outside before a corpse on its way to the graveyard.They are told that the dead man is a friend of theirs, that he was killed suddenly by a thief called Death, and that this same Death has killed many other

men, women and children that year.

The three drunken youths set out to find Death and kill him; and swear an oath of loyalty and love to each other in this quest. Next morning on the road they meet a mysterious old man, who directs them to an oak tree, where they will find Death. Instead, beneath the tree the men find a rich stash of gold florins – and promptly forget all about their quest to kill Death.

They agree that they cannot carry the gold home by daylight; so they draw straws to decide which one will fetch food and wine, while the other two stand guard until nightfall.

The two men remaining on guard secretly plot to kill the other when he returns, and split the treasure two ways instead of three. Meanwhile, their intended victim has returned to town and bought poison from an apothecary. It's his intent to poison the wine and keep the gold for himself alone.

And so – two of the young men stab the third upon his return from the town; but when they drink to their new found wealth, they are both poisoned. Hence, all three drunken men do indeed find Death at the foot of the oak tree.

The Pardoner then chides mankind (and the pilgrims) for their sinfulness and offers to sell them pardons from the Pope. For a price he will write their names on a scroll, which will guarantee their straight passage to Heaven.

The Wife of Bath - This mature lady has made a good career of being a wife, having buried five husbands and on the look out for number six. Chaucer tells us that she's quite deaf, and has been on many other pilgrimages before this one.

The Wife herself gives us the benefit of her experience and philosophy of marriage – 'Perfect is for nuns. I'd rather be a wife'

The Wife of Bath's Tale

An Arthurian fable about a 'lusty bachelor' who forces himself on a young maid, and for this crime of rape is condemned to death by the King. However, the Queen intercedes with a task for the young knight. His life will be spared if he can discover what it is that women desire most. He has a year and a day in which to complete his quest.

On his search the knight hears many answers to this question, but cannot find the definitive answer that applies to all women. The year passes quickly and he is sorrowfully returning to face his certain death when he encounters an old woman in a woodland glade. She promises to tell him the answer to his question if he swears to grant her the next thing she asks of him. The young man willingly agrees.

All the court turns out to hear the young knight's answer to the Queen's riddle – 'the thing all women want is sovereignty o'er their husbands'. No widow, wife or maid could contradict him and his life was spared. At which, the old crone spoke up and demanded her part of the bargain. She asks to be the knight to take her as his wife.

The young man begs her to ask anything else of him, but this is her demand and he may not refuse her. They are married the next day, and that night he is less than enthusiastic in bed; until his bride guides his thoughts to appreciate an old wife and beware the problems of a young and beautiful wife. Overwhelmed by her wisdom, the knight gives sovereignty to her and promises to love her, whatever her age or beauty.

Satisfied with his acceptance of her, the old crone then transforms into a beautiful young maiden and they live happily ever after – thus proving that it is to the benefit of men to give their wives mastery over them.

The Clerk of Oxenford- A poor and pious scholar, the Clerk's tale is probably the most challenging of all for a modern audience to understand. It almost seems like a master-class in mental cruelty, but this is a profound religious allegory. The central character, Grisilde, represents the perfect Christian soul– pure and constant, ever trusting in her Lord. Ultimately, her humility and endurance are rewarded.

The Clerk of Oxenford's Tale

An Italian Marquis, under pressure to marry from his people, selects a peasant girl – Grisilde. Upon their marriage she promises faithfully to never to disobey him in deed or thought.

The Marquis wishes to test her constancy and when their first child is born, he tells Grisilde that the people are unhappy with his marriage to such a low born woman. For this reason they will not tolerate the child, and she must die. Grisilde, despite her grief, surrenders her daughter without complaint.

Some time later, when a boy is born, the Marquis gives the same excuse to take him from his mother also. Again, Grisilde is unchanged in her love to her husband, and acceptance of the suffering.

After many years the Marquis tests her yet again, by divorcing her in favour of a new, young wife. This Grisilde accepts, and doesn't even flinch when he then asks her to return to the palace as a servant to his new wife.

