



THE FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE AND TALE

- The Franklin successfully stops the flow of the Squire's story in mid-sentence. Take turns with a partner to read aloud lines 1–14 (up to 'As that ye been.')
- The Squire should attempt to continue a sentence that begins 'Apollo's chariot whirled into the sky and...' but must not be allowed to get any further. Discuss the Squire's feelings. Is he flattered by what is said about him or annoyed by the interruption?
- The question of 'gentility' is an important issue in *The Franklin's Tale* and is discussed more fully at the end of the book. List the qualities by which the Franklin suggests a 'gentil' man may be identified in these first 36 lines. Can gentility be detected in the way he speaks to both Squire and Host, as well as in what he says to them? Note particularly how he seems to confuse wealth with nobility.

1	thou hast thee wel yquit you have acquitted yourself well [put up a good performance]	18	pleye at dees play dice [gamble]
			despende waste money
4	I allow the I grant you [thee with one 'e' allows a rhyme with 'youth']	19	lese lose
			usage habit, custom
5	As to my doom in my judgement	20	hath levere would prefer
7	good chaunce good fortune		page servant
8	in vertu ... continuaunce! may God grant you a life lived in manly virtue!	22	gentillesse gentility [see p. 89 for a full discussion of this]
9	of thy speche ... deyntee I have taken great pleasure from your words	23	Straw for ... oure Hoost 'To the devil with gentility,' said our Host ['To the devil with gentility!' is an approximation. Harry Bailey, the bluff, outspoken landlord of the Tabard Inn where the pilgrims met, has joined them on their trip to Canterbury and taken charge of organising the storytelling.]
11–14	I hadde levere ... that ye been even if I had the chance of a parcel of land worth £20 rent per annum ripe for the taking, I would sooner choose that my son was a man of discernment such as yourself	24	wel thou woost you know well
		24	ech of yow each of you
14–15	Fy on ... vertuous withal! riches are nothing if a man lacks the noble qualities that should accompany them!	25	moot ... biheste must tell at least one or two tales, or break his promise
16	snybbed scolded	28	haveth ... in desdeyn don't take offence at my behaviour [a very polite phrase]
	yet shal I shall do so again		
17	For he ... entende for he chooses to ignore the importance of noble behaviour		

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The Squire, who as the Knight's son is a member of the nobility, has been telling a tale about love and brave deeds. It seems to be endless, and the Franklin interrupts it here with courtesy and skill. He curtails the Squire's ramblings, praises him, deplores the manners of his own son, and is urged by the Host to stop his fine talk and get on with his story.

'In feith, Squier, thow hast thee wel yquit
 And gentilly. I preise wel thy wit,'
 Quod the Frankeleyn, 'consideringe thy yowthe,
 So feelingly thou spekest, sire, I allow the.
 As to my doom, ther is noon that is heere 5
 Of eloquence that shal be thy peere,
 If that thou live; God yeve thee good chaunce,
 And in vertu sende thee continuaunce!
 For of thy speche I have greet deyntee.
 I have a sone, and by the Trinitee, 10
 I hadde levere than twenty pound worth lond,
 Though it right now were fallen in myn hond,
 He were a man of swich discrecioun
 As that ye been. Fy on possessioun,
 But if a man be vertuous withal! 15
 I have my sone snybbed, and yet shal,
 For he to vertu listeth nat entende;
 But for to pleye at dees, and to despende
 And lese al that he hath, is his usage.
 And he hath levere talken with a page 20
 Than to comune with any gentil wight
 Where he mighte lerne gentillesse aright.'
 'Straw for youre gentillesse!' quod oure Hoost.
 'What, Frankeleyn! pardee, sire, wel thou woost
 That ech of yow moot tellen atte leste 25
 A tale or two, or breken his biheste.'
 'That knowe I wel, sire,' quod the Frankeleyn.
 'I prey yow, haveth me nat in desdeyn,
 Though to this man I speke a word or two.'
 'Telle on thy tale withouten wordes mo.' 30



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- The way a person speaks has always been one way in which an English person can tell which 'class' another comes from. Things were no different in the fourteenth century. Rhetoric was a skill linked to good breeding, and education in good manners and conversational arts, which distinguished a 'gentil' man from a common person. By calling himself a 'burel' man, the Franklin is apparently denying his own claims to gentility; but in fact every word he speaks in lines 44–55 would be recognised as a rhetorical device by a discerning audience. On page 85 you will find a more detailed explanation of these devices and how they are employed in this prologue and tale.
- When you have read the explanation, turn back to this page and consider how many times the Franklin repeats himself, in different words. Is such repetition effective? Does it add anything of importance? If not, why has Chaucer included these lines?
- Nowadays people tend to use rather pompous or showy language if they wish to impress others. Think of occasions when this occurs – afterdinner speeches, perhaps, formal letters of complaint, legal documents. Try to write the introductory paragraph to one such composition, bringing in as many pompous phrases and clichés as you can. (You might begin: 'My lords, ladies and gentlemen, unaccustomed as I am to public speaking ...!')

