927 Anglo-Saxon King Athelstan makes England

1215 John Lackland signs the Magna Carta

1154 The Plantagenets get the English throne

1348 The Black Death hits the country

1387–1400 Chaucer portrays English society

1348 The Black Death hits the country

See Robin Hood on screen
Meet the Celts

During the Iron Age (ca 600 BC–50 AD), a Celtic culture established itself throughout the British Isles.

Q What was the basic unit of Celtic life?
A It was the clan, which was like today's extended family.

Q Were clans bound together?
A Yes, clans joined together with other clans to form tribes, each with its own social structure and customs.

Q Where did the Celts live?
A They lived in huts made of timber with thatched roofs.

Q Were they farmers?
A The Celts practised agriculture when they were not fighting in wars. They introduced the iron plough, which made the cultivation of the soil easier. In the countryside in Britain it is still possible to see the long and narrow pattern of the Celtic field.

Q What was the role of women?
A They were almost equal to men. They could choose the man they wanted to marry and retained their own property. They could also lead other warriors in war, like Boadicea – a warrior queen of the early Britons who fought against the Romans.
The origins of Halloween
October 31st is Halloween. This festivity has Celtic origins: in the 5th century BC, the Celts believed that summer ended on October 31st. The holiday was called Samhain and celebrated the start of winter and of the new year. The Celts believed that ghosts and witches returned on that night and that evil spirits entered the body of a person or animal. This is why they used to wear frightening costumes and make big fires to send the spirits away. Later, Christian practices replaced pagan ones; the Roman Catholic Church decided to call November 1st ‘All Hallows Day’ or ‘All Saints Day’ and the evening of October 31st became ‘All Hollows Eve’ – that is, Halloween.

Nowadays at Halloween children and teenagers wear skeleton, witch, ghost and monster costumes for parties and ‘trick or treating’. They visit their neighbours’ houses and, when the door opens, they say ‘Trick or treat?’ and people usually give them sweets or money. This custom originated in the 9th century in Ireland, where on November 2nd – All Souls Day – Christians used to walk from village to village begging for ‘soul cakes’, made of bread with currants. The more ‘soul cakes’ the beggars received, the more prayers the they promised to say for dead relatives. The custom of buying a big pumpkin and making a lantern comes from Irish folklore. Irish people put lit, hollowed-out turnips in front of their windows and in their garden to frighten evil spirits away.
The Roman invasion

In 55 BC Julius Caesar (ca 100–44 BC) invaded Britain, but it was under Emperor Claudius (10 BC–54 AD) that the real conquest of the country took place, in the years 43–47 AD. The Romans involved the conquered tribes in the administration of the province, and they encouraged the growth of towns near their army bases. They persuaded the ruling class of Celtic aristocrats to live in the towns, which became centres of commercial activity. The towns were usually surrounded by stone walls and had a regular network of streets. The centre contained a forum, or civic centre, with access to the basilica, or town hall, which is where courts of justice or merchants assemblies were held. There were also public baths, which were used as spas and meeting places in every town.

The Roman influence on Britain

The Romans built over 9,600 kilometres of roads in Britain. They were extremely well built and served to join the towns and facilitate the movement of troops and commercial goods. They also built an extraordinary defence fortification and barrier from the east coast to the west coast, between England and Scotland, known as Hadrian’s Wall. The Roman invasion also marked the beginning of the importance of London. The Romans built the first ‘London Bridge’. This crossing place proved a convenient central point for the new network of roads, and the Roman settlement on the north side of the bridge, called ‘Londinium’, quickly became important as a trading centre.

The Anglo-Saxons arrive

When the Roman army withdrew from Britain in 410 AD, the Romanised Celts were left alone to fight against groups from Germany and Scandinavia who invaded the island in the 5th century and destroyed the Roman British towns. These people were the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes, and they gave the larger part of Britain its current name: England, that is, ‘the land of the Angles’. The Anglo-Saxon invaders were mainly farmers or fishermen who were also organised into family groups called ‘clans’. For these clans, the most important social bond was loyalty to their king and tribe. They exalted physical courage and personal freedom. They also created fine artwork and ornaments, and enjoyed feasts and drinking.

The Christianisation of Britain

At the end of the 6th century, Pope Gregory I the Great (590–604) sent a monk, Augustine, to bring Christianity to England. Augustine first went to Canterbury and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. Soon monasteries were built and turned into important centres of communal life and culture.

The Kingdom of England

At this time, the land now known as England was divided and ruled in small areas under different tribes. This was the situation until 865, when Danish armies, commonly known as Vikings, began to invade. They quickly conquered northern, eastern, southern and part of the central areas of England, until Alfred the Great of Wessex (871–899) intervened and halted the Danish advance. In ca 879 a
‘kingdom of Anglo-Saxons’, joining Wessex (the West Saxons, in southern England) and Mercia (the Angles, in central England), was born under Alfred’s lordship. Alfred’s vision was for a kingdom built over generations, with developments in state-building, local organisation, the construction of towns, the distribution of coins, the making of English law and the promotion of learning and literacy. Alfred’s son Edward (899–924) extended their power into the Midlands and East Anglia, and Edward’s son Athelstan completed the task of creating England by conquering Northumbria in 927.

4 The Heptarchy, a name applied to the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms.

Milestones

927, Athelstan made England
Few English kings have as direct a claim as Athelstan to be described as the father of the English state. 927 AD was a turning point, the year when he created a kingdom of all of England by establishing the idea of royal authority, law and coinage. Diplomacy was a fascinating aspect of his rule. Disorder was the great terror of the age. He tried to achieve peace across western Europe through a series of diplomatic alliances, including the marriage of four of his sisters to European rulers. This is why in the 12th century Athelstan was remembered as a kind of English Charlemagne – an image echoed in several medieval romances and even on the Elizabethan stage.