At this point, the Marquis is finally satisfied and reveals to Grisilde that this new wife is in fact their daughter, and her page – their son. He has not killed them, but kept them safe. He acknowledges Grisilde as his one true wife and sets her in the place of highest honour, at his right hand – never to test her again.

The Merchant - A smart and successful man of business, this merchant wishes his wife were as patient as Griselde.

The Merchant's Tale
A knight of Lombardy, upon reaching his sixtieth year, has a strong urge to finally be married.

After a lifetime of womanizing, he wishes to wed and take one woman, lawfully, to bed. His friends urge caution, but he fixes on a much younger woman, May, and they are quickly married.

The knight's young squire, Damyan, falls madly in love with his master's new wife. He writes her a love letter, declaring his desire, and she responds favourably to his advances. They lack opportunity to meet and 'swyve' – until, 'in midst of lust', the old knight is suddenly struck blind.

Being blind, the old knight is now fiercely jealous of May and will not let her leave his side. So, she and Damyan cook up a cunning plan…

One sunny day the old knight and his wife take a walk in their private garden, where Damyan is hiding, up a pear tree. While the knight is sitting beneath, May climbs up into the tree to pick some fruit!

The god Pluto looks down upon this scene and decides to restore the old knight's sight to him in time to catch the lovers. The god's wife, Proserpine, however, takes pity on young May and bestows on her the wit to think of an excuse.

Consequently the old knight witnesses his wife and squire in their lustful embrace, but May explains that she was told by a wizard that her husband would recover his sight if she were to 'struggle' with a man in a tree.

The old knight is satisfied with this explanation and all three go home content.

The Manciple
A person responsible for the purchase and storage of food for a court of law**.**

The Manciple's tale
A Greek myth set in the days when the god Apollo still dwelt on earth, and kept a crow. The crow is, at this time, pure white – and possesses a beautiful voice.

Apollo also has a wife, whom he loves dearly and guards jealously; but nevertheless she takes a lover. The crow discovers her secret and tells Apollo, who kills her in his rage.

Instantly regretting what he has done, Apollo turns on the crow and curses him – turning his white feathers black, and his sweet voice to an ugly 'caw'.

The Manciple then delivers his moral – to beware of spreading gossip, whether it's true, or not.

At the end of the Manciple's tale, the pilgrims arrive at Canterbury, where the **Parson** leads them in prayer and a hymn in praise of St Thomas.

Pilgrims without tales

Geoffrey Chaucer
A poet staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, before embarking on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury.

Chaucer is under pressure at intervals along the way to tell a tale himself. When they are almost at Canterbury he finally begins to tell a story of a handsome knight, Sir Thopas, who dreams that the elf queen should be his lover.

This is as far as Chaucer gets, as his poetry is so bad that he is quickly shouted down by the pilgrims in favour of the Manciple.

It's a nice moment of self mockery from the poet – who in fact has created the whole piece.

The Host
Landlord of the Tabard Inn and a kind of self appointed Master of Ceremonies. It's his idea that the pilgrims each tell a tale on the way to Canterbury; and he puts up the prize of *'supper bought, at our expense / Here in this place when we return from thence'.*

The Tavern Boy
A tavern boy.

The Yeoman
'An English archer, afraid of no man,' and a servant of the Knight. Chaucer may have intended giving the Yeoman a tale, but he never got round to it.

The Prioress
A genteel religious lady, if a little pretentious; her inoffensive affectations include speaking Franglais. In our production she has no tale, but she does have a dog – and thereby, a tail.

The Nuns
Accompanying the Prioress.

The Summoner
The *'red-faced harlot'* Summoner's function is to summon offenders to appear at the church courts – but he's not above a bribe.

The Parson
An honest pilgrim, untainted by the world – brings us into Canterbury with solemnity and a prayerful office of devotion.

NORTHERN BROADSIDES and The Canterbury Tales

Meet the team…

Mike Poulton - Writer


Photo: Nobby Clark

In selecting which tales to use for this new version of The Canterbury Tales, I was looking for a balance between characters and tales everybody knows and loves, and some of the more unfamiliar tales. I also needed to arrange them so as not to lose the sense of pilgrimage; each tale building on the last, so that a journey is made, in every sense of the word. Chaucer never completed this work, and his pilgrims don't ever reach Canterbury. However, for a satisfying theatrical presentation, I felt it was important that as we see the pilgrims set out, so we also see them arrive at their destination. Whatever their character, they all have this underlying religious need to kneel at the shrine of St Thomas – and the audience must see them do it.