33–4	I wol yow ... wol suffice I won't disobey you in any way, as far as I am able [very polite]	46	rethorik rhetoric [the art of public speaking]
37	Britouns Bretons	49	Mount of Pernaso Mount Parnassus [Supposed birthplace of the Muses, and by inference the source of inspiration for writers, artists and storytellers.]
38	diverse aventures various events layes lays [Narrative lays were short romances. They first appeared in Anglo-Norman and French in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, when they are said to have derived from Breton legends. English lays appeared later but the form may well have appeared old-fashioned by the 1390s. The source here is in fact an Italian story by Boccaccio.]	50	Ne learned ... Scithero nor learned ['the art of' is understood here] Marcus Tullius Cicero [the famous Roman orator]
41	Or elles ... hir plesaunce or else read them for their pleasure	51–4	Colours ne ... to me queynte I never learned anything about any 'colours', without doubt, except for the colours of nature, growing in the meadow, or the colours men use in dyeing or painting; the 'colours' of rhetoric are quite strange to me
43	with good wil as I kan as well as I can burel plain, simple	55	My spirit ... swich mateere my spirit knows nothing of such matters
44	I yow biseche I beg you	56	if yow liste if you choose
45	rude speche uncouth way of talking		

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With deliberately emphasised courtesy, the Franklin starts his tale. He says he knows an old-fashioned 'lay' (or spoken story) of the type told in the courts of Brittany. He protests that he is a simple man, unable to tell the story in a polished or educated manner.

'Gladly, sire Hoost,' quod he, 'I wole obeye
 Unto your wil; now herkneþ what I seye.
 I wol yow nat contrarien in no wise
 As fer as that my wittes wol suffise.
 I prey to God that it may plesen yow; 35
 Thanne woot I wel that it is good ynow.'
 Thise olde gentil Britouns in hir dayes
 Of diverse aventures maden layes,
 Rimeyed in hir firste Briton tonge;
 Whiche layes with hir instrumentz they songe, 40
 Or elles redden hem for hir plesaunce,
 And oon of hem have I in remembraunce,
 Which I shal seyn with good wil as I kan.
 But sires, by cause I am a burel man,
 At my biginning first I yow biseche, 45
 Have me excused of my rude speche.
 I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn;
 Thing that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn.
 I sleep nevere on the Mount of Pernaso,
 Ne lerned Marcus Tullius Scithero. 50
 Colours ne knowe I none, withouten drede,
 But swiche colours as grown in the mede,
 Or elles swiche as men dye or peynte.
 Colours of rethorik been to me queynte;
 My spirit feeleth noght of swich mateere. 55
 But if yow list, my tale shul ye heere.

THE FRANKLIN'S PROLOGUE AND TALE

- What does the Franklin tell us about the knight and his lady here? You may wish to compare this knight's behaviour with that of the Knight and the Squire described in *The General Prologue*.
- The Franklin wishes to present an 'ideal' marriage, combining courtly love traditions with legal and practical marital relationships. There is further information on page 85 about the conventions associated with courtly love. How would the partnership normally change after the wedding day? Is there any evidence that the knight fears others might find this agreement strange or laughable?
- How much can you deduce about the Franklin's attitude to social status from the way he begins his tale?



▲ The Franklin as depicted in the Ellesmere manuscript. This was written and decorated in the fifteenth century but reproduced the style of dress of the 1380s.



▲ '(She) hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce
 That prively she fil of his acord To take him for hir
 housbonde and hir lord.'

