

## Reading Guide questions for “The Wife of Bath”

### Prologue

1. What is the Wife of Bath’s issue?
2. What support does she use to argue against those who would say she is sinful for having multiple husbands?
3. What are her tactics to “win” her marriages?
4. What generalizations does she make about the sexes?
5. In what ways is she progressive, and in what ways is she perpetuating stereotypes?
6. Describe each of her husbands and their marriages.
7. Describe the character of the Wife of Bath.

### Tale

1. What do you learn from the conversation between the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath in the beginning of the tale?
2. What might be ironic about the Wife of Bath’s claim that her views are “only offered to amuse”?
3. What is the Wife of Bath’s opinion of the Friars getting rid of the fairies? How is this satirical?
4. Why do you think that the Wife of Bath digresses from her original story in lines 102-119?
5. Of the answers suggested to the Knight’s question, which does the Wife of Bath think is the best?
6. What criticism of women does the Wife of Bath offer in lines 120-126?
7. What is the rhetorical purpose of the Wife of Bath’s story about Midas?
8. Why is it ironic that this should be the answer that saves the knight’s life in lines 213-221?
9. What does the woman request as her reward for helping the knight?
10. What is your reaction to the knight’s reluctance to grant her request? Do you think he deserves what he is getting or is he being unduly punished?
11. Is the knight’s reaction to the old woman an example of direct or indirect characterization? What does it reveal about his character? What value system does the old woman reject and what values does she affirm in the long speech in lines 282-314?
12. What are the “temporal things such as may hurt and maim?”
13. What philosophical point is the old woman making by contrasting men and fire?
14. What arguments does the old woman present in favor of poverty?
15. What do you think of the choice the old woman is offering the knight in the lines of 396-403?
16. What does this response in lines 405-411 reveal about the knight?
17. What is the significance of the references and allusions that the Wife of Bath makes?
18. Summarize the Wife of Bath’s thoughts on men, women, and marriage.