Conrad Nelson Director/Composer


Photo: Deb Mc

Apart from the electric light, there's nothing technical in this production that couldn't have been done 600 years ago. Set; costume; puppetry; music – it's all 'unplugged' from the 21st Century. We didn't constrain ourselves to do it like this – it's the nature of the piece. But that doesn't make it easy. This enormous play makes huge demands of the company and the audience. Eight complete tales, and four broken ones – all with a unique, theatrical identity; told, acted, sung, played with immediacy and definition. And the real world of the pilgrims, like the mortar that binds the whole thing together – fighting, flirting and farting their way to Canterbury, and finally united in achieving their spiritual goal.

Andy Cryer Assitant Director/Actor

Photo: Deb Mc

In our production we all have to sing, play instruments and manipulate puppets - in addition to playing several characters each. In casting this show, Con and I had to find multi-skilled, generous actors to be part of a true ensemble. The multiple role-playing isn't about doing funny voices, or silly walks; it's about honesty and simplicity, with every actor investing in every story. Ultimately the Tales themselves are the stars of the show.

Rebekah Hughes Musical Director

Photo: Nobby Clark

Every piece of music in this production went through a rigorous process of development. Lots of research went into finding exactly the right feel for every musical passage, and there are many styles: medieval (obviously); New Orleans Jazz; Western; High Opera; Folk; Russian Sacred music… Some of the music is sourced from early manuscripts, but mostly it has been composed by Conrad. The most challenging piece to sing is Clangat Tuba– a medieval hymn to St Thomas Becket. It gives us the right feeling for the period and a truly spiritual lift at the end of the performance.

Matthew Bugg - Movement Director

Photo: Nobby Clark

This is a very physical show. The breadth of physicality and the pace of work have been very challenging for myself and the actors. We've had to find our way very quickly into fights, maypole dancing, puppetry, travel, slapstick, tango… My role is to assess the physical ability and psychological approach of each actor to get the best out them, whilst keeping them comfortable and confident in the work. Everything I do must help them tell the story. If it doesn't – it's gotta go!

Lee Threadgold – Puppet maker and advisor

Photo: Nobby Clark

We are using several different kinds of puppet in this production: glove puppets; humanettes; hobby -horses; object theatre puppets; rods; and shadows. Some have been made in advance of production, and some are created from objects lying around on the stage. Each puppet has to interact with the play in a way that is consistent with the environment in which it is presented. There are two distinct worlds – the 'real' world of the pilgrims, and the fantastical world of the tales. To blend seamlessly with the storytelling is our goal.

And in depth…

Conversation with Lis Evans – Designer.

Wednesday 10th Feb – week two of rehearsals.

Beginnings…

I see my job as being to bring the essence of the play, and the essence of the director's vision for the production together; to create a context and environment through which the text may be enriched and to inform the audience in ways that the words alone cannot.

My first point of contact with any play is to read the script. Having read Mike Poulton's version of The Canterbury Tales, I then had a detailed discussion with Conrad Nelson (Director) and made some wide, rough notes about his ideas for the production. We also met with Lee Threadgold (Puppet maker), as Conrad knew from the start that puppets would be part of the production – and therefore part of the design.

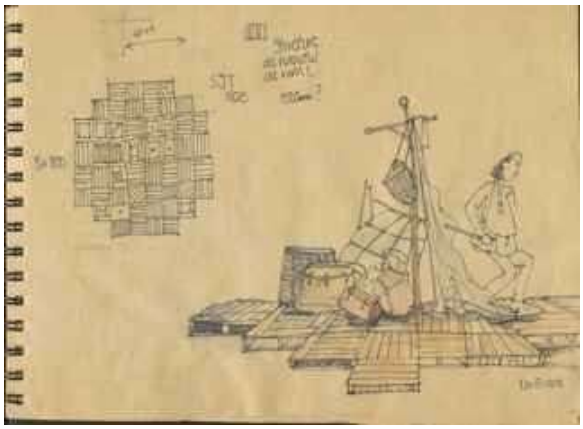
Because this was such a big project I had to start work on it quite far in advance.

