**Wife of Bath Questions**

**Comprehension Questions**

1. When the Wife of Bath introduces the subject of her tale, she also reveals her opinion on the subject. What personal opinions and experiences does she reveal in these lines?
2. What does the Knight do in lines 56-64?
3. What does the King want to do with the Knight?
4. Who wants to show the Knight mercy? What does the Knight have to do to win their favor? What happens if he fails?
5. What kinds of answers did the knight received when he searches to discover what women really want?
6. The wife stops to tell us about the tale of Midas and his wife. What does Midas’ wife do?
7. What does the old woman make the Knight agree to? What will she do in return?
8. What does the Knight tell the Queen that women truly desired?
9. What does the old woman demand when the Knight’s life is spared?
10. How does the Knight feel about his new wife?
11. Describe the wedding between the Knight and the Old Woman.
12. What does the Knight decide at the end of the old woman’s speech?
13. What happens after the Knight agrees to love and respect his old wife?
14. Summarize the moral of the story the Wife of Bath gives in lines 433-438

The Wife’s Speech: Close Reading

In response to her husband’s rudeness and cruelty, the old woman gives a lengthy speech on character love. Explain her claims in the right hand column by paraphrasing or summarize her ideas.

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| Text | Summarize or paraphrase the text |
| “I could set right what you suppose a blunder, That’s if I cared to, in a day or two, If I were shown more courtesy by you. Just now,” she said, “you spoke of gentle birth, Such as descends from ancient wealth and worth. If that’s the claim you make for gentlemen. Such arrogance is hardly worth a hen. |  |
| Whoever loves to work for virtuous ends, Public and private, and who most intends To do what deeds of gentleness he can, Take him to be the greatest gentleman. Christ wills we take our gentleness from Him, Not from a wealth of ancestry long dim, Though they [**bequeath**](https://my.hrw.com/content/hmof/language_arts/hmhcollections/na/gr12/ese_9780544088269_/data/glossary/pageglossary.xhtml#bequeath) their whole establishment by which we claim to be of high descent. Our fathers cannot make us a bequest Of all those virtues that became them best And earned for them the name of gentlemen, But bade us follow them as best we can. |  |
| “Thus the wise poet of the Florentines, Dante by name, has written in these lines,  For such is the opinion Dante launches: ‘Seldom arises by these slender branches Prowess of men, for it is God, no less, Wills us to claim of Him our gentleness.’ For of our parents nothing can we claim Save temporal things, and these may hurt and maim. |  |
| “But everyone knows this as well as I; For if gentility were implanted by  The natural course of lineage down the line, Public or private, could it cease to shine In doing the fair work of gentle deed? No vice or villainy could then bear seed. |  |
| “Take fire and carry it to the darkest house Between this kingdom and the Caucasus,  And shut the doors on it and leave it there, It will burn on, and it will burn as fair As if ten thousand men were there to see, For fire will keep its nature and degree, I can assure you, sir, until it dies. |  |
| “But gentleness, as you will recognize, Is not annexed in nature to possessions. Men fail in living up to their professions;  But fire never ceases to be fire. God knows you’ll often find, if you enquire, Some lording full of villainy and shame.  If you would be esteemed for the mere name Of having been by birth a gentleman And stemming from some virtuous, noble clan, And do not live yourself by gentle deed Or take your father’s noble code and creed,  You are no gentleman, though duke or earl. Vice and bad manners are what make a churl. |  |
| “Gentility is only the renown For bounty that your fathers handed down, Quite foreign to your person, not your own; Gentility must come from God alone. That we are gentle comes to us by grace And by no means is it bequeathed with place. |  |
| “Reflect how noble (says Valerius)  Was Tullius surnamed Hostilius,  Who rose from poverty to nobleness. And read Boethius, Seneca no less,  Thus they express themselves and are agreed: ‘Gentle is he that does a gentle deed.’ And therefore, my dear husband, I conclude That even if my ancestors were rude, Yet God on high—and so I hope He will— Can grant me grace to live in virtue still, A gentlewoman only when beginning To live in virtue and to shrink from sinning. |  |
| “As for my poverty which you reprove, Almighty God Himself in whom we move, Believe and have our being, chose a life Of poverty, and every man or wife, Nay, every child can see our Heavenly King Would never stoop to choose a shameful thing. No shame in poverty if the heart is gay, As Seneca and all the learned say. He who accepts his poverty unhurt I’d say is rich although he lacked a shirt. But truly poor are they who whine and fret And covet what they cannot hope to get. And he that, having nothing, covets not, Is rich, though you may think he is a sot. |  |
| “True poverty can find a song to sing. Juvenal says a pleasant little thing: ‘The poor can dance and sing in the relief Of having nothing that will tempt a thief.’ Though it be hateful, poverty is good, A great incentive to a livelihood, And a great help to our capacity For wisdom, if accepted patiently. Poverty is, though wanting in estate, A kind of wealth that none calumniate. |  |
| Poverty often, when the heart is lowly, Brings one to God and teaches what is holy, Gives knowledge of oneself and even lends A glass by which to see one’s truest friends. And since it’s no offense, let me be plain; Do not [**rebuke**](https://my.hrw.com/content/hmof/language_arts/hmhcollections/na/gr12/ese_9780544088269_/data/glossary/pageglossary.xhtml#rebuke) my poverty again. |  |
| “Lastly you taxed me, sir, with being old.Yet even if you never had been told By ancient books, you gentlemen engage, Yourselves in honor to respect old age. To call an old man ‘father’ shows good breeding, And this could be supported from my reading. “You say I’m old and fouler than a fen. You need not fear to be a cuckold, then. Filth and old age, I’m sure you will agree, Are powerful wardens over chastity. Nevertheless, well knowing your delights, I shall fulfil your worldly appetites. |  |
| “You have two choices; which one will you try? To have me old and ugly till I die, But still a loyal, true, and humble wife That never will displease you all her life, Or would you rather I were young and pretty And chance your arm what happens in a city Where friends will visit you because of me, Yes, and in other places too, maybe. Which would you have? The choice is all your own.” |  |

Character Analysis: The Old Woman

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| What is one quote that represents what the old woman believes about the world? | What is one quote that demonstrates what kind of person she is? (Personality, temperament) |  |
| What is one quote that shows how she feels about her husband: | What is one quote that describes her appearance? |  |

**Analysis Questions**

1. In what ways is the Wife of Bath’s unusual tale well-suited to her personality? Cite evidence from the text to support your answer.
2. What does “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” argue that women truly want? How relevant is his answer to today’s world?
3. How does Chaucer’s challenges societal norms? Give at least two examples.
4. In her tale, the Wife of Bath offers direct statements on friars (lines 39-56), women’s desires (lines 101-126), and marriage (lines 433-440). Summarize each statement, and then explain what each reveals about the Wife’s personality.