The Canterbury Tales (CT) is usually used as a text for advanced students within the high school general education curriculum. This is a shame considering the possibilities for teaching the text to students in special education. First, the text is broken into tales, which are easily read to or by students in a short period of time (granted with some simplification of wording). Second, each tale holds a plethora of moral and social lessons which are at the crux of special education curricula. Chaucer and special education are an unexpected and yet logical match. The Knight's Tale is the ideal story to use to begin this bridge between CT and special education since it lends itself both conceptually and practically to special education. This essay is divided into three parts: the first explains relevant special education laws regarding teaching general education curriculum, the second introduces the themes that are appropriate to teach to special education students, the last part outlines special education best practices as they apply to The Knight's Tale.

When considering possibilities to create opportunities for teaching, one should remember the requirements of Chaucer's host, Harry Bailly, that the Canterbury pilgrims tell tales of “best sentence and most solaas” (GP 798)—in others words, that the tales be both meaningful and entertaining. Special education curriculum should always be useful and functional, but it must also be enjoyable and accessible. So, with Chaucer's words as a guideline for what qualities make a story the best, this paper compiles ideas for how The Knight's Tale can be taught to students who have cognitive impairment.

A Brief Synopsis of Laws and Definitions
Academics and professionals in special education do not always agree on how prevalent inclusion should be in public schools. However, current public laws have consistently required educators to make the pedagogical shift to inclusion. PL 108-446, more commonly referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) 2004, revised the wording in Individualized Education Plans (IEP) to promote inclusion beyond that of IDEA 97. While the IEP of IDEA 97 asked educators to list when students who have disabilities will be included in general education, IDEA 2004 added a small but very important “not” into the instructions: “An explanation, if any, to which the child will not participate with nondisabled children in the regular class and in extracurricular and other nonacademic areas” (Wrightslaw.com) (emphasis added).

The implication is that the student with a disability is assumed to be included in the general education classroom by default and any time where this is not appropriate should be fully documented and explained. The general education classroom and curriculum is said to be the least restrictive environment (LRE) for all students and, therefore, all students should be part of this structure to the maximum extent possible.
Simply put, inclusion is the law. Teachers cannot deny a student who has a disability attendance in their classroom. Inclusion may require modified and adapted curricula; not all special education students can learn the general education curriculum as it is. This is where teachers have problems. General education teachers are not taught nor trained to adapt curricula. In the cases where students are not included, special educators are still expected to align their lessons with age-appropriate curricula being taught in general education classrooms. Resources in this area are increasing and improving but tools for implementations are relatively absent considering that inclusion is the standard according to the law.

Teaching general education lessons in special education is easier said than done. The trick is to use the same topics discussed in general education but to find lessons, within those topics, that are functional and relevant for students who have disabilities. When this is done, students who have disabilities can carry the same books as their peers and attend the same classes: dignity intact. Any high school student would be humiliated when expected to carry around a primary reader in the hallways. I propose that students who have disabilities, specifically cognitive impairments, can always be included in the general education literature curriculum. Literature and English classes provide unique opportunities to modify lessons and assignments while still allowing the students who have disabilities to study the same content. For students who cannot read, texts can be adapted into simple sentences with interactive words and illustrations. For students who cannot write, assignments can be transcribed or created to embrace a multimedia approach. Literature and English classes are so flexible in this regard that I see no reason why all students who have disabilities cannot participate and be included.

**Why The Knight's Tale?**
While a comprehensive adapted curriculum for the entire CT is feasible, *The Knight's Tale* is the easiest place to start. Sexual and scatological humor are virtually absent from this tale, making it the least controversial to teach. Moreover, themes of friendship, living by a code of rules, and self-determination are functional lessons that fit easily into special education curricula. Additionally, high school students will find the topic of romance to be relevant and interesting given their own developing personal feelings on the subject. *The Knight's Tale* is an obvious place to start due to its surface simplicity. “The student who reads *The* Knight's Tale for the first time without previous exposure to learned commentary normally reacts to the poem as something reasonably pleasant and certainly uncomplicated” (Ham 252). Along this thinking, “the high point of [the tale] is the Tournament, a perfect blend of love and war, of pageantry, pomp, and the glory of combat without the horrors that usually attend these things” (Madden 193). This is not to suggest that other tales could not be used or are inappropriate, but that *The Knight's Tale* offers many easy transitions and opportunities for teaching when one is first broaching the possibility of teaching CT in special education.