**FCE Reading and Use of English – Part 5**

4 **MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS.** Read the text about British history again. For questions 1–6, choose the answer (A, B, C or D) which you think fits best according to the text.

1 The Roman invaders in Britain persuaded the conquered tribe leaders to
   A build new army bases within the towns.
   B avoid trading with Rome.
   C move into the towns.
   D give up their previous lands and occupations.

2 What evidence of Roman influence remained in Britain?
   A Hadrian’s Bridge, a small network of roads and a new town in Londinium.
   B disorganised communication systems.
   C fortified farms and towns without a proper centre.
   D an extensive network of roads, a formidable customs barrier and fortified towns.

3 What happened after the Roman army withdrew from Britain?
   A The Romanised Celts destroyed the British Roman towns.
   B The island was invaded by the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes.
   C The Romanised Celts returned to Ireland and Wales.
   D The Romanised Celts successfully defended the British Roman towns from invasion.

4 Anglo-Saxon culture was characterised by many aspects but NOT
   A physical courage.
   B artistic beauty.
   C feasting and drinking.
   D lack of personal freedom.

5 What was Alfred the Great’s important achievement in the 9th century?
   A He halted the advance of the Vikings’ conquests in England.
   B He conquered Northumbria.
   C He brought Christianity to England.
   D He extended his power into the Midlands and East Anglia.

6 In 927 ... completed the task of creating England by conquering Northumbria.
   A Alfred
   B Alfred’s son, Edward,
   C Edward’s son, Athelstan,
   D a Viking king
1.3 History

The Norman Conquest and feudalism

WARM-UP

1 MATCH the words with their Italian equivalent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1 baron</th>
<th>A vescovo</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>bishop</td>
<td>B cavaliere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>abbot</td>
<td>C contadino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>knight</td>
<td>D feudatario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>peasant</td>
<td>E abate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 READ the text and match each heading (A–D) with a paragraph (1–4).

1 A new social order
2 Defeat and conquest
3 Wealth and taxation
4 Interdependence

3 The barons were able to sub-let their lands to the knights in return for their services. Thus the barons and knights provided the military service, and the agricultural work was done by the peasants, who belonged to the land of all the tenants. This system guaranteed security and food, and so peace and prosperity.

4 Twenty years after the Conquest, William sent his men throughout England to make a complete survey of the economic life of the country. The survey, which was written down in the Domesday Book, had two objectives: first, to provide the necessary information for collecting the ‘geld’ or property tax, and second, to give the king detailed knowledge of the extent and distribution of the wealth of his tenants.

1 On October 14th 1066, William, Duke of Normandy, defeated the Anglo-Saxon king, Harold II, at Hastings. On Christmas Day of that year, William was crowned as William I (1066–87) in Westminster Abbey. He had conquered the South East, but it took five more years to subjugate the rest of England.

2 First, William created a new aristocracy, which replaced the Anglo-Saxon aristocracy. The king kept the best lands, the towns and the forests. He distributed the rest of the lands to his Norman followers and to a few trusted Saxons. The feudal system was established: the barons obtained their land by becoming the king’s tenants, and they paid their ‘rent’ in military services to the king. They built castles to demonstrate and maintain their power.

3 ANSWER the following questions.

1 Who did William defeat?
2 Where and when was William I crowned?
3 What did the king own?
4 What did the barons obtain from the king? What did they have to pay the king?
5 What system guaranteed security and prosperity?
6 What was the Domesday Book? Why was the survey carried out?

FCE Speaking – Part 1

4 INTERVIEW. Answer the following questions.

1 Do you like studying history? Why is it important?
2 Does the place where you live have historical relevance?
3 Can you name places that are important in your national history?
4 Have you ever been to England? Have you visited any of the places you have studied? Which ones would you like to visit? Why?
1.4 History

Henry II: the first Plantagenet king

Glossary
- shrine
- tempio
- barefoot
- scalzo

AS YOU READ, write a heading for each paragraph (1–5).

In the years after the Norman Conquest, there were no set laws to decide who should replace a dead monarch. Thus this was a time when the throne was fiercely contested, with several different people asserting their claims to be the ruler of England. The members of the aristocracy became tired of the lack of an effective monarch. They refused to battle each other and obliged the various contenders to come to an arrangement in 1153.

Henry II was the first king of the Plantagenet dynasty. The Plantagenets were kings of France and England. Henry II's reign (1154–89) was successful in bringing order and stability. His first task was to reduce the power of the barons. He did this with the help of professional soldiers. Knights could now pay the king a sum of money, or 'scutage', instead of giving military service, and with this money the king was able to hire mercenaries, or professional soldiers.

Henry II sent travelling judges round the land to the largest towns in each county. The law they administered became known as 'common law', because it was used everywhere. In other parts of Europe, legal practice was based on the Civil Law of the Roman Empire or the Canon Law of the Church. English lawyers created an entirely different system of law based on custom, comparisons, previous cases and previous decisions. This mixture of experience and custom is the basis of law in England even today.

The king also wanted to reduce the power of the Church. Henry II thought that the easiest way of controlling the Church would be to make Thomas Becket (1118–70), his chancellor and friend, head of the Church in England. However, once he became Archbishop of Canterbury, Becket became an opponent of the king, who had considerable authority because he chose the bishops. The conflict lasted for a long time, until Becket was murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by four knights on 29th December 1170.

Becket's murder shocked all of Europe. He was soon regarded as a martyr and was canonised as St Thomas in 1173. Pilgrims from all over England and Europe visited his shrine in Canterbury Cathedral, and Henry II himself walked barefoot to his tomb. St Thomas's shrine was also the destination of the pilgrims portrayed by Geoffrey Chaucer in The Canterbury Tales (ca 1387).
1. WARM-UP

DISCUSS. What do you generally associate the adjective ‘Gothic’ with?

