1. Experience, though no authority   
Were in this world, were good enough for me,   
To speak of woe that is in all marriage;   
For, masters, since I was twelve years of age,

5. Thanks be to God Who is for aye alive,   
Of husbands at church door have I had five;   
For men so many times have wedded me;   
And all were worthy men in their degree.   
But someone told me not so long ago

10. That since Our Lord, save once, would never go   
To wedding (that at Cana in Galilee),   
Thus, by this same example, showed He me   
I never should have married more than once.   
Lo and behold! What sharp words, for the nonce,

15. Beside a well Lord Jesus, God and man,   
Spoke in reproving the Samaritan:   
'For thou hast had five husbands,' thus said He,   
'And he whom thou hast now to be with thee   
Is not thine husband.' Thus He said that day,

20. But what He meant thereby I cannot say;   
And I would ask now why that same fifth man   
Was not husband to the Samaritan?   
How many might she have, then, in marriage?   
For I have never heard, in all my age,

25. Clear exposition of this number shown,   
Though men may guess and argue up and down.   
But well I know and say, and do not lie,   
God bade us to increase and multiply;   
That worthy text can I well understand.

30. And well I know He said, too, my husband   
Should father leave, and mother, and cleave to me;   
But no specific number mentioned He,   
Whether of bigamy or octogamy…   
"Now, sirs, now will I tell you forth my tale.

35. And as I may drink ever wine and ale,   
I will tell truth of husbands that I've had,   
For three of them were good and two were bad.   
The three were good men and were rich and old.   
Not easily could they the promise hold

40. Whereby they had been bound to cherish me.   
You know well what I mean by that, pardie!   
So help me God, I laugh now when I think   
How pitifully by night I made them **swink**;   
And by my faith I set by it no store.

45. They'd given me their gold, and treasure more;   
I needed not do longer diligence   
To win their love, or show them reverence.   
They all loved me so well, by God above,   
I never did set value on their love!

50. A woman wise will strive continually   
To get herself loved, when she's not, you see.   
But since I had them wholly in my hand,   
And since to me they'd given all their land,   
Why should I take heed, then, that I should please,

55. Save it were for my profit or my ease?

For God so truly my salvation be   
As I have never loved for policy,   
But ever followed my own appetite,   
Though he were short or tall, or black or white;

60. I took no heed, so that he cared for me,   
How poor he was, nor even of what degree.   
"What should I say now, save, at the month's end,   
This jolly, gentle, … clerk, my friend,   
Had wedded me full ceremoniously,

65. And to him gave I all the land in fee   
That ever had been given me before;   
But, later I repented me full sore.   
He never suffered me to have my way.   
By God, he smote me on the ear, one day,

70. Because I tore out of his book a leaf,   
So that from this my ear is grown quite deaf.   
'Better,' he said, 'your habitation be   
With lion wild or dragon foul,' said he,   
'Than with a woman who will nag and chide.'

75. 'Better,' he said, 'on the housetop abide   
Than with a brawling wife down in the house;   
Such are so wicked and contrarious   
They hate the thing their husband loves, for aye.'   
He said, 'a woman throws her shame away

80. When she throws off her smock,' and further, too:   
'A woman fair, save she be chaste also,   
Is like a ring of gold in a sow's nose.'   
Who would imagine or who would suppose   
What grief and pain were in this heart of mine?

85. "And when I saw he'd never cease, in fine,   
His reading in this cursed book at night,   
Three leaves of it I snatched and tore outright   
Out of his book, as he read on; and eke   
I with my fist so took him on the cheek

90. That in our fire he reeled and fell right down.   
Then he got up as does a wild lion,   
And with his fist he struck me on the head,   
And on the floor I lay as I were dead.   
And when he saw how limp and still I lay,

95. He was afraid and would have run away,   
Until at last, out of my swoon I made:   
'Oh, have you slain me, you false thief?' I said,   
'And for my land have you thus murdered me?   
Kiss me before I die, and let me be.'

100. "He came to me and near me he knelt down,   
And said: 'O my dear sister Alison,   
So help me God, I'll never strike you more;   
What I have done, you are to blame therefore.   
But all the same forgiveness now I seek!'

105. And thereupon I hit him on the cheek,   
And said: 'Thief, so much vengeance do I wreak!   
Now will I die; I can no longer speak!'   
But at the last, and with much care and woe,   
We made it up between ourselves. And so

110. He put the bridle reins within my hand   
To have the governing of house and land;   
And of his tongue and of his hand, also;   
And made him burn his book, right then, oho!   
And when I had thus gathered unto me

115. Masterfully, the entire sovereignty,   
And he had said: 'My own true wedded wife,   
Do as you please the term of all your life,   
Guard your own honor and keep fair my state'-   
After that day we never had debate.

120. God help me now, I was to him as kind   
As any wife from Denmark unto Ind,   
And also true, and so was he to me.   
I pray to God, Who sits in majesty,   
To bless his soul, out of His mercy dear!   
Now will I tell my tale, if you will hear."

Questions:

1. What three details do we learn about the Wife of Bath’s marriages in lines 1-8?
2. What do we learn about the Wife’s religious beliefs in lines 9-18?
3. What line of scripture does the Wife use to support her desire to have multiple husbands? (highlight or circle) How does this support her position?
4. What is one word you could use to describe the Wife of Bath in lines 34-50? What textual evidence leads you to make that conclusion?
5. What do you think “swink” means?
6. Does the Wife of Bath choose to marry only a particular type of man? What is your proof?
7. How does the Wife say her fifth marriage was different than the others?
8. Why do you think the Wife of Bath was so offended by her husband’s statements in lines 73-83? What do you think he said that was the MOST offensive to her?
9. How would you describe the relationship the Wife of Bath has with her fifth husband? Why?
10. Why might the textbook company not have included this portion of the Wife of Bath in the textbook? How does it help us understand the narrator?