**Assessment is on Socrative. Class code is 574283. Mark and explain as you go.**

A Brief History Of The English Language Part 2 - The Age Of Change

By [Patrick Lockerby](http://www.science20.com/profile/patrick_lockerby) | April 23rd 2009 04:11 PM | [Print](http://www.science20.com/print/52796) | [E-mail](http://www.science20.com/forward/52796) | [Track Comments](http://www.science20.com/trackarticle/52796?destination=node%2F52796)Bottom of Form

[Part 1](http://www.science20.com/chatter_box/brief_history_english_language) of this *Brief History of English* describes the **suppression** (2) of the English language under the Normans who imposed Norman French as a national language.   As French declined and English revived, there were briefly two languages in the one nation. (9)  
*"Before Chaucer wrote, there were two tongues in England, keeping alive the feuds and resentments of cruel centuries; when he laid down his pen, there was practically but one speech -- there was, and ever since has been, but one people."*

D. Laing Purves  
\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

(1) Many scholars are agreed that Geoffrey Chaucer is the father of literary English. I propose to take that idea further. I suggest that, of his century, Chaucer was the most important unifying influence on the English language, with John Wycliffe running him a close second. The influence of these two men can still be clearly found in modern English. (10)  
  
**The Life and Times of Geoffrey Chaucer.**  
In the century of Chaucer's birth, the English way of life changed dramatically and permanently. The [climate changed](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medieval_Warm_Period), turning cooler in Europe. There were famines in much of Europe during the whole century, with a peak, [the Great Famine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Famine_of_1315%E2%80%931317), about 1315 to 1317. Overpopulation and underproduction of food led to wild economic cycles with starvation and death for many. Undernourishment, and a lack of scientific knowledge of disease control, made many people vulnerable to typhoid and other infectious diseases. (3) England and France joined battle in the start of what would come to be called the [hundred years war.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Years%27_War)   And then came the [Black Death.](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Death)  
Into all of this economic and social chaos was injected a popular **disaffection** (7) with the established order of things. A population used to the idea that each person had a pre-ordained station in life began to rebel against that notion. [John Wycliffe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Wycliffe) enjoyed popular support for his attacks on a wealthy and corrupt established church, and the power of a distant pope over English kings. [Wat Tyler](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peasants%27_Revolt) ensured his place in history by **fomenting** (8) rebellion against harsh taxes and corrupt churchmen.   It was the age of change. (5)

**The Canterbury Tales**In an England, where French and Latin were still the languages of the scholar, Geoffrey Chaucer chose to write in English. He wrote to such a high standard that his style was accepted and adopted for at least two hundred years afterwards.   Although Chaucer wrote much more than just the *Canterbury Tales*, it is for these tales that he is most widely known. They are, of his writings, the lightest, most readable, most enjoyable, most earthy. (13) The reported speech may have been emphasized for purposes of satire. In these tales he appears to have interwoven snippets from Greek and Latin stories, personal recollections of his travels and perhaps some English folk tales.  
Chaucer's English had no history of bookish style, no formal grammar, no dictionary. Chaucer had a free hand. (4) (10) He had knowledge of the English of the royal court, the courts of law and of parliament. He knew logic and rhetoric, French, Italian, Latin and most probably Greek. He was a courtier, a poet, a gentleman, a knight of the shire of Kent and a keen observer of human nature. He also had a keen ear for the common use of language.  
  
Taking what might well be called the Germanic English of the common people and the Norman English of the ruling classes, Chaucer created a new **meld** (11) of words and phrases.   Medieval treatises on (Latin) writing distinguish only three styles: grave, middle and simple.  This newly blended English was Middle English, that is to say, English in its middle state between early and modern. The pronunciation of the final *e* and the *e* in -ed endings was only just beginning to die out. The poetry of Chaucer retains this to the full: *telle* is pronounced 'tell-uh', *speak*, spelled as *speke*, is pronounced 'speak-uh'. (6)

