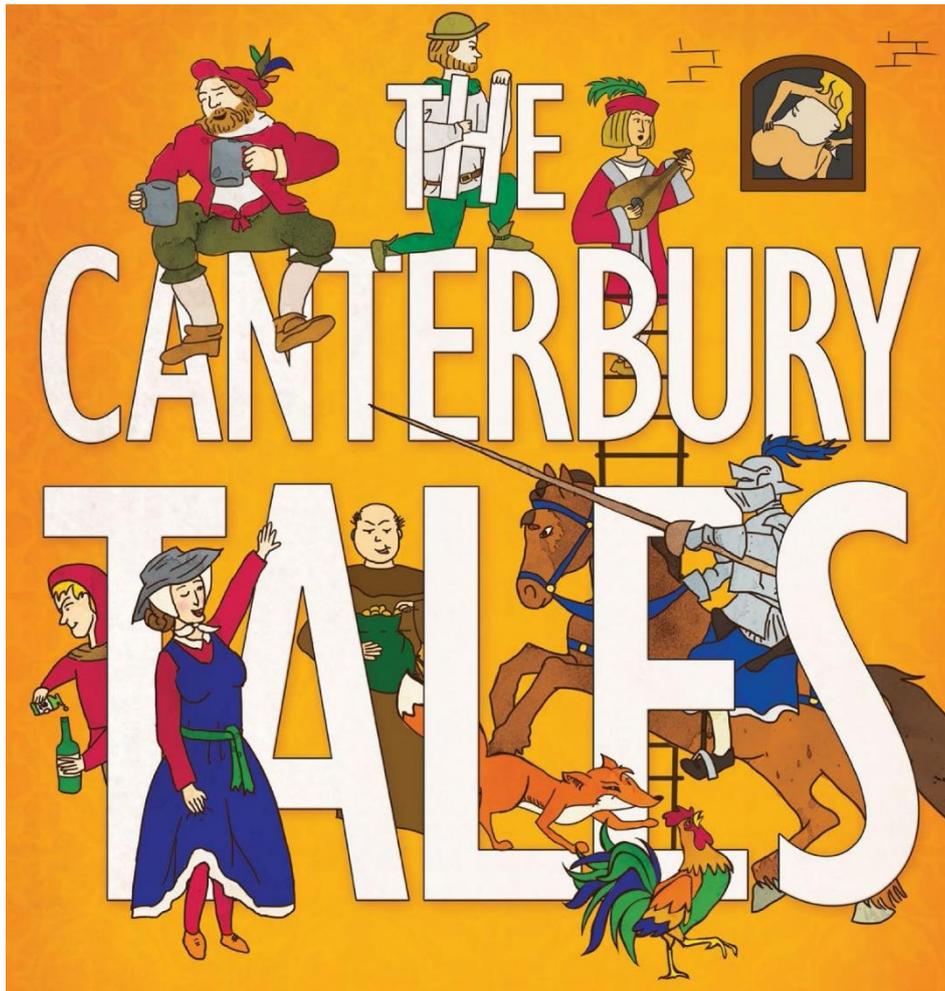
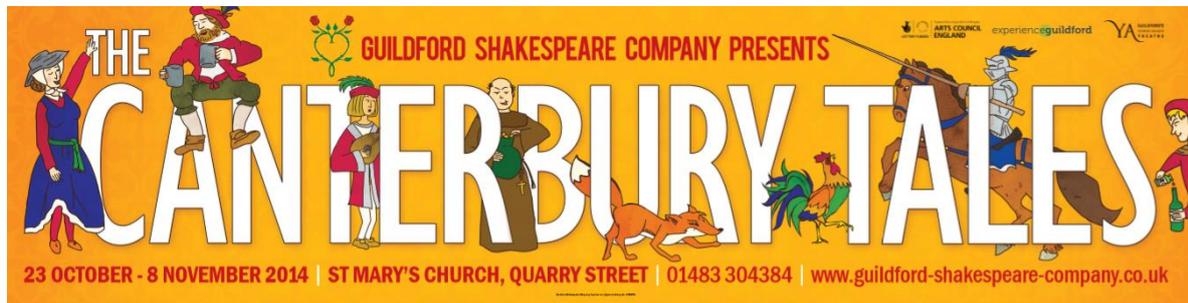


**GUILDFORD
SHAKESPEARE
COMPANY**



EDUCATION PACK

INTRODUCTION



This education pack has been written by GSC to complement the stage production of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, staged at Guildford's St Mary's Church in autumn 2014.

The information contained in here can be used as preparation material before seeing the performance or as follow-up work afterwards in the class room. This pack is aimed at final year GCSE or A-level students (or equivalent).