- 57 **Armorik . . . Britaine**
 Armorica, now called Brittany
- 58 **dide his paine** took great pains
- 59 **his beste wise** as best he could
- 60 **greet emprise** great enterprise
- 61 **oon the faireste** the most lovely one of all
- 63 **eek therto** what is more
- 64 **heigh kinrede** high-born family
- 64 **wel . . . for drede** scarcely dared this knight, for fear
- 67 **meke obeisaunce** meek submissiveness
- 68 **penaunce** suffering
- 69–70 **prively she . . . and hir lord** in private she made an agreement with him to take him as both her husband and her lord [For an explanation of the significance of this statement, see notes on courtly love conventions, p. 87.]
- 75 **maistrie** mastery
- 76 **kithe hire jealousy** show jealousy towards her
- 79 **soverainete** superiority, higher status
- 80 **for shame of his degree** out of regard for his position [both as a knight and as a husband]
- 82–3 **sith of youre gentillesse . . . a reine** since your noble and courtly nature leads you to offer me such freedom and control
- 84–5 **Ne wolde . . . werre or stryf** may God never allow hostility or discord between us through any fault of mine
- 87 **Have heere my trouthe** I give you my solemn oath [Use of the word 'trouthe' implies a most binding promise.]

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He sets his tale in Brittany. It is about a knight who woos and wins a beautiful, high-born lady to be his bride. He promises that after marriage he will continue to serve her humbly, instead of taking control over her as his wife.

In Armorik, that called is Britaine,
 Ther was a knight that loved and dide his paine
 To serve a lady in his beste wise;
 And many a labour, many a greet emprise 60
 He for his lady wroghte, er she were wonne.
 For she was oon the faireste under sonne,
 And eek therto comen of so heigh kinrede
 That wel unnethes dorste this knight, for drede,
 Telle hire his wo, his peyne, and his distresse. 65
 But atte laste she, for his worthinesse,
 And namely for his meke obeisaunce,
 Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce
 That prively she fil of his accord
 To take him for hir housbonde and hir lord, 70
 Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wives.
 And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lives,
 Of his free wil he swoor hire as a knight
 That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne night,
 Ne sholde upon him take no maistrie 75
 Again hir wil, ne kithe hire jalousie,
 But hire obeye, and folwe hir wil in al,
 As any lovere to his lady shal,
 Save that the name of soverainetee,
 That wolde he have for shame of his degree. 80
 She thanked him, and with ful greet humblesse
 She seyde, 'Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
 Ye profre me to have so large a reine,
 Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,
 As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryf. 85
 Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf,
 Have heer my trouthe, til that myn herte breste.'
 Thus been they bothe in quiete and in reste.



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- Having proclaimed himself a 'burel' man with no rhetorical skills, the Franklin (perhaps unsurprisingly) employs the rhetorical device of digression in lines 89–114 to underline themes which will be significant in his story. Work out precisely what points he is making here. Do you agree with the suggestions he makes about human nature in general and women in particular?
- Take particular note of his statement about the value of patience (ll. 99–103), which is used by one character very successfully later in the tale, while others suffer for their lack of it.
- A number of important promises are made in the tale. Two occur in the last lines on this page. Does one seem more rash than the other?

89	o thing . . . dar I seye one thing, my lords, I can say with absolute confidence	109	constellacioun position of the planets [which was believed to have an effect on human behaviour]
90–1	freendes . . . holden compaignye lovers must give in to one another if they wish to stay together for long	110	chaunginge of complexioun balance of the 'humours' which affected one's disposition [The human body was influenced, so physicians believed, by four humours: phlegmatic, choleric, sanguine and melancholic, relating to the four 'juices' of the body – blood, phlegm, choler and bile. If the balance was upset in some way, a person felt 'ill-humoured' – 'out of sorts' physically or mentally.]
92	Love wole nat been constreynd by maistrye love can't be forced by domination		
96	of kinde by nature		
97	a thral a slave		
99–100	Looke . . . al above whoever is the most patient in love has the advantage over all others		
102	venquisseth conquers		
	these clerkes seyn these learned men tell us	111	doon amis or speken do or say something amiss
103	rigour severity, discipline	112	wreken avenged
104	For every word . . . or pleyne people can't make a fuss about every wrong word spoken	113–14	After the time . . . governaunce every person who understands self-control knows how to use restraint at certain times
105–6	Lerneth . . . or noon learn to be tolerant or, as I live, you'll have to learn to put up with things, whether you want to or not	116	suffrance hir bihight promised her forbearance
108	ne dooth or seith sometime amis does not do or say something wrong at some time	118	defaute fault

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The Franklin pauses in his tale to comment on the nature of love and the importance of tolerance in any relationship, emphasising the promises this husband and wife have made to each other.

