**EVERYMAN STUDYGUIDE**

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*Everyman* is the best surviving example of the type of Medieval drama known as the [morality play](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medievaldrama.htm). Moralities evolved side by side with the [mystery plays](http://www.luminarium.org/medlit/medievaldrama.htm), although they were composed individually and not in cycles. The moralities employed [allegory](http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/ent/A0803383.html) to dramatize the moral struggle Christianity envisions universal in every individual.

*Everyman*, a short play of some 900 lines, portrays a complacent Everyman who is informed by Death of his approaching end. The play shows the hero's progression from despair and fear of death to a "Christian resignation that is the prelude to redemption."1 First, Everyman is deserted by his false friends: his casual companions, his kin, and his wealth. He falls back on his Good Deeds, his Strength, his Beauty, his Intelligence, and his Knowledge. These assist him in making his Book of Accounts, but at the end, when he must go to the grave, all desert him save his Good Deeds alone. The play makes its grim point that we can take with us from this world nothing that we have received, only what we have given.

The play was written near the end of the fifteenth century. It is probably a translation from a Flemish play, *Elckerlijk* (or *Elckerlyc*) first printed in 1495, although there is a possibility that *Everyman* is the original, the Flemish play the translation. There are four surviving versions of *Everyman*, two of them fragmentary.

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| **JOURNAL #1: What does it mean to be a good person? Answer inside this box.**  |

**Setting**

The action begins in heaven when God sends Death to summon the main character, Everyman. Thereafter, the action takes place on earth. Since the author intended the main character to represent every human being, the action on earth could take place anywhere.

**Characters**

**Everyman**: Typical human being who has neglected his spiritual life but repents his sins in time to be saved.
**God**: Just but merciful Supreme Being.
**Death**: Messenger commanded by God to summon Everyman.
**Fellowship, Kindred, Cousin, Material Goods**: Earthly acquaintances of Everyman who abandon him in his time of need.
**Good Deeds**: The only friend willing to accompany Everyman to the afterlife.
**Knowledge**: Character that tells Everyman what he must do to obtain salvation.
**Confession**: Character representing the sacrament of penance. Everyman confesses his sins to this character.
**Discretion, Strength, Everyman's Five Wits, Beauty**: Earthly acquaintances of Everyman who abandon him in his time of need.
**Angel**: Creature that welcomes Everyman to the celestial realm.
**Doctor**: Scholar who delivers words of warning at the end of the play.

**Tone**

The tone of the play is solemn and dignified.

**End Rhyme**

The dialogue contains varying patterns of end rhyme. When God first appears, he speaks with alternating lines that rhyme.

I perceive here in my majes**ty**,
How that all the creatures be to me unk**ind**,
Living without dread in worldly prosperi**ty**:
Of ghostly sight the people be so bl**ind**,
Drowned in sin, they know me not for their G**od**;
In worldly riches is all their m**ind**,
They fear not my rightwiseness, the sharp r**od**;
My law that I shewed, when I for them d**ied**,
They forget clean, and shedding of my blood r**ed**;
I hanged between two, it cannot be den**ied**;
To get them life I suffered to be d**ead.**

Death, God's messenger, often speaks in couplets:

Lord, I will in the world go run over **all**,
And cruelly outsearch both great and sm**all**;
Every man will I beset that liveth beast**ly**
Out of God’s laws, and dreadeth not fol**ly**;
He that loveth riches I will strike with my d**art**,
His sight to blind, and from heaven to dep**art**,
Except that alms be his good fr**iend**,
In hell for to dwell, world without **end**.

**Plot Summary**
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*The original text of the play*—*preserved in the British Library in editions by two different printers*—*contains archaisms and old spellings. In the following summary, most of the quotations from the play have been modernized.*

The author introduces the play with the following announcement:

Here beginneth a treatise how the high Father of Heaven sendeth Death to summon every creature to come and give account of their lives in this world, and is in manner of a moral play.

A messenger of God then admonishes readers to play close attention to the play, for it reminds them that a day will come when they will be called to a reckoning.

“Ye think sin in the beginning full sweet,” he says, “which in the end causeth the soul to weep when the body lieth in clay.”

God then speaks. He laments that his creatures live preoccupied with worldly prosperity, blinded to what is really important. “Drowned in sin, they know me not for their God,” the King of Heaven says. He summons a messenger, Death, and tells him to inform Everyman that his time on earth has ended and that he must now give an account of his life.