Set and props…

The previous Northern Broadsides shows I've done were for quite small venues, but The Canterbury Tales is going to some big spaces, so I needed this design to be versatile.

The tour begins in New Vic Theatre, which is in the round; but the design has to adapt to other theatre shapes and sizes.

I needed a kind of kit that could expand and contract.



I had images in my mind of medieval architecture – a rough wooden look to things, cruck beams and trusses; lots of timber. I wanted to capture the sense of journey in the play. And in a way, the staging itself is going on a pilgrimage – on tour! The set and props must have a portable feel – roll up, pack away, stack etc…

We couldn't create a whole new set of costumes and props for every story, so everything on the stage had to be multifunctional.

The company also needed the facility to create the many different kinds of spaces in the play – interiors, exteriors – palaces; cottages; towns, woods – and we finish up in Canterbury Cathedral itself.

It had to be clog-friendly, hardwearing, fireproof, portable…

The answer was to use wooden pallets; like a big toy box. We had fifty-five made in total; they slot together in various configurations and we can use more or less, depending on the venue. Some have doors and slots into which various other bits of set can fit; and four are moveable during performance.

We also needed some height – which is where the tower comes in. It's needed for several stories, so it earns its place in the production.

There's no frivolity. Everything has to be multifunctional

I'm really pleased with the pallets. They were made outside the building, but when they arrived and we assembled them for the first time I was really excited. They're so simple, but satisfying.

Character and Costume…

There are sixteen actors in this production, playing around eighty roles, so I needed to do a detailed character breakdown. Mike Poulton's script doesn't use all Chaucer's Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, but I studied it carefully for the brilliant descriptions of the pilgrims.

I also did a detailed breakdown of the tales – and identified a key set of images for each story.

We tried to be as authentic as possible.

I did a lot of research on medieval clothing. We didn't have much medieval stock, so my team has made everything, using authentic medieval cuts; and paid attention to detail on hemlines and necklines.

We've used mostly cottons, wools and silks; and avoided prints – patterns are woven or embroidered. Colours are muted, like vegetable dyes. We didn't have the time to hand sew everything, but there's not a lot of top-stitching so you can't see the machine sewing.

No zips; wooden buttons; leather thronging.

We've also had proper medieval shoes made for the entire cast. If you've got everything authentic, modern shoes would just spoil the look - and actors move differently in them too.

There is a lot of detail on the costumes that will be lost in some of the larger venues, but is very important for the smaller theatres – especially in the round.

In the round, characters are almost a scenic element.

All the costumes have to survive a long tour. They must hardwearing, comfortable and have a washable base layer.

I've had to use plastic flowers in the head garlands instead of dried flowers, which just wouldn't last the tour

I have cheated slightly not putting the men in tights. Most men don't look good in them and I didn't want the actors to look or feel silly - so I've compromised with tight fitting leggings.

I normally like to involve the actors in at least the detailing of their costume, but I had to work ahead of casting on this project. Each actor has a basic costume for their pilgrim – then add-ons for the story characters.

Pilgrim	**The Pardoner**	+	Base – red linen tunic; grey leggings Grey coat and belt; with pockets for relics; a hat, with St Veronica's handkerchief on the front.
In Knight's Tale	3rd Queen	+	Greek drape; coronet; veil to suggest hair.
In Miller's Tale	Absolon	+	Soft hat; waistcoat.
In Wife's Tale	5th Woman	+	Hennin and wimple; low girdle belt.
In Clerk's Tale	Priest	+	Clerical cape; skull cap.

The whole process of being a theatre designer is varied and wonderful. You get to work with inventive, talented people. The job involves drawing, making models, fabric shopping, literature, working with a group – a collaborative process. Then you send your work out all over the country for people to enjoy.

Telling Tales

DRAMA exercise

Create a simple **object puppet**

An object puppet is created from everyday things – sometimes called a 'junk puppet'.

