

Ninth-Grade English: *The Canterbury Tales* Pilgrimage Project

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* presents a uniquely diverse group of pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury in 1380. This project brings together the newest members of the Upper School to work collaboratively in designing a 10-minute, modern-day pilgrimage through the school. In the process, students connect to the text, each other, and the landscape of the Upper School.

Essential Questions:

- WHY DO WE TELL STORIES?
- HOW DO THE STORIES WE TELL REVEAL OUR IDENTITIES, CULTURE, AND VALUES?
- HOW DOES HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL CONTEXT AFFECT OUR READING OF A TEXT?



“The first thing our group did was agree that our pilgrims would be journeying to the coffee machine near the Café. Next, we came up with four characters that would be making the pilgrimage: a college student, a little girl, a mother, and a teacher.”

“My character was the college student, who everyone expects is drinking coffee because she is sleep deprived and stressed, but truly she just thinks it is delicious.” — Gaelen C.



MAKING CONNECTIONS

Prior to their work on the Pilgrimage Project, David and Alexa's classes spent three weeks reading and discussing selected excerpts from *The Canterbury Tales*.

During the Middle Ages, religious individuals made pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, or Mecca. In *The Canterbury Tales*, the pilgrims travel from outside of London to Canterbury, England.



REIMAGINING CHAUCER AT NUEVA

The students were asked to consider what is sacred, valuable, or important in our culture at Nueva in 2017.

Many students created a pilgrimage towards metaphorically sacred spaces, such as education (WRC), technology (tech office), and wellness (counselors' office).

Students used elements of satire in their own tales and created a group of unique characters to participate in each pilgrimage.



“Stanford English professor Jonathan Quick, who specializes in Medieval Studies, visited our class to talk about what was happening in England at the time. Our time with Jonathan helped us contextualize the targets of the satire present in the novel.”

“For example, we learned that the Prioress, one of the main characters, was using French to elevate her status, which it did among certain individuals. We might have skipped over that detail without knowing the reasons she tried to act as if she was from a higher class.” — Alex P.

While reading *The Canterbury Tales* in class, a handful of students discovered that there is a Canterbury Street near the Upper School.

After sharing this discovery with their teachers, the class decided to take their learning off campus, designing a pilgrimage inspired by the novel.

Now, in the Upper School's fifth year, the project has evolved into a tradition that leads the freshman class in an immersive and experiential interaction with the text.

“While the language of the novel makes it hard to dive right in, I was amazed that something written so long ago is still so easy to relate to. Many of the problems that arise in the book have been dealt with by society, but others still persist, such as sexism, anti-Semitism, and the really huge class differences that are found around the world.” — Alex P.



STANDARDS-BASED ASSESSMENT

For this project, students were assessed on the following criteria: Understanding Literature, Connecting Texts and Contexts, Class Discussion, Responsibility, and Collaboration.

The clarity of expectations, opportunity for self-assessment, and feedback from the group help ensure that each student can maximize their opportunity for success and growth.

