**WAYLAND BAPTIST UNIVERSITY**

**WBU Virtual Campus**

**School of Languages and Literature**

**Wayland Baptist University Mission Statement:** Wayland Baptist University exists to educate students in an academically challenging, learning-focused and distinctively Christian environment for professional success, lifelong learning, and service to God and humankind.

**Course Name:** ENGL 5305VCO1 – The Middle Ages

**Term and Year:** Summer 2017

**Instructor:** Dr. Troy Gregory

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I can best be reached via email.

**Office Hours:** M-F 8-12 pm

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**Class Meeting Time and Location:** online, through Blackboard

**Catalog Description:** An intensive study of late medieval English literature, with a distinct emphasis on the works of Geoffrey Chaucer.

**Prerequisite:** graduate standing or final-term senior meeting requirements of non-degree seeking post-baccalaureate student

**Required Textbook and Resources:**

Required Textbook:

*The Riverside Chaucer*, Oxford UP, 2008.

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Broadview’s parallel-text edition, 1992.

*The Vision of Piers the Plowman*, Everyman, 1995.

*The Book of Margery Kempe*, Norton, 2000.

*The Showings of Julian of Norwich*, Norton, 2004.

*The Tournament of Tottenham* (on-line edition).

Required Resources:

You will need a reliable and secure computer connection, as well as access to software capable of producing and saving documents in Microsoft Word .doc or .docx formats; software capable of reading documents produced in .html and .pdf formats; backup media such as USB flash drive, recordable CDs, or some other external destination.

The course will take place entirely online. You must have a functional Blackboard account and be able to access the WBU library website, as well as articles and other material provided through proprietary databases available via the WBU library website. You also must have an active WBU email address. Your WBU email address is the usual way that I will contact you. You are strongly encouraged to visit the Blackboard login page and [test your browser](http://www.wbu.edu/academics/online_programs/browser_test/) for Blackboard compatibility, as well as take the [Blackboard Tutorial](http://www.wbu.edu/academics/online_programs/works/BbTutorial/) if you are not familiar with how the service works. If you have problems with Blackboard or your WBU email, please use the WBU Support Contacts available on the Blackboard login page.

**Course Outcome Competencies:** Upon the conclusion of this course, students actively engaged in learning will be able to (1) read and interpret late medieval English literature intelligently and evaluate them critically; (2) explain the basics of the cultural and historical context in which the works were written; (3) perceive (beyond the plot) themes and literary devices that make Chaucer Chaucer, as distinct from his contemporaries; (4) produce in style and content essays and/or oral presentations appropriate for graduate students of English; and (5) conduct research on a topic in Chaucer and late medieval studies, articulate and support a thesis, and follow through with appropriate documentation. The more the student puts into the course, the higher his or her outcome competencies will be.

**Attendance Requirements / Decorum and Makeup Policies:** Students are expected to participate in the class and demonstrate regular attendance. This applies without exception. Participation and attendance will be determined through message board discussions, responses, and other activities. When a student shows a lack of participation considered by the instructor to be excessive, the instructor will so advise the student. Any student who misses 25 percent or more of the class assignments will receive a grade of F in the course. Students are required to have computer and Internet access for the course. Additional participation policies for each course, as defined by the instructor in the course syllabus, are considered a part of the University’s attendance policy. Makeup work will be offered at the instructor's discretion and will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Any authorized makeups must be completed within the time limit set by the instructor; otherwise, the makeup grade will be zero.

**Disability Statement:** In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), it is the policy of Wayland Baptist University that no otherwise qualified person with a disability be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subject to discrimination under any educational program or activity in the university. The Coordinator of Counseling Services serves as the coordinator of students with a disability and should be contacted concerning accommodation requests at (806) 291-3765. Documentation of a disability must accompany any request for accommodations.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS and GRADING CRITERIA:**

Outcome competencies will be assessed in the following ways: Blackboard discussion AND response forum participation; an oral “reading” presentation, in Middle English, posted on Blackboard; and a final research paper.

**How I Will Grade** – discussions, responses, and the final essay will be evaluated in light of the following criteria: (1) control and responsible development of discussion; (2) presentation of evidence from the work under discussion as well as from secondary sources (let me know that you understand how to use summary, paraphrase, and quotation properly); (3) analysis of, and ability to draw conclusions from, this evidence; (4) clarity and polish of writing; (5) proper use of MLA documentation style.