This pack contains:

1. GSC: Our Approach to Theatre
2. The Cast and Creative Team
3. Chaucer and his Tales
4. Translating Middle English
5. Introducing the Characters
6. Interview with The Director

School Workshops

Practical in-school workshops on *Canterbury Tales* can be booked, with actors coming into your school to work on the play.

Please see www.guildford-shakespeare-company.co.uk or call 01483 304384 for more details.

GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY OUR APPROACH TO THEATRE

“One of the strongest and most consistent companies operating in and around London”

PlayShakespeare.com, 2011

Guildford Shakespeare Company is a professional site-specific theatre company, specialising in Shakespeare and other classic texts. Our approach places the audience right at the heart of the action, immersing them in the world of the play, thereby demystifying the legend that theatre is for an elite few but rather is immediate and accessible to everyone.

“...to be spellbound, amused and to follow every moment of text and to want the production never to end...one of the best evenings of theatre I have ever been privileged to attend.” Audience member 2011

We want our 21st Century audiences to experience the same thrill and excitement that Shakespeare’s original audiences must have felt when they first saw the Ghost appear in *Hamlet*, the rousing battle cry of Henry V, and edge-of-your-seat anticipation in *The Comedy of Errors*.

At GSC we use diverse and unusual non-theatre venues to create dynamic and challenging productions. From castles to lakes, churches to pubs, our approach merges the audience and acting space so that you’re given a visceral, stimulating and, above all, unique theatre experience.

“I am so thrilled to be able to bring my grandchildren to such quality theatre right here on our doorstep. I also think that the proximity to the stage makes the action all the more real and compelling for youngsters” Audience member, 2011

GSC productions are fresh, fast and modern. Our interpretation of Shakespeare is always in the original text and NEVER dumbed down.

We hope you enjoy these fabulous stories as much as we enjoy re-telling them.

All best wishes

Matt & Sarah

Joint Artistic & Executive Producers

THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

Cast

Philip Benjamin
Bea Holland
Matt Pinches
Lauren Silver
Ben Tolley

Creative Team

Director	Abigail Anderson
Designer	Dora Schweitzer
Lighting Designer	Will Evans
Sound Designer	Matt Eaton
Puppet Designer	Elaine Hartley
Musical Director	Mary McAdam
Producers	Sarah Gobran and Matt Pinches

Stage Management

Production Manager	Tamsin Rose
Deputy Stage Manager	Danyal Shafiq
Assistant Stage Manager	Beth Sweeney
Puppet Maker	Elaine Hartley

Rehearsals

The Canterbury Tales marks the first production where GSC have written their own version of a classic British text. The company devised the tales and wrote original music throughout the rehearsal process.

CHAUCER AND HIS TALES

Chaucer's Life

Little is known about Chaucer's personal life, but he was born in London in the early 1340s. He was fluent in French and Italian and served in the Hundred Years War between England and France, as a soldier and diplomat. Henry IV gave him many rewards for his service including money, land and important positions at court.

Chaucer began work on The Canterbury Tales around 1387. He retired from public life in the early 1390s and dedicated the majority of his time to his writing.

14th Century England

Chaucer lived through a difficult time in English history. The Black Death spread right across the country and killed between one third and one half of the population. The working classes revolted against their masters so their wages could be increased. Meanwhile, merchants were becoming rich from the Hundred Years War, selling luxury goods. These changes in fortune created tension between the classes.

The Tales

Chaucer was inspired by the writing of Petrarch and Bocaccio. He wrote in the vernacular, which is the English that was spoken around London at the time and described recognisable figures of the time. Many other poets were still writing in French and Latin, so The Canterbury Tales were one of the first poems that everyone could read.

Chaucer's original idea was for each character to tell four tales, two on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. He only managed to write 24 tales of a possible 120, however. It's possible that Chaucer died before he could finish the work, but this hasn't stopped the tales becoming one of the most celebrated works of English poetry.

Practical ideas

Chaucer wrote about characters that the public would recognise from everyday life. If you were to write a story in modern Britain, what characters could you include? Bankers, politicians, reality TV stars? What kind of tale would they tell?

TRANSLATING MIDDLE ENGLISH

Chaucer wrote the Canterbury Tales in Middle English, which was an older version of the language we speak today. Many words were the same, but they may have been spelled differently.

Below is an extracts from the General Prologue. Chaucer is setting the scene for the journey to Canterbury. On the left is the original Middle English and on the right you can see a modern translation.

Middle English

Bifil that in that seson on a day,
In southwerk at the tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
To caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
In felawshipe, and pilgrimes were
they alle,
That toward caunterbury wolden ryde.

And shortly, whan the sonne was to
reste,
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon
That I was of hir felawshipe anon,
And made forward erly for to ryse,
To take oure wey ther as I yow
devyse.