**Conceptual Basis for Teaching**

**Questions Posed in The Knight's Tale**
Another reason why *The Knight's Tale* is easy to adapt is that the text has built in questions that assess comprehension and reflection. The teacher can use a modern translation of Chaucer's own words to aid students in focusing on thematic concepts. Edward B. Ham, in his essay “Knight's Tale 38,” makes a list of questions the Knight inserts into his tale. The ones that work best for students with cognitive impairment include:
1. Whose situation is worse?
   “Yow loveres axe I now this questioun:
   Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?
   That oon may seen his lady day by day,
   But in prison he moot dwelle alway;
   That oother wher hym list may ride or go,
   But seen his lady shal he nevere mo.” (KnT 1347-1352)

   Sentence: What is happening to each knight?
   Solaas: Which knight would you rather be in this situation?

2. Which knight should have Emily?
   “For paramour I loved hire first er thow.
   What wiltow seyen? Though woost nat yet now
   Wheither she be a woman or goddesse!
   Thyn is affeccion of hoolynesse,
   and myn is love as to a creature” (KnT 1155-1159)

   Sentence: What is the difference between how the knights view Emily?
   Solaas: Which knight do you think truly loves Emily?

3. Should Aricte be loyal to Palamon or to his love for Emily?
   “For to be fals, ne for to be traitour
   To me, that am thy cosyn and they brother
   Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,
   That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,
   Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne” (KnT 1130-1134)

   Sentence: What is Palamon talking about? What does he mean by brotherhood?
   Solaas: What do you think is the right thing to do? “Bros before hos?”

4. Is love greater than any laws or promises we make to others?
   “That ‘who shal yeve a lovere any lawe?’
   Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan
   Than may be yeve to any erthely man” (KnT 1164-1166)

   Sentence: Which law is more important to each knight?
   Solaas: Which law is more important to you?

Chaucer's questions and challenges to the reader make natural essay questions and journal topics. These questions can all be asked in terms of the story (“What happens in the tale to answer this question?”) or in terms of personal experience (“Have you ever had to answer a question like this in your life? What do you think is the right answer? Why?”). In this way, the actual text of The Knight's Tale serves both as an exercise of reading comprehension as well as providing clarification of moral and social practices in real life.

Theme of Friendship
Students who have cognitive impairments have tremendous difficulty creating mutually enjoyable peer relationships. The “Circle of Friends” program is widely used throughout schools with varying results.
“Circle of Friends” refers to the idea of circles of support being formed around an individual with a disability and that the second circle, the peer circle, is almost always empty. This program requires peers, chosen by the IEP team, to pledge to spend a certain amount of time with a person that has a disability, in the hope that a true friendship will form. While professionals can provide peers for a person who has disabilities to interact with, it is really up to the individual to begin and maintain a friendship. In order for this to happen, students who have disabilities must understand and continuously review what it means to be a friend.

Arcite and Palamon, in The Knight's Tale, are supposed to be the best of friends. In fact, Chaucer's retelling of Boccaccio's original story highlights and forces the reader to contemplate the bonds of friendship between Arcite and Palamon. Robert Stretter, in “Rewriting Perfect Friendship in Chaucer's Knight Tale and Lydgate's Fabula Duorum Mercatorum,” points out that in Boccaccio's story the knights are just kinsmen but that Chaucer writes these men as “sworn brothers,” making this differentiation appear to be “especially significant” (237). Accordingly, if Chaucer wrote this story to stress the bonds of friendship, it is wholly appropriate for a special education audience to stress the learning of this bond through this story.

In addition to a functional approach to social relationships and standards, students can explore medieval concepts of friendships that hail from Aristotle. Stretter calls attention to “two largely distinct friendship traditions: amicitia [and] sworn brotherhood” (235). In amicitia, two people are united out of love, without any plans to benefit from the other. “Theseus and Pirithous, whose friendship is mentioned in The Knight's Tale, [are] two of the most famous exemplars of this tradition” (Stretter 236). Sworn brotherhood was a concept and relationship bond that was common throughout England where two men “[swear] a solemn, legally binding oath of mutual support” (Stretter 236). The differences between these men's relationships and the expected outcome from the friendships are appropriate to special education curriculum. Students will be familiar with having friends, peers, volunteers, and paid service providers. Students are expected to recognize the differences in these relationships, much like recognizing the difference between being friends out of love or personal gain. Teaching these two versions of friendship would not only be a history lesson in the context of literature (sentence) but it would also ask students to examine their own approaches to friendship (solaas).