2. READ the text below and answer the questions.
   1. When was there a large cathedral-campaign in England?
   2. When was a church called a ‘cathedral’?
   3. What materials were used to build Gothic cathedrals?

### The building of Gothic cathedrals in England

The end of the 12th century witnessed a large cathedral-campaign in England. There were different reasons for this. First, the construction of new roads and bridges improved the transportation of materials. Urban growth created a diversity of labourers and craftsmen. Ecclesiastical incomes increased as a result of more efficiency of management and administration. At that time, a church was called a ‘cathedral’ when it contained a *cathedra*, or ‘throne’, for a bishop and the most important materials employed to build it were timber, stone (the most common was limestone), marble and glass.

3. READ the first sentence in the following brochure for Canterbury Cathedral. What word would you use to fill in the blank?

### FCE Listening – Part 2

SENTENCE COMPLETION. You will hear part of a radio talk about Canterbury Cathedral in Kent. For questions 1–10, complete the sentences in the brochure.

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Canterbury has been the most important spiritual centre in England for (1) ___________________. St Augustine was sent to Kent as (2) ____________________ in 597 AD and given a church at Canterbury. Until the 10th century, the Cathedral community was a (3) ____________________ of Benedictine monks. The wealth and power of the Cathedral increased in the 12th century thanks to the (4) ____________________ . It is now regarded as one of the finest examples of (5) ____________________ art.

The Cathedral was seriously damaged by the severe earthquake of 1382, losing its bells and campanile. The nave was rebuilt in the Perpendicular style of English Gothic, but the Norman and Early English east end was left in place. Today nearly (6) ____________________ are held each year. ‘Save Canterbury Cathedral’ was the banner launching an appeal to (7) ____________________ in 2006. This appeal wanted to protect the future of the Cathedral as a (8) ____________________ centre.

A combination of centuries of (9) ____________________ and constant use had produced serious damage problems at Canterbury Cathedral that needed urgent action.

The structural review wants to guarantee (10) ____________________ of the pilgrims and tourists visiting the Cathedral every year.
Reading and Use of English – Part 1

MULTIPLE-CHOICE CLOZE.

For questions 1–8, read the text and decide which answer (A, B, C or D) best fits each gap. There is an example at the beginning (0).

1. SCAN the following texts and see if you can explain why John is popularly known as ‘Bad King John’.

GLOSSARY
- drain prosciugare
- defy sfidare
- seal sigillare
- indictment accusa scritta
- seizure confisca
- wage dichiarare (guerra)

2. RICHARD I (0) SUCCEEDED his father, Henry II, in 1189. He spent less (1) a year of his reign in England, because he (2) for the Holy Land to take part in the Third Crusade. During his absence, his brother John tried to usurp his place. When Richard (3) without an heir in 1199, the English and Norman barons chose John as king.

In the popular perception, John is ‘Bad King John’ – an image that has been reinforced by his negative presentation on the screen in Robin Hood films or TV series like Ivanhoe, where he always (4) as a cowardly, cruel and reprehensible monarch.

The rebellion that started in England in 1215 had John as its cause. His defence of the French territories was ineffective, and the constant collection of taxes (5) the incomes of the barons and increased their discontent. It seemed that no one was safe from his arbitrary rule. The barons (6) to pay scutage and conspired to resist the king. By May 1215 war had broken out. The rebels, under the name ‘the Army of God’, (7) the king and occupied London. John agreed (8) them and sealed the Magna Carta.

Milestones

1215, the Magna Carta

The clauses of the Magna Carta were indictments against John’s rule. Among them, the Magna Carta called for a guarantee of protection to all free men from illegal imprisonment and seizure of property. It also asked for swift justice and scutage limitations. The charter established a committee of twenty-five barons with a mandate to wage war on the king if he failed to respect the agreement.

3. READ the texts again and get ready to report orally on the following points:
   1. Richard I;
   2. the reasons for John’s unpopularity;
   3. the barons’ reaction to John’s rule;
   4. the clauses of the Magna Carta.
**FCE Reading and Use of English — Part 2**

**4 OPEN CLOZE.** For questions 1–8, read the text below and write the word which best fits each gap. Use only one word in each gap. There is an example at the beginning (0).

**MEDIEVAL OUTLAWS**

The medieval outlaw is a familiar figure in modern imagination. This is due to the popularity of the legend of Robin Hood. We tend to imagine Robin and outlaws as fugitives because they defied the king’s officials and operated outside the law in the great forests of the kingdom. What we forget is that was an established process behind the creation of outlaws. Men not choose to become outlaws: they were made outlaws. This was a tool frequently employed by Henry II, Richard I and John to enforce the exile of individuals found guilty or suspected of robbery, theft or murder. Such individuals were obliged to leave the kingdom in either eight days or forty days. If they returned, they were to be arrested as outlaws. This meant immediate execution. Men were outlawed for treason, made it a powerful tool for the punishment and removal of the king’s enemies. Clause 3 of the Magna Carta addressed the operation of outlawry: ‘free man was to be imprisoned, dispossessed of his property and exiled, outlawed or ruined ‘except by the lawful judgement of his peers or by the law of the land’.

**5 DESCRIBE** the process of outlawry using the following words:

- defy
- tool
- exile
- guilty
- execution
- treason
- imprisoned
- dispossessed
- peers
Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves

Directed by Kevin Reynolds; USA 1991.
With Kevin Kostner (Robin of Locksley); Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio (Maid Marian); Sean Connery (King Richard); Morgan Freeman (the Moor).

