

LITERATURE CLASSES

Geoffrey Chaucer "*The Canterbury Tales*"

The Wife of Bath

Excerpt:

There was a business woman, from near Bath,
But, more's the pity, she was a bit deaf;
So skilled a clothmaker, that she outdistanced
Even the weavers of Ypres and Ghent².
5 In the whole parish there was not a woman
Who dared precede her at the almsgiving³,
And if there did, so furious was she,
That she was put out of all charity.
Her headkerchiefs⁴ were of the finest weave,
10 Ten pounds and more they weighed, I do believe,
Those that she wore on Sundays on her head.
Her stockings were of finest scarlet red,
Very tightly laced⁵; shoes pliable and new.
Bold was her face, and handsome; florid too.
15 She had been respectable all her life,
And five times married, that's to say in church,
Not counting other loves she'd had in youth,
Of whom, just now, there is no need to speak.
And she had thrice⁶ been to Jerusalem;
20 Had wandered over many a foreign stream;
And she had been at Rome, and at Boulogne,
St James of Compostella, and Cologne⁷;
She knew all about wandering—and straying⁸:
For she was gap-toothed⁹, if you take my meaning.
25 Comfortably on an ambling¹⁰ horse she sat,
Well-wimpled¹¹, wearing on her head a hat
That might have been a shield in size and shape;
A riding-skirt round her enormous hips¹²,
Also a pair of sharp spurs¹³ on her feet.
30 In company, how she could laugh and joke!
No doubt she knew of all the cures for love,
For at that game she was a past mistress.

Match the following to the lines in the text.

- a She had a bold and handsome face.
- b The hat she wore was like a shield in shape and size.
- c This woman was so good at cloth-making that she surpassed the weavers of Ghent and Ypres.
- d She had married five times.
- e She was very friendly and could give remedies for all love misfortunes.
- f She was charitable but if someone preceded her in the mass offertory she became furious and didn't give any money.
- g She wore a riding skirt and sharp spurs.
- h It was a pity that she was slightly deaf.
- i Her teeth were wide apart.
- j On Sundays she wore lots of elegant scarves on her head.
- k On her pilgrimages she had visited such well-known shrines as Rome and Boulogne.
- l She wore scarlet red stockings and soft, new shoes.



Match the following details with the corresponding character traits.

1. ALMSGIVING	A. vanity
2. FINE HEADKERCHIEFS	B. Quick tempered
3. A SKILLED CLOTH-MAKER	C. amorous
4. ANGER AT OTHERS' CHARITY	D. generosity
5. GAP-TEETH	E. Businesslike and professional

Read the excerpt and decide if the following statements are true or false. Put T or F in the provided space.

1. The Wife of Bath is an idealized woman.
2. She is a realistic portrait of a mature woman.
3. She is a modest and devout woman.
4. She represents the emerging class of merchants and tradesmen.
5. She is a true Christian with all the weaknesses of an average person.