*Who so shall telle a tale after a man,  
He* ***moste*** *reherse, as neighe as ever he can,  
Everich word, if it be in his charge,  
All speke he never so rudely and so large;  
Or elles he moste tellen his tale untrewe,  
Or feinen thinges, or finden wordes newe.*

In a land where the storytelling poet was held in high esteem, Chaucer's writings helped to spread English as the new language of literature. (13) For the first time, a fairly uniform English was the true national language of England. (12)

**Chart/Table that reviews information you already know…you’re welcome**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Etymological Phase** | **Era** | **Major text** | **Author** | **Readability** | **Major historical events** |
| Old English | 1100-1200 | *Beowulf* | Unknown | We can’t read it | Germanic tribes getting conquered by Roman Empire that spoke Latin |
| Middle English | 1300-1400 | *Canterbury Tales* | Chaucer | Can read but tough | Norman French running British government, which Chaucer converted to English-making it a “real” language |
| Modern English | 1500-1600 | *Hamlet* | Shakespeare | Slightly challenging | Shakespeare inventing words, writing entertaining plays and elevating English to a culturally rich language |
| **Factors that contribute to the change of language: time, people/places, technology.** | | | | | |

**Name:**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Number | Answer | Right: no mark  Wrong: X | | Explanation of why I got it wrong | | | | Question Type |
| 3 |  |  | |  | | | | Comprehension |
| 5 |  |  | |  | | | | Comprehension |
| 6 |  |  | |  | | | | Comprehension |
| **LEARNING TARGET** | 4.0 = 3 Correct & Reflection | | 3.0 = 3 Correct | | | 2.0 = 2 Correct | | 1.0 = 1 or less correct |
| **Comprehend** and  explain the **literal**  main ideas & details  & **cite text evidence** | **I can** insightfully explain  author’s meaning by  citing text evidence  accurately beyond  teacher’s expectations. | | **I can** plainly explain  the author’s meaning  by citing text evidence  relatively accurately &  consistently. | | | **I can** just mention the  author’s meaning by  citing text evidence  somewhat accurately and  somewhat consistently. | | **I struggle to** identify  author’s meaning by  citing text evidence.  I **need teacher help.** |
| Number | Answer | Right: no mark  Wrong: X | | Explanation of why I got it wrong | | | | Question Type |
| 1 |  |  | |  | | | | Author’s Craft |
| 4 |  |  | |  | | | | Author’s Craft |
| 12 |  |  | |  | | | | Author’s Craft |
| **LEARNING TARGET** | 4.0 = 3 Correct & Reflection | | 3.0 = 3 Correct | | | 2.0 = 2 Correct | 1.0 = 1 or less correct | |
| Determine the **author’s craft of narratives, informational and persuasive texts.** | **I can** insightfully  explain all examples  of author’s craft  accurately beyond  teacher’s expectations. | | **I can** plainly explain  several examples of  author’s craft relatively accurately and consistently. | | | **I can** mention some  examples of author’s craft  somewhat accurately and somewhat consistently. | **I struggle to** identify  examples of author’s  craft. I analyze A. C. with  some inaccuracies & **need**  **teacher assistance**. | |
| Number | Answer | Right: no mark  Wrong: X | | Explanation of why I got it wrong | | | | Question Type |
| 9 |  |  | |  | | | | Infer |
| 10 |  |  | |  | | | | Infer |
| 13 |  |  | |  | | | | Infer |
| 14 |  |  | |  | | | | Infer |
| **LEARNING TARGET** | 4.0 = 4 Correct & Reflection | | 3.0 = 3 Correct | | | 2.0 = 2 Correct | 1.0 = 1 or less correct | |
| Make **inferences** while reading fiction & nonfiction | **I can** insightfully  make inferences from text  evidence accurately  beyond expectations. | | **I can** plainly make  inferences from text  evidence relatively  accurately &  consistently. | | | **I can**  make some  inferences from text  evidence somewhat  accurately and somewhat  consistently. | **I struggle to** make  inferences. I make  inferences with some  inaccuracies **& need teacher**  **assistance** to do so. | |
| Number | Answer | Right: no mark  Wrong: X | | | Explanation of why I got it wrong | | | Question Type |
| 2 |  |  | | |  | | | Vocab |
| 7 |  |  | | |  | | | Vocab |
| 8 |  |  | | |  | | | Vocab |
| 11 |  |  | | |  | | | Vocab |
| |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | | **LEARNING TARGET** | 4.0 = 4 Correct & Reflection | 3.0 = 3 Correct | 2.0 = 2 Correct | 1.0 = 1 or less correct | | Build **vocabulary** by  determining meanings of  unknown words by  using context, word  parts & parts of  speech. | **I can** accurately master  unfamiliar words  accurately & incorporate  these words into **my own**  **writing** seamlessly  beyond teacher’s  expectations. | **I can** accurately learn  unfamiliar words  consistently & incorporate these words into **my own**  **writing** plainly and  regularly. | **I can** partially learn  unfamiliar words somewhat  consistently & inconsistently.  I incorporate these words  into **my own writing**. | **I struggle to** personalize  unfamiliar words and/or  incorporate these words into  **my own writing**. **I need**  **teacher help to do this proficiently.** | | | | | | | | | |