The Research Paper must be submitted during the week stipulated in the syllabus schedule and will not be accepted after that week. Students are at all times responsible for their materials and are required to keep copies of their work in progress. Please see me if you need assistance or clarification.

**Blackboard Participation**

Each week, students will select from and formally write on two discussion prompts, and the ideas generated there will occasion further responses from students, via threaded posts on Blackboard. You are expected to participate helpfully and meaningfully in each discussion, and indeed 50% of your total grade will depend upon it. You are expected to read outside articles, by way of contextualization, in preparation for these discussions and responses. Please be sure that you can access the proprietary databases, such as JSTOR, in the "Articles & Databases" area of the WBU library website in order to view these articles.

**Grading / Help:** (See Grade Distribution table below.) My grading scale is as follows: 90-92/A-, 93-97/A, 98-100/A+; 80-82/B-, 83-87/B, 88-89/B+, and so forth. Anything below 60 is an F. Weighted grades are averaged according to a 100-point scale and are totaled at the end of the semester. If your total is 79.44, your course grade is a C. If your total is 79.45, your course grade is a B. I am always pleased to talk with you about your progress in the course, any difficulties or victories, or any thoughts you may have about literature and life in general.

**Grade Distribution (how much grades count):**

Semiweekly Discussion Prompts[1]: 30%

Threaded Responses to Discussion Prompts: 20%

Recorded Reading Project: 20%

Final Paper: 30%

**Academic Honesty:** College students—especially Wayland students—are expected to exercise scrupulous honesty in their work. No form of cheating will be tolerated. Plagiarism—intentionally or unintentionally representing another writer's words or ideas as your own—is a serious violation of academic conduct and may result in an F on a written assignment. Students are responsible for familiarizing themselves immediately with university policy on academic honesty in their copies of the *Wayland Baptist University Undergraduate and Graduate Catalog* and the *Student Handbook.*

**Late Work and Incompletes:** All work, including essays, message board discussions and responses, etc., will be due during the week or weeks noted in the class schedule. Because the ideas we derive there will both inform and challenge our peers, and more importantly because the ideas themselves are designed to accumulate across the various units, I cannot accept late work except in the most extreme circumstances and only then when a student has contacted me within three days of the due date. The student must explain the reason for the deficiency, and I will determine whether the work may be made up. No make-up opportunities will be offered for the final research essay. Make-up opportunities for lengthy absences (two weeks or longer) will not be offered except in extremely compelling cases. Military personnel who think they may have to be gone on extended TDY's should arrange for computer and internet access during that time. Grades of Incomplete (I) will not be considered. Please contact me early if you're having trouble getting something in so that I can assist you properly.

**Course Outline:** This offering of ENGL 5305 will introduce students to an intensive study of late medieval English literature, with a distinct emphasis on the works Geoffrey Chaucer. We will begin by discussing the course requirements and acclimating ourselves to the social and artistic dynamics of Chaucer’s world. Then we will examine his major works in the context of other important English writers of the period. The course will not attempt to follow Chaucer’s career chronologically but will, instead, analyze his works from generic and thematic perspectives. See "Schedule for ENGL 5305" in this syllabus for details and a calendar of semi-weekly topics / readings / assignments. *(NB: examples, ideas, opinions, and theories presented during class meetings do not necessarily reflect the views of the instructor. Furthermore, this syllabus is a plan. Although no significant changes are anticipated, the instructor may modify the plan during the course. The requirements of the course may be altered from those appearing in the syllabus. Finally, the plan contains criteria by which the student's progress and performance in the course will be measured. These criteria may also be changed.)*

**Schedule** **for** **English** **5305**

Class members are responsible for keeping up with the following schedule. **Please complete the reading assignments as early as possible during the weeks indicated.** This is a working schedule and may be altered at the instructor's discretion, although departures are unlikely. Students will be notified of any changes on Blackboard.