The young nobleman Robin of Locksley escapes from a hellish prison in the Holy Land and makes his way home to England with a Moor, Azeem. Once home, Robin discovers that his father has been murdered and the wicked sheriff of Nottingham is frightening the country. While travelling through Sherwood Forest, Robin is ambushed by a gang of thieves, but he soon learns that they are honest men and women who have been driven from their homes by the sheriff’s cruelty. Robin wins their trust and becomes their leader. He falls in love with Maid Marian, a relative of King Richard. Eventually, the sheriff dies and Robin and Marian get married with the blessing of the king.

What about accuracy? The film presents an accurate portrayal of medieval Europe: there are horses and carriages for transport; the Church is highly respected; there are both good and bad knights; and public torture is used for the people’s amusement. But there are also some inaccuracies. Although the film is set during King Richard’s absence from England, Prince John does not appear and it is the sheriff of Nottingham who tries to fill the vacuum of power.

Robin Hood

Directed by Ridley Scott; USA 2010.
With Russell Crowe (Robin Hood); Cate Blanchett (Lady Marion); Max von Sydow (Robin’s father).

This version of ‘Robin Hood’ differs from previous ones: it tells of Robin Hood’s transformation from Robin Longstride, the son of a stonemason and an archer in King Richard’s army, into a leader of English soldiers against an invading French army and, finally, into a rebel against King John.

The climax of the film is the French army’s invasion of England’s Dover Beach, where they are opposed by an English army. The English are victorious, but in the final scenes King John declares Robin an outlaw. In response to this, Robin moves to Sherwood Forest with his friends to form what will become the Merry Men of Sherwood Forest.

What about accuracy? Warfare is presented as exceptionally brutal, fought with swords, arrows, boiling oil and fire. Life in England, except for the rich, was hard at that time, with most people living in huts. Even those with land and titles, like Lady Marion, had to face grain shortages, do hard labour and live in cold, barren castles. The film makes Robin responsible for the Magna Carta, which was historically impossible.
Literary language

The ballad

Here are the most important features of the ballad:
- short stanzas of two or four lines;
- repetition of words or lines;
- mixture of dialogue and narration;
- narrative as a series of rapid flashes;
- both real and supernatural characters;
- themes of the supernatural, love, war, domestic tragedy, outlawry.

Ballads were produced anonymously and sung with or without accompaniment or dance. They were transmitted orally and written down between the 13th and 14th centuries. They were later collected and published by Bishop Thomas Percy in his famous Reliques of Ancient English Poetry in 1765.

Lord Randal

Anonymous

First published in the 19th century

The poem you are going to read is a traditional ballad. It is a folk narrative poem which was very popular in the late Middle Ages. It was originally adapted for singing and dancing.

O where ha' you been, Lord Randal my son?
And where ha' you been, my handsome young man?
I ha' been at the greenwood; mother, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' hunting and fain wad lie down.

An' wha met ye there, Lord Randal my son?
An' wha met you there; my handsome young man?
O I met wi' my true-love; mother, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down.

And what did she give you, Lord Randal my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?
Eels fried in a pan; mother, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down.

And what becam of them, Lord Randal my son?
And what becam of them, my handsome young man?
My hawks and my hounds; mother, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down.

And what d'ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal my son?
What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?
Four and twenty milk kye; mother, mak' my bed soon,
For I'm sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down.
COMPREHENSION
2 READ the ballad carefully and answer the following questions.
1 Who is speaking?
2 Can you infer when and where the story is set?
3 Where has Lord Randal been? Why?
4 Who did he meet?
5 What was he given?
6 What did he take with him?
7 What happened to him?

ANALYSIS
3 FOCUS on the sound pattern of the poem to understand its musical quality.
1 Write down the rhyme scheme using the letters of the alphabet. Is it regular? If it is, why?
2 Point out all the repeated words. Are there many? You will notice they are repeated without any variation from stanza to stanza. This sort of repetition involves the use of a sort of fixed formula called ‘refrain’.
3 Find examples of alliteration, underlining the words that start with the same consonant sound.
4 Discuss the effect of rhyme, repetition and alliteration. Tick as appropriate and justify your choice.
   - They help the listener to memorise.
   - They create a musical effect.
   - They link words and lines.
   - They emphasise important details.

4 FOCUS on the layout of the poem, that is, its organisation on the page.
1 How many stanzas are there?
2 How many lines are there in each stanza?
3 What is the function of the apostrophes?

5 CONSIDER the language of the poem.
1 Decide whether the nouns are concrete or abstract. To what purpose? Tick and give reasons:
   - To convey the psychology of the characters.
   - To describe events.
   - To express feelings.
2 Each stanza (from 1 to 6) contains an alternation of sense and sound. Lines 1 and 3 provide information about the storyline; lines 2 and 4 contribute to the sound quality of the poem through repetition. The third line of stanzas 1–6 contains key words. Write them down below. The first has been provided.
   - stanza 1 greenwood
   - stanza 2 .................
   - stanza 3 .................
   - stanza 4 .................
   - stanza 5 .................
   - stanza 6 .................

   In this way we get to know the story; here is its beginning. Complete it using your own words. Lord Randal has been hunting in the wood and he has met...
3 Say where the turning point, or climax, is. Which stanza is it in?
4 The climax of the story affects the tone of the dialogue between Lord Randal and his mother in the last four stanzas. In fact they contain another device typical of the ballad: the oral testament. Explain how it works.

6 FIND evidence in the text for the following:
   - hunting, as a resource;
   - the absence of the horse, which helps you understand that Lord Randal is a very old ballad, witnessing an age when hunting was carried out on foot;
   - the wood, as a main feature of landscape but, at the same time, as a mysterious and magic place;
   - hawks and hounds, as the assistants of the hunter.