**Reflection**: Based on your performance, what can you logically infer about your proficiency in each of the learning target addressed in this formative assessment?

3) Comp: What contributed to drastic changes in economy? **Overpopulation and underproduction of food**, starvation and disease for many, undernourishment, lack of disease control

5) Comp: The author included the examples of Watt Tyler and John Wycliffe in order to…show examples of age of change.

6) Comp: Most meaningful contribution Chaucer had to English: made it a respectable language and not Latin/French in court.

1) Craft: The line break shows a transition from part 1 to part 2 of brief history of English language

4) Craft: by using “free hand”, author is using a metaphor

12) Craft: This text is informative because it tells about English but kinda persuasive because it argues that Chaucer was most important English writer

9) Infer: one can infer “Norman” is…group of people/nation that spoke French

10) Infer: one can infer that the author Lockerby is…English professor

13) Infer: one can infer Chaucer chose to write in English to…reach common people to make English more spread.

14) Infer: One can infer an effective cause of Chaucer spreading English was…him writing narrative poetry

2) Vocab: suppression = held down/restricted

7) Vocab: dissatisfaction = dissatisfaction

8) Vocab: fomenting = provoking

11) Vocab: meld = synthesis

**Answers in order**

1. **B**
2. **A**
3. **C**
4. **D**
5. **A**
6. **D**
7. **C**
8. **B**
9. **D**
10. **B**
11. **C**
12. **D**
13. **A**
14. **B**

from [**Chapter III. Period III. The End Of The Middle Ages. About 1350 To About 1500**](http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/rfletcher/bl-rfletcher-history-3.htm)

**GEOFFREY CHAUCER, 1338-1400.**Chaucer (the name is French and seems to have meant originally 'shoemaker') came into the world probably in 1338, the first important author who was born and lived in London, which with him becomes the center of English literature. About his life, as about those of many of our earlier writers, there remains only very fragmentary information, which in his case is largely pieced together from scattering entries of various kinds in such documents as court account books and public records of state matters and of lawsuits. His father, a wine merchant, may have helped supply the cellars of the king (Edward III) and so have been able to bring his son to royal notice; at any rate, while still in his teens Geoffrey became a page in the service of one of the king's daughters-in-law. In this position his duty would be partly to perform various humble work in the household, partly also to help amuse the leisure of the inmates, and it is easy to suppose that he soon won favor as a fluent story-teller. He early became acquainted with the seamy as well as the brilliant side of courtly life; for in 1359 he was in the campaign in France and was taken prisoner. That he was already valued appears from the king's subscription of the equivalent of a thousand dollars of present-day money toward his ransom; and after his release he was transferred to the king's own service, where about 1368 he was promoted to the rank of esquire. He was probably already married to one of the queen's ladies-in-waiting. Chaucer was now thirty years of age, and his practical sagacity and knowledge of men had been recognized; for from this time on he held important public positions. He was often sent to the Continent--to France, Flanders, and Italy--on diplomatic missions; and for eleven years he was in charge of the London customs, where the uncongenial drudgery occupied almost all his time until through the intercession of the queen he was allowed to perform it by deputy. In 1386 he was a member of Parliament, knight of the shire for Kent; but in that year his fortune turned--he lost all his offices at the overthrow of the faction of his patron, Duke John of Gaunt (uncle of the young king, Richard II, who had succeeded his grandfather, Edward III, some years before). Chaucer's party and himself were soon restored to power, but although during the remaining dozen years of his life he received from the Court various temporary appointments and rewards, he appears often to have been poor and in need. When Duke Henry of Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, deposed the king and himself assumed the throne as Henry IV, Chaucer's prosperity seemed assured, but he lived after this for less than a year, dying suddenly in 1400. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, the first of the men of letters to be laid in the nook which has since become the Poets' Corner.