**Week One: The Medieval Worldview**

from *The Waning of the Middle Ages*, Introduction (e-text)

Riverside Introduction

*Troilus and Criseyde****[2]***

**Week One: Response Prompts[3]**

1. Where do you see Huizinga’s thesis from *The Waning of the Middle Ages* most clearly manifest

in Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*? Defend your ideas through a careful unpacking of Chaucer’

text.

2. Where might Huizinga’s thesis find itself challenged or deficient in Chaucer’s poem? Lock

down particular episodes in Chaucer to flesh out your argument.

3. Explore the residuals of medieval culture—those aspects of the Middle Ages and medieval

institutions or ideologies that recognizably stick with us today—as defined by Huizinga and your Riverside introduction, in the contemporary world around you. What might be the staying power of such residuals?

4. Writings in the vernacular were extraordinary things during the late Middle Ages, particularly so

in England where so much regional variation in the spoken language still existed. What language and cultural assumptions, do you suppose, come together in the birth of a national literature? Illustrate your ideas using Chaucer’s text.

**Week Two: Chaucer’s Language and Late Medieval English Generally**

from Riverside Chaucer

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

*The Book of the Duchess*

*The House of Fame*

*The Parliament of Fowls*

**Week Two: Response Prompts[4]**

1. Do some research on the Great Vowel Shift in English, beginning with your Riverside

Introduction and consulting an additional source or two of your own judicious selection. To what extent do elongated vowels work to normalize the language? Were elongated vowels a “conscious” or “unconscious” effort? Explore.

2. Again, after doing some preliminary researches in the field, explore how scholars go about

reconstructing earlier languages, particularly Middle English. How valid are their finding?

3. Why not simply read medieval texts in translation? With particular attention to Middle English,

do we lose anything in the modernized text? Construct a careful argument here using one of

the readings from Chaucer for this week.

4. Cognitively speaking, how do the sounds, even if only imperfectly reconstructed sounds, of

Middle English contribute meaningfully to the foreignness of the study? Give examples from

Chaucer from this week’s reading to illustrate your points.

**Weeks Three and Four: Medieval Festive Laughter**

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

Bakhtin, Introduction to *Rabelais and His World* (e-text)

“General Prologue” to the *Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer’s fabliaux and comic tales

*The Tournament of Tottenham* (e-text)

**Weeks Three and Four: Response Prompts[5]**

1. Many of Chaucer’s fabliaux are uncomfortably funny today—as indeed are the examples of the

genre in French that Chaucer most certainly knew—and educators frequently make the

argument that Chaucer is immoral and that he should be removed from class curricula across

the board. Is medieval laughter in Chaucer moral, immoral, or amoral? Support your argument

with specific episodes from the texts.

2. Bakhtin is largely celebrated for his anthropological exploration of laughter in medieval and early

modern culture. Can you uncover instances of laughter in Chaucer where Bahktin’s ideas do

not quite seem to fit? If not, select another prompt. If so, how does laughter function or seem

to function in the episode or episodes under consideration?

3. Are you shocked by the candor of instances of laughter or comedy in Chaucer, particularly given

that Chaucer’s work is six-hundred years removed from today? What does such laughter or

comedy say about the worldview of the Middle Ages as opposed to the worldview of

contemporary America, particularly the American South or Midwest?

4. Modeled closely on medieval court jesters and the institution of tomfoolery, Shakespeare’s

literary fools are given full license in his works to expose the follies or foibles of

others—beginning within the plays themselves and expanding outward to the playhouses that

perform the works and the larger reading communities that, since the *First Folio* in 1623,

privately or collectively read them. To what extent is Chaucer such a fool?

5. Scholars distinguish between the fictional manifestations of Chaucer—all those hokey,

dimwitted narrators within the poems themselves—and the poet Chaucer to show a pointed,

rhetorical strategy, sophisticated to say the least, that might assist our reading of the works.

How does such an awareness of the different Chaucers inform or alter your reading of the

works?

6. Festive laughter is tied to very specific moments within the cyclical calendar or instances within

community life that remove them from the expectations of the “official” or “workaday” world.

When the logic of official culture is suspended, moreover, the new form (of logic?) must

announce itself to meaningfully arrange the lives of the people. To what extent does laughter

subvert or reinforce the control of the official life of medieval man? Use instances from the

readings to support your argument.