YOUR TURN
7 DISCUSS in pairs. The ballad is still used in modern pop and folk music. Can you think of examples of modern ballads sung by famous singers? How do they differ from medieval ballads?
On John’s death, his nine-year-old son, Henry III (1207–72), became king, and England was governed by a group of barons until he came of age. It was in his reign that parliament began to create a structure of permanent control over the king’s policies. The term ‘parliament’ comes from the French word meaning ‘discussion’, and in fact his council included barons, knights and, for the first time, two representatives from each town.

Henry’s son, Edward I (1239–1307), continued the experiment when he became king in 1272. The meeting of his council, known as the ‘Model Parliament’ of 1295, included representatives of the barons, the clergy, two knights from each county and two citizens from each town. The system of the future two Houses of Parliament – the House of Lords and the House of Commons – was already in place.

1 The English Parliament meets before Edward, ca 1300.

2 A photo of a Parliamentary session of the House of Commons today.

3 The British Houses of Parliament in the Palace of Westminster on the north bank of the River Thames.

Internet Lab

1 DisCUSS. What do you know about today’s English Parliament?

2 Type in the website www.parliament.uk and carry out a research project on the following:
   1 Parliament’s role;
   2 its composition;
   3 checking the work of government;
   4 rules and customs;
   5 Parliament and the Crown;
   6 the birth of the two-chamber system;
   7 the increase of the Commons’ power;
   8 the clash between Parliament and the Crown;
   9 the supremacy of Parliament over the Crown;
   10 the growth of the size of Parliament and devolution.
1. WARM-UP

READ the title of the section (1.10). Then look at the pictures below and write the names of the three orders of medieval society under them.

peasants
nobles
clergy

2. FCE

LISTENING – Part 1

EXTRACTS WITH MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS. You will hear people talking about medieval society. For questions 1–8, choose the best answer (A, B or C).

1. You hear a lecturer talking about medieval society. What was it like?
   A. It was fixed and hierarchical.
   B. It was characterised by mobility.
   C. It was powerful and free.

2. You hear a professor explaining the nobility in feudal society. What did a lord need to maintain his power?
   A. Hereditary titles.
   B. The king.
   C. Castles and vassals.

3. You hear a student answering the teacher’s question about medieval society. Who were vassals?
   A. They were the king’s friends.
   B. They were men who had taken an oath to the king.
   C. They were the king’s guards.

4. You hear part of a history lesson at school. What linked the clergy to the noble estate?
   A. They both prayed.
   B. The eldest male heirs who inherited the estates and titles.
   C. The younger sons of noble families who entered religious life.

5. You hear a radio talk about the controversial aspects of a clergyman’s life. What were its contradictions?
   A. Many clergymen had properties and children.
   B. All clergymen were poor and chaste.
   C. Most clergymen were poor but not chaste.

6. You hear an extract from a history programme about medieval society. What percentage of the population were peasants?
   A. 5%.
   B. 10%.
   C. 95%.

7. You hear part of a history lesson at school. What did serfdom also imply?
   A. Being born on the manor.
   B. Paying taxes and being subject to the lord’s permission to get married.
   C. Having basic individual rights.

8. You hear two people discussing the breakdown of the three orders, or estates, of medieval society. When did some social mobility start?
   A. After the Black Death had killed up to half of the population.
   B. After Chaucer wrote The Canterbury Tales.
   C. In the 13th century.

3. EXPLAIN what each order, or estate, did in medieval society.
WARM-UP

1 DISCUSS. Geoffrey Chaucer is regarded as the ‘father of English literature’. Can you think of the possible reasons why? Can you guess what he chose to write about?

Geoffrey Chaucer’s life

Born about 1343, Geoffrey Chaucer (ca 1343–1400) was the son of a wine merchant and the relative wealth of his family enabled him to receive an excellent education. He found employment in the house of John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III of England and the wealthiest man in the land. In response to the death of John of Gaunt’s first wife, he wrote one of his most important works, *The Book of the Duchess*. It was his skill and inventiveness as a writer, combined with a clever mind and practical skills, that raised his social status. He worked as a controller of the customs for the Port of London and took part in important diplomatic missions. He died in 1400 and was the first poet to be buried in Westminster Abbey, in what was to become Poets’ Corner.

The Canterbury Tales

(1387–1400)

In his unfinished narrative poem *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer used the structure of the three orders of society. This work belongs to a genre of writing known as ‘estates satire’, in which stock characters or stereotypes were represented, such as a dishonest miller, a lascivious friar and a virtuous knight. Chaucer, however, also included a significant number of figures representing the rising merchant class of his day.

The premise

The story is about thirty people, including Chaucer as narrator, who meet at the Tabard Inn in London. They are all there to join a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral and the shrine of Thomas Becket. The innkeeper decides to make things interesting by suggesting that every pilgrim should tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back; the pilgrim who tells the best story will win a free dinner. The various tales are both religious and humorous, moral and satirical. Before the storytelling begins, however, Chaucer gives us portraits of each of the travellers in a ‘General Prologue’.

The three estates

Chaucer begins his character description with a knight who, with his son, is the only representative of the noble estate on this particular pilgrimage. His description is almost entirely focused on the numerous military campaigns he has fought. He represents the warlike aspect of the noble classes – the original source of their power and status. By contrast, the knight’s son represents a noble character with courtly and chivalric attributes.