Chaucer's poetry falls into three rather clearly marked periods. First is that of French influence, when, though writing in English, he drew inspiration from the rich French poetry of the period, which was produced partly in France, partly in England. Chaucer experimented with the numerous lyric forms which the French poets had brought to perfection; he also translated, in whole or in part, the most important of medieval French narrative poems, the thirteenth century 'Romance of the Rose' of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, a very clever satirical allegory, in many thousand lines, of medieval love and medieval religion. This poem, with its Gallic brilliancy and audacity, long exercised over Chaucer's mind the same dominant influence which it possessed over most secular poets of the age. Chaucer's second period, that of Italian influence, dates from his first visit to Italy in 1372-3, where at Padua he may perhaps have met the fluent Italian poet Petrarch, and where at any rate the revelation of Italian life and literature must have aroused his intense enthusiasm. From this time, and especially after his other visit to Italy, five years later, he made much direct use of the works of Petrarch and Boccaccio and to a less degree of those of their greater predecessor, Dante, whose severe spirit was too unlike Chaucer's for his thorough appreciation. The longest and finest of Chaucer's poems of this period, 'Troilus and Criseyde' is based on a work of Boccaccio; here Chaucer details with compelling power the sentiment and tragedy of love, and the psychology of the heroine who had become for the Middle Ages a central figure in the tale of Troy. Chaucer's third period, covering his last fifteen years, is called his English period, because now at last his genius, mature and self-sufficient, worked in essential independence. First in time among his poems of these years stands 'The Legend of Good Women,' a series of romantic biographies of famous ladies of classical legend and history, whom it pleases Chaucer to designate as martyrs of love; but more important than the stories themselves is the Prolog, where he chats with delightful frankness about his own ideas and tastes.

The great work of the period, however, and the crowning achievement of Chaucer's life, is 'The Canterbury Tales.' Every one is familiar with the plan of the story (which may well have had some basis in fact): how Chaucer finds himself one April evening with thirty other men and women, all gathered at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (a suburb of London and just across the Thames from the city proper), ready to start next morning, as thousands of Englishmen did every year, on a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. Thomas a Becket at Canterbury. The travelers readily accept the proposal of Harry Bailey, their jovial and domineering host, that he go with them as leader and that they enliven the journey with a story-telling contest (two stories from each pilgrim during each half of the journey) for the prize of a dinner at his inn on their return. Next morning, therefore, the Knight begins the series of tales and the others follow in order. This literary form--a collection of disconnected stories bound together in a fictitious framework--goes back almost to the beginning of literature itself; but Chaucer may well have been directly influenced by Boccaccio's famous book of prose tales, 'The Decameron' (Ten Days of Story-Telling). Between the two works, however, there is a striking contrast, which has often been pointed out. While the Italian author represents his gentlemen and ladies as selfishly fleeing from the misery of a frightful plague in Florence to a charming villa and a holiday of unreflecting pleasure, the gaiety of Chaucer's pilgrims rests on a basis of serious purpose, however conventional it may be.