In the Northern Broadsides production of The Canterbury Tales we created object puppets to be the children in the Clerk of Oxenford's tale of patient Grisilde.

Photo: Nobby Clark

The cast in rehearsal with an object puppet

To create your own object puppet, all you need is a square piece of material and a small ball of material, or a cloth bag.

Put the ball of material in the centre of the square and gather it up to form a head.

Stretch out two corners to create arms, and bend half way along to make an elbow

Separate the other two corners to make feet.

Alternatively, if your puppet is wearing a long gown, you can leave the 'skirt' draping on the floor, and catch the puppet at the waist instead to give structure.

Practice with your puppet

A few pointers from our Puppet maker, Lee Threadgold.

- How does it move?
- How does it walk? Consider the gait of your puppet.
- What's its character? Is it young or old? Male or female? Does it belong to the 'real' world, or the fantastical?
- Audiences naturally fall into empathizing with a puppet when it is sensitively portrayed. Less is often more.
- Identify where the puppet's intention is focused. What does it want?
- Avoid gratuitous movement. If the puppet scratches its head, it must have a reason – eg puzzlement.
- How does the puppet interact with other puppets / real people?

Photo: Nobby Clark

Lee with the team, in rehearsal

Now devise your own dramatization of **The Pardoner's Tale.**

Create a puppet to portray the character of Death (the mysterious old man)

- Consider how the puppet is created within the dramatization.
- Consider how the puppet moves. How many are needed to manipulate?
- Does this character need feet? Or a flowing gown?
- How do the live actors interact with the puppet?
- How creative can you be with your puppet, symbolizing Death?

HISTORY

Hearts and Bones

Why Canterbury?

Early history

In 597 St Augustine arrived on the Kentish coast, on a mission from the Pope to establish the Church in Britain. There had been Christians in Britain since Roman times, but the faith was scattered at the withdrawal of Rome and the invasion of the Anglo-Saxon peoples in the 5th and 6th Centuries AD.

Augustine found a land divided into various Anglo-Saxon kingdoms, of which Kent was one – ruled by King Ethelbert, who was married to a Christian woman. Thus, favourably inclined towards Christianity, Elthebert permitted Augustine to settle at Canterbury and to preach. It is traditionally recorded that on Whitsunday 597 Ethelbert was baptized at Canterbury by St Augustine; the first Anglo-Saxon king to embrace the Christian faith.

Over the 400 years following the conversion of King Ethelbert a great cathedral grew up at Canterbury, and successive Archbishops were enthroned in Augustine's chair. By the time of the Norman Conquest of 1066, the Church of Rome had established itself throughout Britain, with Canterbury as the primal seat of ecclesiastical power.

The Martyrdom of Thomas Becket

On 29th December 1170 four knights broke into the Cathedral at Canterbury and murdered the Archbishop in cold blood, in full view of the monks who were singing vespers.

Archbishop Thomas Becket had incurred the wrath of the king, Henry II; who had certainly incited, if not explicitly ordered, his death.

The two men had once been great friends, but conflict arose between them concerning the independence of the Church. The dispute, which deepened over a number of years, was complex, but may be boiled down to the fact that Henry wished to make clerics subject to civil law and justice, like everyone else; a move which Thomas resisted.

From a modern perspective it's easy to see Henry's point of view. However, it's important to remember that these secular courts were not comparable with our modern justice system, and the punishments they administered included mutilation, torture and a variety of nasty methods of execution.

The political manoeuvrings of both Becket and Henry over the course of this dispute were subtle and difficult to discern. Sources and perspectives vary enormously, and are inevitably coloured historically by what happened next…

After a period in exile Becket boldly returned to Canterbury in the December of 1170. Upon learning of this Henry, it seems, was goaded by Becket's enemies that there would never be peace in England while the Archbishop lived. At this, Henry is reported to have flown into a rage and uttered his now legendary cry – 'will no one rid me of this turbulent priest?'