Everyman says he needs more time, but Death refuses to grant it. Everyman then attempts to muster acquaintances to support him. When he begs Fellowship to help him with a problem, the latter pledges assistance. However, when Fellowship learns that Everyman wants him to testify in the land of death, Fellowship says he would normally accompany Everyman everywhere—to eat, drink, make merry, and pursue the pleasures of lust. He would even help Everyman commit murder. But to go with him to the afterlife and help him give an accounting of his life, that is out of the question, Fellowship says. Under no circumstances would he undertake such a fearsome journey.

Everyman then seeks help from those related to him, Kindred and Cousin. But they, too, refuse to take part in the perilous journey. Sorely distressed at their unwillingness to support him in his time of need, Everyman now thinks that the material possessions he has stored up may enable him to buy his way into heaven. He calls out to Goods, saying “money maketh all right that is wrong.” Goods answers that he cannot stir from his position, for he is a heap of chests and bags and sacks.

“But if thou had me loved moderately,” Goods says, giving part of Goods to the poor, “then shouldest thou not in this dolor be.”

Desperate, Everyman turns to Good Deeds:

I pray you, help me in this need
Or else I am forever damned indeed;
Therefore, help me to make reckoning
Before the Redeemer of all things.

Because he has been long neglected, Good Deeds is in a sorry condition. Although he is willing to go with Everyman, he cannot muster the strength to do so—at least not at the moment. However, he introduces Everyman to his sister, Knowledge, who says she can help him by taking him to Confession. Everyman weeps for joy.

Confession tells Everyman he will give him a precious jewel, penance, if he confesses his sins. Everyman calls on the Lord to forgive his grievous offenses, acknowledging that he is a “sinner most abominable,” and calls on the Virgin Mary to intercede with her Son on his behalf.  After Everyman completes his confession, Knowledge informs him that his friend Good Deeds is healthy and whole once again. Good Deeds himself then comes forth and says Everyman is now prepared for eternity. Knowledge outfits Everyman with a robe of contrition, signifying his repentance.

Good Deeds introduces Everyman to Discretion, Strength, his Five Wits, and Beauty and asks them to accompany Everyman on his journey. Knowledge then tells him before he leaves he must receive the last sacraments of the church—Holy Viaticum (which is a special name for Holy Eucharist or Holy Communion when given to anyone about to die) and anointment with an oil. After he receives the sacraments, Beauty, Discretion, Strength, and the Five Wits go with Everyman to his grave but refuse to accompany him to the afterlife. Disheartened, Everyman cries, “O, Jesus, help! All hath forsaken me.” However, Good Deeds says, “Nay, Everyman, I will bide with thee.” Knowledge remains a while longer: “I will not from hence depart / Till I see where ye shall be. . . .”

Everyman then prays that the Lord will receive him, saying “In manuas tuas, commendo spiritum meum” (Latin for “Into thy hands, I commend my spirit”).
Knowledge hears angels singing. One of them invites Everyman into the heavenly regions. Only Good Deeds accompanies him.

**THEMES**

**Please give evidence from the text in the form of indirect quotes to support each theme. Don’t forget to explain your answers.**

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| **Final Judgment/Individual Accountability** |
| **Material Goods vs. Spiritual Goods** |

**VOCABULARY:**

In order to understand both levels of the play, you need to know the meaning of the following words. Define each word.

1. kindred
2. moral
3. mortal
4. pilgrimage
5. reckoning
6. redemption
7. repentance

8. respite
9. reverence
10. salvation
11. sin
12. summon
13. virtue
14. Vice

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:**

1. Why does God send Death to summon Everyman?

2. How does Everyman react to the summons by Death?

3. The author of this play used deliberate repetition to drive home major points. In what way do Everyman's encounters with Fellowship and Kindred follow a similar pattern?

4. What happens when Everyman asks Goods to accompany him? Why does Goods think that his presence would adversely influence God's judgment of Everyman?

5. Why is Good Deeds at first unable to accompany Everyman?

6. How does Knowledge help Everyman on his journey?

7. Explain how the play supports the idea that knowledge of one's sin is necessary before one can truly repent.

8. How does the order in which Beauty, Strength, Discretion, and Five Wits abandon Everyman parallel the process of aging?

9. Who follows Everyman into the grave?

10. What does the weakness of Good Deeds reveal about the way Everyman has led his life?

**Prepare a plot diagram for the play. Include brief notes indicating the order in which each character meets with Everyman and what happens during that meeting. For example, the first character who enters is Death. Everyman tries to talk Death out of taking him, begging for more time, and finally even attempting bribery. And so on.**