Living by a Code
The Knight's Tale is about two knights and told from the perspective of a knight. Knights followed chivalry, “a code of honor and courtesy based on social detachment” (Madden 194). Catherine A. Rock, in her article “Forsworn and Fordone: Arcite as Oath-Breaker in The Knight's Tale,” argues that breaking the knightly code is precisely why Arcite does not end up with Emily in the end. She asserts that because Arcite broke the bonds of brotherhood, acted selfishly, and prayed with proud intent, he was bound to have negative outcomes on the basis that he did not act like a knight. It would be interesting and educational for students to learn this knightly code. Students can apply the code to the story and see where these principles are exercised: Rock points out that in each action that Arcite and Palamon make, Palamon upholds a knight's code while Arcite acts selfishly. This “Goofus and Gallant” dichotomy will provide good contrasting evidence to teach what being a knight is and is not.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palamon</th>
<th>Arcite</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Upon seeing Emily, prays for both men to be freed from prison</td>
<td>Upon seeing Emily, immediately wants her for himself</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleads with Arcite to hold his oath</td>
<td>Claims love is above the law (defying oaths of knighthood and brotherhood) and concludes “Ech man for himself, ther is noon oother” (KnT 1182)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palamon had prayed that both men be released</td>
<td>There is no indication that Arcite ever attempts to help his friend out of prison after he is released</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Palamon continues in his courtoisie</td>
<td>Love guides his actions, breaking his oath with Thebes and his fellow knights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>remains a prisoner</td>
<td>performs menial labor for a foe (serving an enemy and breaking a precept of knighthood)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tells Theseus that they both deserve to die and admits both their faults</td>
<td>Does not confess anything</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prays humbly and gives his god two options of outcome</td>
<td>Prays selfishly and give his god only one option for outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wounded nobly and accepts defeat</td>
<td>Grandstands at his victory and is injured because of it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To make the inspection of chivalry not only enjoyable but also functional, students can be persuaded to inspect their codes of action (sentence). Attention can be drawn to school rules, ideology and guidelines for being a student, personal family rules and codes of ethics, or expectations for being an employee at their jobs. Reviewing societal expectations and rules is essential in curriculum for students who have cognitive impairment. Doing this routine review under the heading of studying knight culture would be exciting for students (solaas).

**Self Determination**

The most important component of special education curriculum is teaching self-determination. This term applies specifically to students being able to recognize preferences and advocate for their acquisition of those preferences. This is indeed a skill that needs to be taught to students who have cognitive impairment and is widely recognized as one of their most valuable assets. “Individuals who are afforded…freedom of choice and are more involved in making decisions associated with this choice are likely to enjoy a better quality of life. This is due to the fact that they…had a say in the way it should go” (Beirne-Smith 31). Self-determination is demanded in the IEP process, practiced, and enforced at every opportunity.

Emily's lack of self-determination often fascinates readers and is relatable for students who have disabilities. Emily knows what she wants (identifies preferences) but fails to advocate for them.

Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
I am, thow woost, yet of thy compaignye,
A mayde, and love huntynge and venerye,
And for to walken in the wodes wilde,
And noght to ben a wyf, and be with childe.
Noght wol I knowe the compaignye of man (KnT 1446-1453)
It is a useful exercise in reading comprehension, and discussion, for students to identify what Emily does and does not want. Students can also make their own statement, like Emily, listing what they do and do not want. This is a common assignment but now it is tied to general education literature.

Another discussion point for students regarding self-determination and Emily is when she concedes. At the end of her plea to Diana, Emily says that if she cannot have what she wants then she would like the next best thing. Students can decide is this is reasonable (Emily is making a compromise) or failing to be self-advocate. Students can come up with ways that Emily could solve her problem and may also reflect on times when they felt similar to Emily.

**Practical Applications of Special Education Best Practices**

**Issues of Text**

This paper focuses on teaching Chaucer to students who have cognitive impairments, so it goes without saying that teaching CT in Middle English is not an option. In fact, for some students, even modern translations will be useless when the student can only recognize basic sight words. But just because a student may not have strong reading skills does not mean that they cannot have access to CT: students can utilize books on tape, be read to aloud, or read with a partner. "The main difficulty is that reading and writing levels may be considerably more advanced than the student with…disabilities is able to comprehend. Information will need to be adapted for these students and expectations adjusted so that they can be successful. The focus is on how to effectively include the students, not exclude him or her based on perceived deficits" (Downing 45).

Teachers can offer supplemental materials to help students keep pace with the class. Clarice Swisher's book, Understanding The Canterbury Tales, uses very simple language to give students a background on historical and cultural information. The author's chapters titled “Cast of Characters” and “The Plots” are particularly valuable as they include one-paragraph explanations highlighting all the main events. This is a great book to use with students because of its brevity and its summarization of important points.