Ridiculing the religious

In the ‘General Prologue’, Chaucer then moves from the nobility to the clergy. The character of the prioress, a kind of nun, is described next, but instead of a description highlighting her faith and devotion, Chaucer’s narrator describes the prioress’s singing, her ability to speak French, her elegant table manners and her love of small animals. At Chaucer’s time it was dangerous to criticise the king, but...
writers made fun of monks, nuns, friars and pardoners. The medieval Church claimed to be all-powerful. It was strong culturally, but by modern standards it was weak as an organisation. Ordinary people often ignored Church laws and some attacked Church property. When a dissident movement (the Lollards, led by John Wycliffe) emerged in the 1380s, the authorities became watchful for heresy, but only a few opinions were classified as heretical.

Overcoming the three estates
One of the most fascinating aspects of Chaucer’s version of the estates satire is that he includes several pilgrims – the Doctor, the Shipman, the Cook, to name just three – who do not fit neatly into the three estates model. The figure that best displays this is the Wife of Bath, whose status as a widow and a merchant contradicts traditional medieval ideas of both gender and class – demonstrating how the social structure was changing. Five times married, she is perhaps the most entertaining of the pilgrims. She, like so many others among this group, seems to regard the pilgrimage as a kind of social activity, as she has been to all the major pilgrimage sites of the medieval world: Jerusalem, Rome, Boulogne, Santiago de Compostella and Cologne. She has visited some of these sites more than once. This suggests a remarkable freedom of movement and access to wealth that was unusual in the Middle Ages, but still common enough to confound and complicate the ideal of the three orders.

The pilgrimage
Chaucer used the idea of pilgrimage as an organising principle for his collection of tales. Pilgrimages to religious sites were an important feature of medieval religious life for members of all social classes. Although Chaucer’s pilgrims seem more interested in socialising than spirituality, thousands of medieval people felt obliged to make journeys to places as far away as Jerusalem and as close as the next village in search of forgiveness, to give thanks or simply to demonstrate their faith.

Chaucer’s language
During the Middle Ages, three languages were spoken in England: French, Anglo-Saxon and Latin. It was from the blend of these three that Middle English (1100–1450) originated. For about two centuries after the Norman Conquest, the ruling classes and the aristocracy used Norman French, while the conquered continued to speak in their native Anglo-Saxon language; Latin was mainly used by the Church and as the language of learning. By the time Chaucer wrote The Canterbury Tales, English had replaced French as the language of instruction in local schools. English was also becoming the language of government, and there was a growing demand for literary works in English. However, Chaucer knew the problem of writing poetry in English: it demanded a new form of the language – a literary language – shaped largely by French and Latin models but built upon the old popular tradition and on a deep knowledge of actual speech, which formed the basis of Chaucer’s dramatic style.

2 READ the text about Geoffrey Chaucer’s life and works and answer the questions.

1 What class did Chaucer belong to?
2 What made him successful during his life?
3 Where was he buried?
4 What genre does The Canterbury Tales belong to? What did Chaucer add?
5 What is the story about?
6 Did Chaucer follow the three orders of society in his presentation?
7 What was the purpose of a pilgrimage in medieval times?
8 What languages were spoken in England in the Middle Ages?
9 How was language changing when Chaucer began to write?
10 What formed the basis of his style?
DISCUSS. What do you associate the season of spring with? How do you feel in this period of the year? What do you feel like doing?

When in April

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales (ca 1387–1400)
General Prologue, lines 1–42

This is the opening of The Canterbury Tales. These are perhaps Chaucer's best-known lines. They introduce the framework to the poem and also establish the sense of 'variety within unity', 'disorder within order' which characterises Chaucer's masterpiece.

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire's end
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
to give his help to them when they were sick.
It happened in that season that one day
In Southwark, at The Tabard, as I lay
Ready to go on pilgrimage and start
For Canterbury, most devout at heart,
At night there came into that hostelry
Some nine and twenty in a company
Of sundry folk happening then to fall
In fellowship, and they were pilgrims all
That towards Canterbury meant to ride. The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;
They made us easy, all was of the best.
And, briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip
And was soon one with them in fellowship,
Pledged to rise early and to take the way
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.
But none the less, while I have time and space,
Before my story takes a further pace,
It seems a reasonable thing to say
What their condition was, the full array
Of each of them, as it appeared to me,
According to profession and degree,
And what apparel they were riding in;
And at a Knight I therefore will begin.

1 showers. Piogge.
2 pierce the drought. Penetrano la siccità.
3 brings about the engendering. Genera.
4 Zephyrus. Zeffro.
5 grove and heath. Bosco e brughiera.
6 shoots. Germogli.
7 the Ram. L'Ariete.
8 fowl. Uccelli.
9 pricks them. Li punge.
10 long to. Sentono il desiderio.
11 palmers. Palmieri. pellegrini.
12 to seek the stranger strands. Cercare i lidi forestieri.
13 hallowed. Venerati.
14 sundry. Diverse.
15 shire. Contea.
16 wend. (Arc.) Si dirigono.
18 hostelry. Locanda.
19 fellowship. Compagnia.
20 stables. Stalle.
21 pledged. Con la promessa, l'impegno.
22 none the less. Tuttavia.
23 takes a further pace. Proceda.
24 array. Schiera.
25 degree. Ceto.
26 apparel. Abbigliamento.
The Wife of Bath

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales (ca 1387–1400)
General Prologue, lines 455–486

In this passage you will read about a pilgrim. Her name is Dame Alice. ‘Wife’ is her status in society; she is actually a widow. ‘Bath’ is the town she comes from. She really enjoys going on pilgrimages. She represents worldly, earthy qualities as well as a female point of view.

A worthy woman from beside Bath city
Was with us, somewhat deaf, which was a pity. In making cloth she showed so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.

In all the parish not a dame dared stir
Towards the altar steps in front of her,
And if indeed they did, so wrath was she
As to be quite put out of charity.

Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.

Her hose were of the finest scarlet red
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.