Perhaps the easiest way to make clear the sources of Chaucer's power will be by means of a rather formal summary.

1. *His Personality*. Chaucer's personality stands out in his writings plainly and most delightfully. It must be borne in mind that, like some others of the greatest poets, he was not a poet merely, but also a man of practical affairs, in the eyes of his associates first and mainly a courtier, diplomat, and government official. His wide experience of men and things is manifest in the life-likeness and mature power of his poetry, and it accounts in part for the broad truth of all but his earliest work, which makes it essentially poetry not of an age but for all time. Something of conventional medievalism still clings to Chaucer in externals, as we shall see, but in alertness, independence of thought, and a certain directness of utterance, he speaks for universal humanity. His practical experience helps to explain as well why, unlike most great poets, he does not belong primarily with the idealists. Fine feeling he did not lack; he loved external beauty--some of his most pleasing passages voice his enthusiasm for Nature; and down to the end of his life he never lost the zest for fanciful romance. His mind and eye were keen, besides, for moral qualities; he penetrated directly through all the pretenses of falsehood and hypocrisy; while how thoroughly he understood and respected honest worth appears in the picture of the Poor Parson in the Prolog to 'The Canterbury Tales.' Himself quiet and self-contained, moreover, Chaucer was genial and sympathetic toward all mankind. But all this does not declare him a positive idealist, and in fact, rather, he was willing to accept the world as he found it--he had no reformer's dream of 'shattering it to bits and remoulding it nearer to the heart's desire.' His moral nature, indeed, was easy-going; he was the appropriate poet of the Court circle, with very much of the better courtier's point of view. At the day's tasks he worked long and faithfully, but he also loved comfort, and he had nothing of the martyr's instinct. To him human life was a vast procession, of boundless interest, to be observed keenly and reproduced for the reader's enjoyment in works of objective literary art. The countless tragedies of life he noted with kindly pity, but he felt no impulse to dash himself against the existing barriers of the world in the effort to assure a better future for the coming generations. In a word, Chaucer is an artist of broad artistic vision to whom art is its own excuse for being. And when everything is said few readers would have it otherwise with him; for in his art he has accomplished what no one else in his place could have done, and he has left besides the picture of himself, very real and human across the gulf of half a thousand years. Religion, we should add, was for him, as for so many men of the world, a somewhat secondary and formal thing. In his early works there is much conventional piety, no doubt sincere so far as it goes; and he always took a strong intellectual interest in the problems of medieval theology; but he became steadily and quietly independent in his philosophic outlook and indeed rather skeptical of all definite dogmas.Even in his art Chaucer's lack of the highest will-power produced one rather conspicuous formal weakness; of his numerous long poems he really finished scarcely one. For this, however, it is perhaps sufficient excuse that he could write only in intervals hardly snatched from business and sleep. In 'The Canterbury Tales' indeed, the plan is almost impossibly ambitious; the more than twenty stories actually finished, with their eighteen thousand lines, are only a fifth part of the intended number.   
     