But nathelees, whil I have tyme and
space,
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me...

Modern English

In Southwark, at the Tabard, as I lay
ready to start upon my pilgrimage to
Canterbury, full of devout homage,
there came at nightfall to that hostelry,
some nine and twenty in a company of
sundry persons who had chanced to
fall in fellowship, and pilgrims were
they all that toward Canterbury town
would ride...

And briefly, when the sun had gone to
rest, so had I spoken with them, every
one, that I was of their fellowship anon,
and made agreement that we'd early
rise to take the road, as you I will
apprise.

But none the less, whilst I have time
and space, before yet farther in this
tale I pace,
It seems to me accordant with reason
to inform you of the state of every one
of all of these, as it appeared to me...

Practical Exercise

How easy do you find Middle English to read? Could you translate the passage into your own words?

INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

Chaucer takes great delight in his descriptions of his characters. Each one is written in great detail, so the reader can have a solid picture of who is telling the tale.

Below are two extracts from his descriptions of the first tale-tellers, The Knight and The Miller. They are very different characters, as you can see when they're placed side by side.

The Knight

There was a knight and he was a worthy man, who, from the moment he first rode around the world, loved chivalry, truth, honour, freedom and courtesy.

He fought bravely in his lord's war and was honoured everywhere. He had fought in fifteen dangerous battles and he fought for our religion in Tramissene.

Three times he fought and each time he defeated his enemy. Though he was brave, he was also wise and as modest as a maiden.

He never said anything mean, for all his life, no matter what happened. He truly was a perfect and gentle knight.

The Miller

The Miller was a stout fellow, big of bones and brawn. Every time he entered a wrestling match he would carry the prize ram home

He was short-shouldered and broad, a thick, knotty fellow. There was no door that he could not heave off its hinges, or break with his head at a running.

Upon the very tip of his nose he had a wart, and on it stood a tuft of red hair like the bristles on a sow's ears, and his nostrils were black and wide.

At his thigh hung a sword and buckler. His mouth was as great as a great furnace. He was a teller of dirty stories and a buffoon, and it was mostly of sin and obscenity.

Practical Exercise

What kind of home do you think these characters live in? How different are they? What sort of tale would you expect each person to tell?

Perhaps you could draw The Miller and The Knight, then describe and draw a modern character of your own.

IN CONVERSATION WITH THE DIRECTOR ABIGAIL ANDERSON

This is your first time with GSC. What excited you most about working with the company?

I've been a fan of the company for many years and have seen lots of their productions all over Guildford. What I love is the way that their shows include the audience throughout and focus on clear storytelling. These are both elements that I've used in my previous shows, and the plans we have for Canterbury Tales push these to the max.

Why do you think The Canterbury Tales is still so popular today?

Firstly, the tales are so varied that there is something in there to please most people's tastes. But mostly I think they're so enduring because, like Shakespeare's plays, they are populated by people who feel real to us in the twenty-first century. Chaucer has such a good eye for the foibles and details of people. The tales also radiate a huge sense of joy in life and that is infectious to the reader.

Chaucer wrote over twenty tales in the collection. How did you choose which ones you would present?

The acting company first met together in May to do some preliminary work on the show, and at that time we invited each person to choose a story and have an idea of how they would like to present it. Amazingly, nobody chose the same story and those are the ones that are in! We also knew that we'd like to do one story entirely as a song and the Summoner's Tale seemed a good bet as it is a simple idea and based around a specific sound....

This is the first time that GSC has devised their own script for performance. What were the challenges of converting the written tales into a piece of theatre?

The language of each story is very engaging so it is a wrench to have to cut phrases and verbal jokes, but if we were to simply read and act out the stories as written, even only the seven we're doing, it would make for a very long evening indeed. So, editing is a challenge and finding non-verbal ways to convey the story. Chaucer had to paint pictures in his reader's mind but we are presenting those pictures live to an audience. Sometimes this can seem limiting as we only have five actors to present 30 pilgrims, but it is also a wonderful excuse to be theatrically imaginative and capitalise on all the things which are inspiring about theatre.

The show is being performed in the historic St Mary's church. How have you incorporated the building into your production?

One of the very first things we did was spend a day exploring in the church and it is fundamental to all the choices we've made. It is a wonderful opportunity to be performing in a building that was around when the text was written (parts of St Mary's actually pre-date the Canterbury Tales by about 200 years), and it inevitably gives the show a Medieval flavour, despite us performing in 2014. This 'automatic medievalism' means that we've felt freer to explore different styles and time periods within our production. The fact that St Mary's is a place of worship also serves as a reminder of the pilgrimage context of the tales, although Chaucer's pilgrim's themselves seem to have had pretty secular agendas!