Bold was her face, handsome, and red in hue.
A worthy woman all her life, what’s more

1.6

1. with us. Con noi.
2. somewhat deaf. Un po’ sorda.
3. which was a pity. Il che (il fatto che fosse sorda) era un peccato.
4. so great a bent. Molta predisposizione.
5. of Ypres and of Ghent. Città delle Fiandre celebri per la manifattura e il commercio della lana.
6. dared stir ... in front of her. Osava precederla.
7. wrath. Furiosa.
8. kerchiefs. Sciarpe.
10. gartered. Fermate con la giarrettiera.

2 Laura Betti as the Wife of Bath in the film ‘The Canterbury Tales’, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini in 1972.
She’d had five husbands, all at the church door, 
A part from other company in youth; 
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth¹. 
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem, 
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them; 
She’d been to Rome and also to Boulogne, 
St James of Compostella and Cologne, 
And she was skilled in wandering by the way. 
She had gap-teeth¹², set widely, truth to say. 
Easily on an ambling¹³ horse she sat 
Well wimpled up¹⁴, and on her head a hat 
As broad as is a buckler or a shield¹⁵; 
She had a flowing mantle that concealed¹⁶ 
Large hips, her heels spurred¹⁷ sharply under that. 
In company she liked to laugh and chat 
And knew the remedies for love’s mischances, 
An art in which she knew the oldest dances.

₁ forsooth. (Arc.) In verità.  
₁² gap-teeth. Spazi tra i denti (segno di temperamento sessuale e amore per i viaggi secondo la fisiognomica).  
₁³ ambling. Che andava al passo.  
₁⁴ Well wimpled up. Ben avvolta da un soggolo.  
₁⁵ a buckler or a shield. Un brocchiere (piccolo scudo circolare) o uno scudo.  
₁⁶ concealed. Nascondeva.  
₁⁷ spurred. Incitavano (il cavallo) con gli speroni.

COMPREHENSION

2 AS YOU READ the passage, find the lines where Chaucer describes the Wife of Bath’s economic skills and those linked to her social skills. What were her skills and abilities?

3 FIND the details regarding her clothes. What do they suggest about her social status?

4 UNDERLINE all the physical descriptions of the Wife. Are they positive or negative?

5 TWO NUMBERS are mentioned. What are they and what do they refer to?

ANALYSIS

6 WRITE down the rhyme scheme. You have just learnt to recognise a rhyming couplet, the rhyme pattern used by Chaucer.

7 WHAT COLOUR is mentioned and associated with this character? What do we normally associate with this colour?

8 FIND where Chaucer uses exaggeration in his description of the Wife. Here are some key words to help you find the exaggerations: first, kerchiefs, numbers, hat. What effect do these four exaggerated descriptions have on our idea of what the Wife of Bath was like?

9 IRONY is the use of words to convey a meaning that is the opposite of its literal meaning. Find some examples of irony in the text. Do you get the impression the Wife of Bath went on pilgrimages because she was very pious?

YOUR TURN

10 DISCUSS. Do you think the description of this character is a stereotype or the picture of an individual? Does this pilgrim fit into one of the three orders of medieval society?
Giving identity a voice

1.12 Cultural Issues

The stories in The Canterbury Tales are very much about entertainment, and the teller of the best tale is promised a free meal at the end of the pilgrimage. In this way, it resembles a modern-day poetry slam, where poets perform and compete for a prize. British performance poet Patience Agbabi (1965-) is a self-confessed lover of Chaucer’s work. In her poem ‘The Wife of Bafa’, she has refashioned ‘The Wife of Bath’ into a sassy, contemporary Nigerian businesswoman.

The Wife of Bafa
Patience Agbabi

My name is Mrs Alice Ebi Bafa.
I come from Nigeria.
I’m very fine, isn’t it.
My next birthday I’ll be ... twenty-nine.
I’m business woman.
Would you like to buy some cloth?
I’ve all the latest styles from Lagos, Italian shoe and handbag to match, lace, linen and Dutch wax.
I only buy the best and I travel first class.

Some say I have blood on my hands ‘cause I like to paint my nails red but others call me femme fatale.
My father had four wives so I’ve had five husbands.
I cast a spell with my gap-toothed smile and my bottom power.
Three were good and two were bad.

The first three were old and rich and I was young and fit.
They died of exhaustion.
The fourth one was ladies’ man.
I could not count his women on one hand but he’d rage if I looked at another man.
I was very wild when I was young.
They called me Miss Highlife,
I was not considered a good wife but I always respected my husband.

He died when I returned from this London.

The fifth one I married for love. He was studying law at University of Ibadon. He was not yet twenty-one, wicked in bed and so handsome but he liked pornographic magazine. His favourite was Playboy. One day I threw it on fire to teach him a lesson. He turned into wife batterer.

He was to regret his action. I beat him till he begged for his ancestors. Now we get on like house on fire.

Some say I’m a witchcraft? ’cause I did not bear them children. They do not understand your Western medicine.

You like my headtie. It’s the latest fashion. They sell like hot cake on Victoria Island. Fifty pounds.

I give you discount ’cause I like your smile. The quality is very good. If I take off more I will not make profit and I travel to Lagos next week. Make it my lucky day.

Please, I beg you.

**COMPREHENSION**

1 READ the poem and complete the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Nationality</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Job</th>
<th>Physical appearance</th>
<th>Clothes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**ANSWER** these questions about the poem.

1 How many husbands did she have? What were they like?
2 What did the first three have in common?
3 What about the fourth? Did she love him?
4 What happened to her last husband?
5 Has she got any children?
6 What is she doing in the last stanza?

**ANALYSIS**

3 **EXPLAIN.** How is ‘The Wife of Bafa’ narrated? How does it reveal the Wife’s character?

