

## THE CANTERBURY TALES: The Wife of Bath

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.  
5 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;  
10 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.  
15 A worthy woman all her life, what's more  
She'd had five husbands, all at the church door,  
Apart from other company in youth;  
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.  
And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,  
20 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-teeth, set widely, truth to say.  
25 Easily on an ambling horse she sat  
Well wimpled up, and on her head a hat  
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;  
She had a flowing mantle that concealed  
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.  
30 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.

(Text: Spiazzi, Tavella, Layton (2012). *Performer. Culture and Literature 1*. Zanichelli)



(Image: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

## ACTIVITIES

1. Find the following words. What do you think they mean?

Use a dictionary when necessary.

- a. deaf
- b. parish
- c. kerchiefs
- d. thrice
- e. concealed



2. What are the abilities this woman has?
3. Underline the words that rhyme at the end of the verses. What's the name for those verses?
4. Why does the writer describe her clothes? What colour is the predominant one and what's the meaning of that colour?
5. Find a hyperbole in this text. What's the irony in this woman going on a pilgrimage?
6. Would you like to travel with someone like this woman?



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## KEY

1. Find the following words. What do you think they mean?

Use a dictionary when necessary.

- a. deaf
- b. parish
- c. kerchiefs
- d. thrice
- e. concealed

2. What are the abilities this woman has?

Making clothes, she has a wide experience with pilgrimages and love matters.

3. Underline the words that rhyme at the end of the verses. What's the name for those verses?

Rhyming couplets

4. Why does the writer describe her clothes? What colour is the predominant one and what's the meaning of that colour?

She is a liberated woman who represents worldly qualities. Her clothes point to a high social status, and the predominant colour is red. It represents passion and a lot of character. It is not conventional for a widow, just like her life is not conventional (e.g. having had five husbands)

7. Find a hyperbole in this text. What's the irony in this woman going on a pilgrimage?

Irony: The fact that she goes on religious trips when she's quite liberal and not very pious.

Hyperbole: (Line 10: I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound)

5. Would you like to travel with someone like this woman?

Students' own answers.