   Even so, several of them do not really belong to the series; composed in stanza forms, they are selected from his earlier poems and here pressed into service, and on the average they are less excellent than those which he wrote for their present places (in the rimed pentameter couplet that he adopted from the French).
2. *His Humor*. In nothing are Chaucer's personality and his poetry more pleasing than in the rich humor which pervades them through and through. Sometimes, as in his treatment of the popular medieval beast-epic material in the Nun's Priest's Tale of the Fox and the Cock, the humor takes the form of boisterous farce; but much more often it is of the finer intellectual sort, the sort which a careless reader may not catch, but which touches with perfect sureness and charming lightness on all the incongruities of life, always, too, in kindly spirit. No foible is too trifling for Chaucer's quiet observation; while if he does not choose to denounce the hypocrisy of the Pardoner and the worldliness of the Monk, he has made their weaknesses sources of amusement (and indeed object-lessons as well) for all the coming generations.
3. *He is one of the greatest of all narrative poets*. Chaucer is an exquisite lyric poet, but only a few of his lyrics have come down to us, and his fame must always rest largely on his narratives. Here, first, he possesses unfailing fluency. It was with rapidity, evidently with ease, and with masterful certainty, that he poured out his long series of vivid and delightful tales. It is true that in his early, imitative, work he shares the medieval faults of wordiness, digression, and abstract symbolism; and, like most medieval writers, he chose rather to reshape material from the great contemporary store than to invent stories of his own. But these are really very minor matters. He has great variety, also, of narrative forms: elaborate allegories; love stories of many kinds; romances, both religious and secular; tales of chivalrous exploit, like that related by the Knight; humorous extravaganzas; and jocose renderings of coarse popular material--something, at least, in virtually every medieval type.
4. *The thorough knowledge and sure portrayal of men and women which, belong to his mature work extend through, many various types of character.*It is a commonplace to say that the Prolog to 'The Canterbury Tales' presents in its twenty portraits virtually every contemporary English class except the very lowest, made to live forever in the finest series of character sketches preserved anywhere in literature; and in his other work the same power appears in only less conspicuous degree.
5. *His poetry is also essentially and thoroughly dramatic*, dealing very vividly with life in genuine and varied action. To be sure, Chaucer possesses all the medieval love for logical reasoning, and he takes a keen delight in psychological analysis; but when he introduces these things (except for the tendency to medieval diffuseness) they are true to the situation and really serve to enhance the suspense. There is much interest in the question often raised whether, if he had lived in an age like the Elizabethan, when the drama was the dominant literary form, he too would have been a dramatist.
6. *As a descriptive poet (of things as well as persons) he displays equal skill.*Whatever his scenes or objects, he sees them with perfect clearness and brings them in full life-likeness before the reader's eyes, sometimes even with the minuteness of a nineteenth century novelist. And no one understands more thoroughly the art of conveying the general impression with perfect sureness, with a foreground where a few characteristic details stand out in picturesque and telling clearness.
7. *Chaucer is an unerring master of poetic form.*His stanza combinations reproduce all the well-proportioned grace of his French models, and to the pentameter riming couplet of his later work he gives the perfect ease and metrical variety which match the fluent thought. In all his poetry there is probably not a single faulty line. And yet within a hundred years after his death, such was the irony of circumstances, English pronunciation had so greatly altered that his meter was held to be rude and barbarous, and not until the nineteenth century were its principles again fully understood. His language, we should add, is modern, according to the technical classification, and is really as much like the form of our own day as like that of a century before his time; but it is still only *early*modern English, and a little definitely directed study is necessary for any present-day reader before its beauty can be adequately recognized.

The main principles for the pronunciation of Chaucer's language, so far as it differs from ours, are these: Every letter should be sounded, especially the final *e*(except when it is to be suppressed before another vowel). A large proportion of the rimes are therefore feminine. The following vowel sounds should be observed:

* Stressed *a*like modern *a*in father.
* Stressed *e*and *ee*like *e*in *fete*or *ea*in breath.
* Stressed *i*as in *machine*.
* *oo*like *o*in *open.*
* *u*commonly as in *push*or like *oo*in *spoon.*
* *y*like *i*in *machine*or *pin*according as it is stressed or not.
* *ai*, *ay*, *ei*, and *ey*like *ay*in *day.*
* *au*commonly like *ou*in *pound.*
* *ou*like *oo*in *spoon*.
* *-ye*(final) is a diphthong.
* *g*(not in *ng*and not initial) before *e*or *i*is like *j*.

Lowell has named in a suggestive summary the chief quality of each of the great English poets, with Chaucer standing first in order: 'Actual life is represented by Chaucer; imaginative life by Spenser; ideal life by Shakespeare; interior life by Milton; conventional life by Pope.' We might add: the life of spiritual mysticism and simplicity by Wordsworth; the completely balanced life by Tennyson; and the life of moral issues and dramatic moments by Robert Browning.