4 **DECIDE.** Do the lines rhyme?

5 **PICK OUT** examples from the poem in which Agbabi wanted to replicate Nigerian English. What effect is achieved?

6 **ANALYSE.** Has the poet changed Chaucer’s original?

7 **TICK** as appropriate. What was the poet’s aim?
   - To make a caricature of West African women.
   - To celebrate a timeless, complex character that exists in all cultures.

**YOUR TURN**

8 **CREATE** ‘a modern pilgrim’ in Chaucerian style and get ready to perform in front of the class. Follow the prompts below.
   - Present your pilgrim with concrete details (clothes, physical features to reflect social status and personality).
   - Use irony.
   - Choose a modern occupation.
   - Show respect for the pilgrim.
The Black Death was one of the greatest human tragedies ever experienced in Europe. The apparent virulence of the outbreak in 1347–50 was linked to a lack of immunity among the population, but also to the fact that the bubonic form was accompanied by outbreaks of pneumonic plague, which was spread by direct contact between humans and gave no chance of survival.

Rich or poor, young or old, fit or ill, man or woman, the plague, like a tornado, made no distinction when it came. It sometimes happened that a victim would catch the plague but recover.

Flight from infected areas was the most common response, especially among those who could afford to flee. This usually meant fleeing from the city to the countryside, as did the wealthy storytellers in Boccaccio’s *The Decameron* (1348–53). Here is Boccaccio’s description of the plague symptoms:

‘[I]n men and women alike there appeared, at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits, whereof some waxed to the bigness of a common apple, others to the size of an egg, some more and some less, and these the vulgar named plague-boils.’

General ignorance about the causes of the plague did nothing to dispel fear and terror. The creatures responsible for the spread of the plague — rats and fleas — were not suspected for one very simple reason: they were common and familiar in the 14th century. The earthquake of 1348 was blamed for corrupting the air with foul odours, thus precipitating the plague.

There were other theories too. The Black Death was responsible for the death of a third of England’s population. The economic and social effects were enormous. Labour was scarce, so wages rose, prices dropped and the condition of those peasants who survived improved since they were able to demand payment for work done on their lord’s land.

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**WARM-UP**

1. **READ** the title of this section (1.13). Do you know what the Black Death was? Why was it called ‘Black’?

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**Reading and Use of English – Part 6**

2. **GAPPED TEXT.** You are going to read a text about the Black Death. Six sentences have been removed from the text. Choose from the sentences A–G the one which best fits each gap (1–6). There is one extra sentence which you do not need to use.

   - A. The idea was simple enough: remove yourself from those areas which were affected.
   - B. On the other hand, most people who caught the plague were dead within a few days.
   - C. Normally it takes ten to fourteen days before the plague has killed off most of a contaminated rat colony.
   - D. This plague, known as the ‘Black Death’ because the body went dark-colored after death, was caused by fleas living on black rats which infested ships trading with Europe.
   - E. But for almost everyone, the plague was a sign of God’s anger.
   - F. The actual plague bacillus was discovered only in the middle of the 19th century.
   - G. The plague could take out an entire side of one street, the entire street or just one house on the street.

3. **ANSWER** the following questions about the text.

   1. What were the causes of the bubonic plague?
   2. How did men and women react to the disease?
   3. Who was responsible for the plague, according to common people?
   4. What were the main consequences of the Black Death?
1 Overview

Test what you know

1 **DECIDE** if the following statements are true or false. Correct the false ones.
   1. Henry II increased the power of the barons. **T**
   2. The knights paid Henry II a sum of money instead of giving him military service. **F**
   3. Common Law was based on a written code. **F**
   4. Thomas Becket was a supporter of the king. **F**
   5. King John left for the Holy Land to take part in the Third Crusade. **T**
   6. With the Magna Carta, the king agreed that no tax could be imposed without the consent of the committee of twenty-five barons. **T**
   7. The first parliament was formed during the reign of Henry II. **F**

2 **PROVIDE** an explanation for each of the following.
   1. Scutage: ...................................................................................................................................................
   2. Common Law: ...........................................................................................................................................
   3. Magna Carta: ..............................................................................................................................................

Can you do it?

3 **EXPLAIN** the link between Halloween and the Celts.

4 **DESCRIBE** Anglo-Saxon society.

5 **SAY** why Canterbury Cathedral is so important and what the most important features of its architectural style are.

6 **TRACE** the process behind the creation of outlaws.

7 **REVISE** your knowledge about Geoffrey Chaucer’s *The Canterbury Tales* and complete the notes below.
   1. The premise................................................................................................................................................
   2. The three estates ...........................................................................................................................................
   3. The organising principle for his tales ...........................................................................................................
   4. The language ..............................................................................................................................................

8 **READ** the text ‘The Knight’ from the ‘General Prologue’ of *The Canterbury Tales* and do the activities below.
   1. Read the first four lines and write down what values the Knight is associated with.
   2. What details does Chaucer give about the Knight’s appearance? Why?
   3. Circle all the adjectives used to describe the Knight. Are they consistent with the values he is associated with at the beginning of the passage?
   4. What do you think is Chaucer’s attitude towards the Knight and the values he represents?

Oral test

9 **IMAGINE** your teacher asks you the following questions in an oral test. For each question, prepare a one-minute turn.
   1. What was the position of women in Celtic society?
   2. What did the Romans introduce into Britain?
   3. Why can we say that Athelstan made England?
   4. What changes did Norman rule bring to society?
   5. What was the Domesday Book?
   6. Why is Henry II remembered as a great reformer?
   7. Why can we consider 1215 a milestone in English history?
   8. What are the most important features of medieval ballads?
   9. Why is *The Canterbury Tales* an estates satire?
   10. What were the economic and social effects of the Black Death?