**Weeks Five and Six: The Medieval English Romance**

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

*The Knight’s Tale****[6]***

*The Squire’s Tale*

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Broadview’s parallel-text edition)

*The Tale of Sir Thopas*

**Weeks Five and Six: Response Prompts[7]**

1. The celebrated folklorist Jessie Weston famously argued that medieval romance literature is a

late, literary rendering of pre-Christian, pagan beliefs, and that the genre preserves, even amid

an extensive Christian overlay, a far more robust tie with rituals from Europe’s pagan past.

Weston’s ideas can be found in her monumental work *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) as well

as in the impact that work had on later movements and writers, such as the modernists, and, in

the critical tradition, Joseph Campbell and Robert Graves. Where in your reading for this unit do

you sense a presence that is not Christian? Does it complement or contend with the openly

Christian aspects of the texts.

2. Scholars account for the elevated presence of human love and even human sexuality in

medieval literature through its distinct ties with the twelfth-century phenomenon known as

“Courtly Love” or “Fin Amour.” The idea is central to medieval romance. Explore the attitudes

toward women in the romances from our section in direct relation to courtly love, particularly as

set out by Andres Capellanus in his vastly influential *The Art of Courtly Love*

(c.f.[http://www.the-orb.net/textbooks/anthology/beidler/courtly.html](https://webmail.wbu.edu/owa/redir.aspx?C=rrvKfak-QEWAOKqXoexBQqKLtJYdgdAIMw7lZsNfWyz8FUgyB6aLj4dogSveYs6olGlxkiocXNk.&URL=http%3a%2f%2fwww.the-orb.net%2ftextbooks%2fanthology%2fbeidler%2fcourtly.html)). Are the writers and works

subservient to the idea or critical of it?

3. Monstrosity holds a special place in medieval romance literature, as critics such as Jeffrey

Jerome Cohen make explicitly clear. Discuss the condition of monstrosity in the works from

this unit. Is it a fixed or unstable idea? Is it contained (and therefore able to be rooted out and

destroyed) or is it contagious (and therefore treated more in fear for the epidemic it could

spread) according to the texts from this unit?

4. Part of what makes Chaucer and the Gawain poet so remarkably refreshing is the skepticism

they bring to their handling of the romance genre—playful yet meaningful challenges to

convention and expectation that initially threaten but later reinforce the genre. Carefully

considering the generic conventions of the medieval romance, where do you see potential for

genre breakdown in Chaucer and in the Gawain poet? Given the immense popularity of the form

in the Middle Ages, why do you suppose they resist the conventions? Illustrate your argument

through careful readings of relevant text.

5. As recent critical investigations show, medieval romance literature is fascinated with the idea of

law and legal right. Explore how law or legal right functions in the works from our section. Do

the works reinforce larger, social ideas or work out new applications for the larger culture to

explore?

6. Medieval popular belief gets transmitted more perhaps through romance than through any other

form of the era. Popular belief might be defined as convictions that are not endorsed by official

doctrine, whether of the church or state. Where in the texts do you see a struggle between

such contending ideas? Is such struggle merely the byproduct of the control that official culture

sought to exert on the people or is there some sense in the texts that things unknown exist

beyond the boundaries of the civilized world and that literature’s place, in part, is to explore

them?

**Weeks Seven and Eight: The Medieval Miscellany**

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

*The Canterbury Tales****[8]***

**Weeks Seven and Eight: Response Prompts[9]**

1. A literary miscellany is a diverse or motley collection of works within a larger, containing unit.

The parts of the whole are disparate and often apparently unrelated. The parts, however, are

framed by the whole, in some attempt to make inclusion seem natural. Discuss the extent to

which the *Canterbury Tales* is or is not a unified work. Are there themes that carry through the

tales and relate them both to each other and to the intentions expressed in the “General

Prologue”? Use specific examples.

2. The way medieval people should act on pilgrimage and the way Chaucer represents them as

acting vary considerably. If Chaucer attended your church, say, and went about “exposing” all

the wrong-headedness therein contained, what would be the community’s reaction? Do you

see any strategies at play within and across the tales that a) suggest that Chaucer might be

aware of possible objections and b) that he is attempting to temper or placate them?