Four knights took Henry at his word and travelled to Canterbury to confront Becket, who seemed to be now courting martyrdom. While the monks were singing vespers, the knights caught up with the Archbishop inside the Cathedral itself. There were many witnesses, and contemporary accounts are surprisingly consistent and graphic. The knights struck Becket about the

head – the killer blow actually slicing off the top of his skull, spilling brains and blood across the stone floor.

Becket's politicking had divided many in the Church, but he was popular with the people. Within hours of his death the Cathedral was thronged with mourners as a violent storm raged outside. It must have seemed that nature itself was outraged by this atrocious murder. Within days, miracles were being attributed to the slaughtered priest and just three years later Thomas Becket was canonized by Pope Alexander III.

The miracles were, of course, ones of healing and restoration – what other miracles are there? The remains of St Thomas and the site of his martyrdom became a holy shrine virtually overnight. Among the early pilgrims was the King himself who, in July 1174, walked barefoot through the city and was flogged by the Prior and all eighty monks of Christ Church Priory in public penance for his part in the death of Becket. A political rather than spiritual act, as you'd imagine a king would have the means to buy forgiveness, even for murder, from the royal Pardoner.

A fire gutted the Cathedral quire just six weeks after Henry's visit, but funds provided by the many pilgrims paid for the building of a new shrine to honour St Thomas. Pilgrims were a constant source of revenue for Canterbury Cathedral throughout the middle ages and, arguably, have been ever since.

Approximately two hundred years after the death of Thomas Becket, at the height of the Saint's popularity, Chaucer began work on *The Canterbury Tales*, about a typical group of pilgrims en route from the Tabard Inn at Southwark to the shrine of St Thomas.

Timeline from 1066 – 1189

1066 **William I**, the Conqueror, first Norman King of England.

1086 Domesday Book is completed in England.

1087 **William II**, Rufus, King of England.

1100 **Henry I,** youngest son of William the Conqueror, King of England following assassination of William Rufus.

1120 William, son of Henry I of England, is drowned in wreck of the "White Ship"

1129 Matilda, daughter of Henry I, marries Geoffrey, Count of Anjou; nicknamed " Plantagenet ".

1135 **King Stephen** succeeds Henry I, in the absence of a male heir. Stephen is the son of Henry's sister; therefore his nephew, and the grandson of William I.

1153 Henry of Anjou, son of Matilda, invades England and forces Stephen to make him heir to the English throne

1154 **Henry II**, grandson of Henry I, King of England; the first 'Plantagenet' king.

1155 Henry appoints the Archdeacon of Canterbury, **Thomas Becket**, as his Chancellor

1162 Becket is appointed Archbishop of Canterbury.

1164 Henry moves to reinstate laws governing the trial of clergy in England. These laws date back to his great-grandfather – William the Conquerer. Becket, in conflict with the king, is forced to flee to France, and remains in exile for 6 years.

1170 Becket returns to Canterbury; is murdered in the Cathedral by four knights.

1173 Becket canonized by Pope Alexander III

1174 King Henry I visits the shrine of St Thomas at Canterbury

1189 Richard I, Coeur de Lion, eldest surviving son of Henry II, King of England (to 1199)

TIME DETECTIVES...

Topics for discussion and research

What interests ***you***?

Start digging and see what you can find out. Chose one or more of our topics, or follow your own line of enquiry.

A Medieval Murder

THE FOUR ASSASSINS
Who were the four knights who murdered Thomas Becket? What were their names? Where did they come from? What happened to them after the death of Becket?

THE VICTIM
Find out more about the life of Thomas Becket. When and where was he born? What kind of a man was he? Who were his friends? Who were his enemies? What was his relationship with the king really like? What was it in his character that made him defend his principles – even to death?

THE KING
Create a character profile for HENRY II – what's his story?
Henry was the son of Geoffrey of Anjou, whose nickname was *Plantagenet* – after the broom flower which was his emblem. Henry is known as the first *Plantagenet* king. Who were the *Plantagenets*? How did they shape the following centuries of British history? Who was the last *Plantagenet* king?

The Poet's Tale

Geoffrey Chaucer was born the son of a London vintner in the early 1340s, and as a youth worked as a page for the Countess of Ulster. His adult career was nothing if not varied – soldier; diplomat; controller of customs for the port of London; clerk of the King's works and Justice of the Peace.