An innovative way to make texts accessible to students who have low reading ability is to create a whole new text that is interactive. This is done by using written sight words and symbolic language that is familiar to students in addition to creating movable, useable illustrations. Two sample pages of what this might look like are included at the end of this essay (Examples 1 and 2); these were created using Gustaf Tenggren's illustrations. June E. Downing recognizes the effectiveness of strategies like this in her book Teaching Literacy to Students with Significant Disabilities. She suggests that teachers “add pictures to [the] ones in [the] text and [to] draw attention to these pictures as [the] text is read” (43). The idea is that students can engage their tactile learning senses by picking up characters and teachers can directly ask questions by referencing this tangible symbol.

Teachers can also provide students with “self-monitoring checklists” (Downing 82) to help guide their reading. A student can check-off that he or she read the part where Arcite is freed from prison or when a fight scene happens. Checklists not only force the reader to pay attention to what they are reading, they also highlight what the student should be looking for and increase the “motivation to read [when] the students can see a tangible reward for demonstrating desired behavior” (Downing 82) This “tangible reward” can be as simple as a check mark or maybe a preferred sticker or stamp.

**Issues of Response**

Often, the easiest way to modify lessons is to change the expectations for student responses. Students can be invited to verbally give answers, use manipulatives to indicate action or indication of decision (especially in the case of students who are nonverbal), or use technology (like computers and video
cameras) to create visual responses. The key to accommodating for open-ended response modes is to ask very clear questions. For example, “What happens to Arcite?” only has one answer and yet it can easily be evaluated in a variety of formats: students could explain verbally or textually, they could act it out, they could create a picture, or they could point to a picture from provided options.

This paper again suggests using illustrations, such as Tenggren's, to make manipulatives, like players' cards, for CT. Some examples of players' cards are included at the end of this essay (Example 2). Students can use these cards to answer questions by holding up the right character in place of using verbal responses. Cards can also help students create answers by jogging their photographic memory. Illustrations like these can be cut and laminated, providing for endless teaching and learning opportunities. For example, “instead of writing a reflection paper, [a student can] use colored pictures to fill in the blanks of several statements” (Downing 88). Additionally, “Students can sequence pictorial or photographic material to retell the story” (Downing 90).

The most important part of using pictorial symbols as response options is that these pictures or symbols are used consistently throughout the reading of the text (Downing 90). This means that every time the teacher says “Emily,” he or she holds up the picture that the students will use to indicate “Emily” as an answer. An example of how a symbol, like “Emily,” can be used and how it becomes part of the text is included in the end of this paper (see Example 1). Symbols can be extremely useful; but it is important to keep the number of symbols down to a manageable number for the individual who will be using them.

Example 1

Emily is laminated and attached with Velcro. The same image is behind the laminated manipulative.
A Thematic Approach
One of the most fun things about bringing Chaucer into the classroom is the potential to transform the whole room for the duration of the unit. Medieval culture is fascinating to most students, of all ages and cognitive ability. A teacher can redecorate the room to look like a castle or dress like a medieval character on the first day of the unit. Students can have a medieval party where social practices are learned and practiced. For students who have disabilities, the more tangible a concept is, the easier it will be for them to understand. In the case of The Knight's Tale, a whole unit could be developed around knights and their culture. Having a basis of knowledge for what a knight is can lead some students to examine Chaucer's own knight: is he an ideal figure or, as some critics claim, “a soldier of fortune…a mercenary” (Bowers 290)? Transforming the classroom is fun for any student, regardless of cognitive ability, and helps take the focus off of how serious or difficult the subject matter may be so that natural learning can take place.

Conclusion
Chaucer's greatest admirers adore him for his multi-layered storytelling. Between the issues of authorship, narration, and ideology, readers will be able to find many ways in which to enjoy one tale. The argument this paper presents is that one of the layers that has always existed amongst Chaucer's tales is a very basic observation of social interactions, which is extremely appropriate subject matter for the special education student. Teachers can focus on this aspect of Chaucer's writing to create materials and lessons plans that are appropriate for students who have disabilities while a general education class can analyze formal elements of literature. The Canterbury Tales, and specifically The Knight's Tale, offer many conceptual and practical options for application in special education.

More Examples

Example 2
Arcite and Palamon are laminated and attached to the page with brads. The knights can be moved back and forth as though they are fighting.
Example 3
These illustrations were hard laminated and then cut into identical rectangles. Note that the cards have different color schemes and are labeled with characters' names.

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Works Cited


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