3. Traditionally, scholars have upheld certain characters within the *Canterbury Tales* as Chaucerian

ideals—characters that underscore the satire by showing both what is possible in human

behavior and what should be strived for. Lately, however, scholars seems far less certain of

such an idealistic reading. Where do you stand in the debate? Are there characters that strike

you as more ideal than others, as models for behavior that throw their peers into contrast, or are

they all woefully flawed? Give specific textual examples to illustrate your argument.

4. Like the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Legend of Good Women* is a framed narrative that certainly

qualifies as a miscellany. Chaucer did not finish the *Legend* and seems indeed either to have

grown uninterested in it or else unaware of how he might meaningfully continue it. By many

readers’ standards, the *Legend* is a failed literary venture. What specifically do you suppose

Chaucer learned from the construction of the earlier work that allowed him to succeed, as most

claim he does, in the construction of the *Canterbury Tales*?

5. Chaucer is writing in the English vernacular at a time when English national identity was either

barely formed or perhaps not even existent. His language is English, but his literary models for

the *Canterbury Tales* are continental or more largely Mediterranean or even *world* oriented. Ovid

and Apuleius worked within the framed-tale tradition as early as the first and second centuries

C.E., and the *Kalila wa Dimna* and Indian *Pañcatantra* (based on a Sanscrit work from the 3rd

century B.C.E.) introduced to and ignited the form in Persian and Arabic literatures.

Boccaccio’s *Decameron* still worked the form meaningfully just decades prior to Chaucer’s own

*career* as a writer. To what extent, do you feel, was Chaucer’s adoption an announcement to

the larger world that English literature had arrived—that Chaucer himself had arrived on the world

scene? What does your answer suggest about the type of poet Chaucer was?

6. Chaucer the pilgrim purportedly retells the stories that his fellow pilgrims first relate on their

journey to Canterbury, and yet Chaucer the pilgrim repeatedly belies himself as a remarkably

inept observer of humanity and the human condition. He even seems more apt than most to fall

victim to the superficialities that initially disguise the darker purposes or more obvious character

flaws or shortcomings of others. To what extent does the pilgrim Chaucer succeed or fail at

rooting out such darker purposes or flaws? Give specific examples to illustrate your ideas.

7. To what extent does the *Parson’s Tale* “quit” the *Canterbury Tales*, particularly as that verb is

conceived of in the tales and links to the tales themselves?

**Weeks Nine and Ten: Visionary Literature**

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

*The Vision of Piers the Plowman*

*The Showings of Julian of Norwich*

*The Book of Margery Kempe*

**Weeks Nine and Ten: Response Prompts[10]**

1. As Wycliffe would posthumously discover—the Council of Constance dug up and burnt his

bones on May 4th, 1415—translating the Bible into the Vernacular was an act of heresy: it

challenged papal authority, demystified Catholic faith, and emphasized personal revelation to

the exclusion of communal belief. To what extent do you view or can you view *The Vision of*

*Piers Plowman* as an English translation of the Bible, or perhaps as a “translation” of a proper

reading of the Bible?

2. Visions or Revelations during the late Middle Ages were subject to Church approval. Catholic

authorities were charged by papal decree to distinguish between what was Spirit-breathed and

what was demonic error and therefore heretical. Sainthood frequently met the visionary host; a

burning at the stake the heretic. That said, what motivated medieval visionaries to publicize

their works, specifically according to their own writings?

3. Explore famous heresies of the late Middle Ages through some preliminary researches and

apply the concept of “damnable error” specifically to the writings of William Langland, Margery

Kempe, and Julian of Norwich. What specifically distinguished Langland as a “Lollard” and

Margery and Julian as mystics?

4. Feminist theology and feminist theory cannot quite get along together concerning female

mystics of the Middle Ages. The former frequently sees in the ideas of women mystics gentle

challenges to the spiritual status quo—sees a more encompassing and inclusive spiritual life

and understanding that openly extends to women—while the later discovers a vehicle for social

mobility and empowerment of medieval women in an otherwise male-centered culture. The two

ideas are not, of course, mutually exclusive, though pursuing a career for individual gain does

preclude in some small degree the selfless service to a greater spiritual vision. In your readings

from this section, do you see personal gain or personal conviction as the chief motivating factor

behind the literature? Give specific examples from the readings to support your argument.

