



## The Doctor

In the 'General Prologue' to The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer includes representatives of all social classes. Among his pilgrims, there is also a member of the new middle classes, a Doctor.

Geoffrey Chaucer  
*The Canterbury Tales*  
(ca 1387-1400)  
General Prologue

A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded;  
No one alive could talk as well as he did  
On points of medicine and of surgery,  
For being grounded<sup>1</sup> in astronomy,  
5 He watched his patient closely for the hours<sup>2</sup>  
When, by his horoscope, he knew the powers  
Of favourable planets, then ascendent,  
Worked on the images for his dependent<sup>3</sup>.  
The cause of every malady you'd got  
10 He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot<sup>4</sup>;  
He knew their seat, their humour and condition.  
He was a perfect practising physician.  
These causes being known for what they were,  
He gave the man his medicine then and there<sup>5</sup>.  
15 All his apothecaries in a tribe  
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe  
And each made money from the other's guile<sup>6</sup>;  
They had been friendly for a goodish while<sup>7</sup>.  
He was well-versed in Aesculapius too  
20 And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew  
And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,  
Galen<sup>8</sup> and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,  
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine<sup>9</sup>,  
Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine<sup>10</sup>.  
25 In his own diet he observed some measures;  
There were no superfluities for pleasures,  
Only digestives, nutritives and such.  
He did not read the Bible very much.  
In blood-red garments<sup>11</sup>, slashed<sup>12</sup> with bluish grey  
30 And lined with taffeta, he rode his way;  
Yet he was rather close as to expenses<sup>13</sup>  
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.  
Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told.  
He therefore had a special love of gold.

1 being grounded. Conoscendo a fondo.

2 closely for the hours. Seguendo le ore celesti.

3 images for his dependent. Talismani di cera che rappresentavano il paziente.

4 dry ... hot. Arsura, freddo, umidità o caldo. Si pensava che tali condizioni influenzassero i temperamenti e gli umori (flemmatico, collerico, sanguigno e malinconico) dell'uomo.

5 then and there. Subito.

6 guile. Astuzia.

7 for a goodish while. Di vecchia data.

8 Aesculapius ... Galen. Esculapio, Ippocrate, Rufo, Dioscoride, Galeno erano autorità mediche dell'antica Grecia.

9 Rhazes ... Constantine. Razis, Ali, Serapione, Averroè, Avicenna, Costantino Afro erano medici di origine araba.

10 Scotch ... Gilbertine. Bernard Gordon, John of Gaddesden e Gilbertus Anglicus erano medici inglesi vissuti tra XIII e XIV secolo.

11 garments. Abiti.

12 slashed. Con inserti di.

13 close as to expenses. Accorto nelle spese.

### VISUAL ANALYSIS

**1** READ the text and divide it into four parts. Then write a heading to each section.

**2** LOOK at the visual analysis of the text. Write down what each highlight and colour represents.

<span style="background-color: yellow;"> </span>	.....
<span style="background-color: lightgreen;"> </span>	.....
<span style="background-color: lightblue;"> </span>	.....
<span style="background-color: pink;"> </span>	.....
<span style="background-color: gray;"> </span>	.....

Gold

grounded

**3 COMPLETE** the summary with the words from the box.

planets

learned

nourishing

pursued

profits

taffeta

cause

authorities

humours

astrology



The Doctor was a very (1) ..... man because he had studied all of the important medical (2) ..... of the past and of his day. He also knew about (3) ..... and relied upon the positions of the stars and (4) ....., in addition to the medieval theory of the (5) ....., to find the right cure for his patients. Once he had found the (6) ..... of his patients' illnesses, he sent them to his friend the apothecary, with whom he shared the (7) ..... . He was so wealthy that he could afford to buy expensive blue and scarlet clothes made of (8) ..... . Although he was wealthy, the Doctor showed moderation, following a modest (9) ..... diet while saving up most of his gold. The Doctor is one of the most educated among the pilgrims, but Chaucer ironically implies that he (10) ..... his learning for financial gain.