Chaucer was indeed a scholar, but he hadn't spent his life with his nose stuck in a book. He was widely travelled, vastly experienced, highly capable and enjoyed the patronage of two successive Kings, Edward III and Richard II. Nevertheless, his fame is as a poet, and his crowning achievement is *The Canterbury Tales* – about a typical group of pilgrims en route to the shrine of St Thomas.

The contest, proposed by the Host of the Tabard Inn, is that each pilgrim should tell two stories on the way there, and two on the way back. The best storyteller wins a slap-up dinner at the Host's expense on their return. In fact, Chaucer never finished his most famous work - completing just 24 full or broken tales, and an introductory Prologue.

Chaucer is the first great poet of the English language – that is, he wrote in English at a time when Norman French was spoken by the ruling classes, and Latin was the language of scholarship. Chaucer wrote in the vernacular dialect of his South Eastern home - quite distinct from his anonymous contemporary who was composing *Gawain and the Green Knight* in the English of the North West.

It looks like a foreign language on the page, not least because there was no consistency in spelling at this time; but speak it out loud and it's amazing how much may be understood by a speaker of modern English.

Have a go at reading these opening lines of the General Prologue aloud…

Rules of thumb:

- *Chaucer generally uses ten syllables to a line.*
- *The poem is in rhyming couplets.*
- *Often an 'e' on the end of a word is pronounced as a separate syllable – usually when the next word begins with a consonant.*

Whan that Aprill with his shoures sote[1]
The droghte[2] of Marche hath perced to the rote[3]
And bathed every veyne[4] in swich licour[5]
Of which vertu engendred is the flour[6]
Whan Zehpirus[7] eek with his swete breeth
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth The
tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne[8]
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne;[9]
And smale fowles maken melodye,
That slepen al the night with open yë[10]
So priketh hem Nature in hir corages[11]
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
And palmered for to seken straunge strondes,[12]
To ferne halwes[13], couthe[14] in sundry londes;
And specially, from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
The holy blissful martir for to seke,
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.[15]

---

[1] sweet showers
[2] dryness
[3] root
[4] vein
[5] such moisture
[6] by which power the flowers grows
[7] the west wind
[8] the sun
[9] passed half way through the zodiacal sign of Aries (the ram)
[10] eye
[11] Nature spurs their hearts
[12] pilgrims seek foreign shores
[13] far off shires
[14] found
[15] sick

.....What's your story, Pilgrim?

Topics for discussion

Examine the synopses of the tales in this document –

- Can you identify the various genres in which the tales are told?
- Are there any tales which fit into more than one genre?
- Can you discover any common themes in these tales?
- Are these themes present in stories and drama today?

- Consider the relationship between the tale and its teller.
- Does the teller have a vested interest in the moral, or outcome, of their tale?
- Try to identify a reason why each pilgrim chooses to tell their particular tale.

Specific study – **The Pardoner's Tale**

- What kind of person is The Pardoner?
- What is the genre of his tale?
- Why does he choose to tell this particular tale?
- Consider the historical context.

Consider the structure of The Pardoner's Tale: beginning/middle/end.

Creative writing – The Pupil's Tale

Imagine yourself to be among the pilgrims.

What might Chaucer have said about you? What story would you tell?

- Write a poem of rhyming couplets, describing yourself among the pilgrims.

- Write the tale you would tell to the other pilgrims on the journey.

Websites to visit

For further information on puppetry, visit –
http://www.dramaresource.com/resources/drama-books/creating-puppets

For further information on Canterbury and Thomas Becket, visit -
www.**canterbury-cathedral**.org

To hear how Chaucer's English might have sounded, visit -
www.**luminarium**.org

Acknowledgements

Images – thanks to:

Photos: Nobby Clark
Front cover image: John Bradley

Pilgrim images from the *Ellesmere manuscript*, sourced at:
www.**luminarium**.org

Thomas Becket window images, sourced at:
sacred-destinations.com

Other images:
karenswhimsy.com
godecookery.com
fotosearch.jp

Education pack written and compiled by Deborah McAndrew for Northern Broadsides © 2010

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