For o thing, sires, sauffy dar I seye,
 That freendes everich oother moot obeye, 90
 If they wol longe holden compaignye.
 Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
 Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
 Beteth his winges, and farewel, he is gon!
 Love is a thing as any spirit free. 95
 Wommen, of kinde, desiren libertee,
 And nat to been constreyned as a thral;
 And so doon men, if I sooth seyen shal.
 Looke who that is moost pacient in love,
 He is at his avantage al above. 100
 Pacience is an heigh vertu, certeyn,
 For it venquisseth, as thise clerkes seyn,
 Thinges that rigour sholde nevere atteyne.
 For every word men may nat chide or pleyne.
 Lerneth to suffre, or elles, so moot I goon, 105
 Ye shul it lerne, wher so ye wole or noon;
 For in this world, certein, ther no wight is
 That he ne dooth or seith somtime amis.
 Ire, siknesse, or constellacioun,
 Wyn, wo, or chaunginge of complexioun 110
 Causeth ful ofte to doon amis or speken.
 On every wrong a man may nat be wreken.
 After the time moste be temperaunce
 To every wight that kan on governaunce.
 And therefore hath this wise, worthy knight, 115
 To live in ese, suffrance hire bihight,
 And she to him ful wisly gan to swere
 That nevere sholde ther be defaute in here.



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- The reader is being offered considerable information in these lines about the habits and attitudes of knights and their ladies, as interpreted by the Franklin. He repeats his explanation of the marriage arrangement, which would have seemed most unusual to a medieval audience. The nature of marriage is discussed in a number of the tales, notably those of the Merchant, the Wife of Bath, the Clerk and here the Franklin. All make a similar assumption – that one partner will normally have *maistrie* or dominance within the relationship. In spite of the fact that the courtly love conventions gave the lady power over her lover before marriage, social norms and current church teaching indicated that the husband was expected to be the dominant partner afterwards. The Franklin seeks to offer a relationship in which neither partner takes control – an idealised situation which is to be tested in the real world as the tale unfolds.
- Discuss in a group or in pairs the Franklin's ideal explained in lines 119–26. Although unusual in the fourteenth century, does it seem more workable nowadays? How convincingly is the argument expressed? Do you feel that Chaucer, the author, is entirely in agreement with the Franklin, his creation, at this point?
- To what extent do you begin to feel that these characters are anything more than mere stereotypical figures at this point in the story? What do we learn about what is expected of knights in lines 127–41?

122 **servage** servitude

124 **sith** since

125 **certes** indeed

126 **The which ... acordeth to** in accordance with the rules of the law of love

128 **Hoom ... his contree** he went back to his homelands with his wife

129 **Pedmark** Penmarc'h [on the Breton coast, near Quimper]

130 **solas** comfort

131–3 **Who koude telle ... and his wyf?** who can speak of the joy, benefit and prosperity that exists between husband and wife unless he himself has been married? [Echo of a similar sentiment expressed in *The Merchant's Tale*, there spoken in

bitter irony, but here to be taken literally.]

136 **of Kayrrud** [phonetic spelling of actual place named Kerru]

was cleped Arveragus was called Arveragus [Latin form of Celtic name; the fact he comes from a real place gives him individuality.]

137 **Shoop him** arranged

138 **cleped was eek Briteyne** also called Britain [In medieval times, England was often called Great Britain and Brittany 'Little Britain' to distinguish them.]

140 **al his lust** all his enthusiasm

141 **the book** [The Franklin follows literary convention by pretending he has an ancient source for his tale.]

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 Excerpt
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Having repeated his careful explanation of the unusual marriage arrangement between these two, the Franklin devotes a line or two to their state of marital bliss, before telling us that Arveragus, the Breton knight, finds it necessary to go adventuring to England for a year or two, seeking honour and fame.

Heere may men seen an humble, wys accord;
 Thus hath she take hir servant and hir lord – 120
 Servant in love, and lord in mariage.
 Thanne was he bothe in lordshipe and servage.
 Servage? nay, but in lordshipe above,
 Sith he hath bothe his lady and his love;
 His lady, certes, and his wyf also, 125
 The which that lawe of love acordeth to.
 And whan he was in this prosperitee,
 Hoom with his wyf he gooth to his contree,
 Nat fer fro Pedmark, ther his dwelling was,
 Where as he liveth in blisse and in solas. 130
 Who koude telle, but he hadde wedded be,
 The joye, the ese, and the prosperitee
 That is bitwixe an housbonde and his wyf?
 A yeer and moore lasted this blisful lyf,
 Til that the knight of which I speke of thus, 135
 That of Kayrrud was cleped Arveragus,
 Shoop him to goon and dwelle a yeer or tweyne
 In Engelond, that cleped was eek Briteyne,
 To seke in armes worshipe and honour;
 For al his lust he sette in swich labour; 140
 And dwelled there two yeer, the book seith thus.