5. Holy Mother Church, an allegorical personification in Langland’s poem, cannot resolve the

narrator’s spiritual dilemma for him, as expressed in his quest for spiritual understanding. She

can merely point the way toward personal revelation, and that revelation may or may not come

to the narrator as the work unfolds. Langland’s protagonist, in other words, *can* fail in his quest

for spiritual knowledge—a rather grim prospect. Of course, perceptions of “failure” will depend

on the spiritual bias or bent of the author, his characters, his listeners, and his readers. To what

extent is Langland creating a spiritual audience that may not otherwise exist in the immediate

proximity of his Catholic England or Europe?

6. Explore the function of the individual’s will in Langland’s poem—both as expressed within the

titular character’s spiritual journey and in reconstructions of what it might have meant to

contemporary listeners or readers of the work.

**Week Eleven: Chaucer’s Retraction**

critical contextualization through student research, as evidenced in discussions and responses

**Final Paper:** Given your long readings, on the one hand, of visionary literature and the religious nature

of late medieval culture, and, on the other hand, of Chaucer’s candid satire on many forms and

institutions of Catholic popular belief, of his use and celebration of “pagan” and worldly sources,

and the nature of medieval laughter generally, discuss how *you* read Chaucer’s retraction.

Contextualize your reading within the scholarly tradition, using those critical articles or texts

that you yourselves have uncovered and utilized in your previous discussions and responses

and any others you may consult on your academic peregrinations. Structure your paper using

MLA format. 12-15 pp.

[1] Regarding “Discussion Prompts”: these are decidedly not “essays,” merely two pages of organized thought per prompt. Select two of the possible four prompts for each week and submit your considered two-page response by Tuesday and Friday of each course week. There is no order in which to answer the prompts and you might cite freely but meaningfully—by extending or challenging ideas—from your colleagues. Borrowings, of course, require in-text acknowledgments, whether of word or idea.

[2] Reading Middle (or late medieval) English is not difficult. The Old (or early medieval) English of *Beowulf* may reasonably give you fits, but you should settle much more comfortably into reading Chaucer and his contemporaries. Even though we will not read specifically about late medieval English pronunciation until next week, I want you to read *Troilus* to the best of your ability in Middle English. To begin, you should listen to my reading of the opening 55 lines on Blackboard and attempt to reproduce the sounds you hear there. Also, by way of a crash course on Middle English, consider simply that there exist no long vowels in the language—even their diphthongs are generally shorter than our long vowels. (Modern long vowels are a product of the Great Vowel Shift, as we’ll learn in the coming weeks.) Long vowels, simply conceived, are vowels that say their own names: a, e, i, o, u. Shorten each of these vowels by clipping their ability to completely form their own name—except that “i” will sound like a ¾ “e”—and you’re half way home. Finally, realize as well that when you shorten Middle English vowels, you bring consonants more closely together and therefore add emphases on the sounds and sound clusters they make. Generally speaking, in Middle English as in Latin, every consonant receives utterance, and the elisions of Modern English simply do not apply, except in such cases as thorns (þ), eths (ð), and yoghs (Ȝ).

[3] Answer two of the possible four prompts.

[4] Answer two of the possible four prompts.

[5] Answer two of the possible six prompts for each of the weeks in this unit. Do not revisit the same prompt in the subsequent week.

[6] The recent movie of the same name, though it purportedly features Chaucer himself, will decidedly not help you out here.

[7] Answer two of the possible six prompts for each of the weeks in this unit. Do not revisit the same prompt in the subsequent week.

[8] Read the tales straight through, even though we have already read long sections of them for earlier units. They’ll bear and reward your greater familiarity. Make sure you end with the *Parson’s Tale* in its entirety. That work will not only close out or “quit” the *Canterbury Tales* but will set up your reading of *The Vision of Piers Plowman* and your final paper.

[9] Answer two of the possible six prompts for each of the weeks in this unit. Do not revisit the same prompt in the subsequent week.

[10] Answer two of the possible six prompts for each of the weeks in this unit. Do not revisit the same prompt in the subsequent week.