Begging Pardon: Among the more memorable of the Canterbury pilgrims is the Pardoner. Licensed by the church to grant indulgences (documents forgiving people's' sins), pardoners were in theory supposed to grant them only to people who showed great charity. In practice, however, many pardoners simply sold their pardons to make money for the church or for themselves. To spur sales, unethical pardoners often threatened reluctant buyers with eternal doom. Chaucer’s Pardoner encourages buyers with a story that illustrates the dangers of the love of money.

Introducing The Pardoner and The Pardoner’s Prologue
First, read the description of the Pardoner in The General Prologue (using the British Literature textbook: page 119; lines 665-710—or on the handout you are given) and answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. What sort of person is the Pardoner portrayed as in this description?

2. He has lots of relics (an object cherished for its association with a saint or holy person) to show, but how authentic are they?

3. What is prevarication?

4. What do the following lines mean when they say, “On one short day, in money down, he drew more than the parson in a month or two. And by his flatteries and prevarication made monkeys of the priest and congregation?”

Now, read “The Pardoner’s Tale,” and answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. How is the Pardoner physically described in the prologue? Does this match up with his occupation?

2. What is the Pardoner's purpose? What is he supposed to do?
3. What is ironic about how the Pardoner gets people to repent from the sin of avarice?

4. What do the three rioters set out to do?

5. What is the old man supposed to represent? What are some textual clues that support this idea?

6. What are the men supposed to find under the tree? What do they literally find? How are these two “things” related?

7. What is the Pardoner’s purpose in telling this story to the other pilgrims? How does he tie this together at the end?

8. The Pardoner says that the theme of his story is “the love of money is the root of all evil”. Do you see any other themes? What other messages do you get out of this tale?