

Before You Read

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone

by Hudson Talbott

LITERARY FOCUS: LEGEND—A LITTLE FACT, A LOT OF STORY

How much do you know about your family history? Have stories about your ancestors been passed down from one generation to the next? As time passes and stories are passed along, events and characters may become exaggerated, and details may be added to spice up the accounts. These stories are a lot like legends in literature. A **legend** is a very old story that has been passed down from one generation to the next. Legends usually have some connection to a historical person or event, but they also contain a lot of made-up, sometimes fantastic, events.

READING SKILLS: RETELLING

Stories that are long or that have complicated plots can be difficult to follow. One good way to keep up with a story is to use a reading strategy called retelling. As you read this story, stop now and then to **retell** what you have read in your own words. Retelling will help you identify the major story events and keep all the information straight in your mind.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand legends.

Reading Skills

Retell a story.

Vocabulary Skills

Recognize Latin and Anglo-Saxon roots.



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VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

Before you read *King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone*, spend a few minutes previewing these vocabulary words.

turbulent (tʌr'byə·lənt) *adj.*: wild; disorderly.

King Arthur restored peace to a turbulent land.

tournament (tʊər'nə·mənt) *n.*: series of contests.

Sir Kay hoped to show his bravery during the tournament.

integrity (in·teg'rə·tē) *n.*: honesty; uprightness.

A knight's integrity kept him from wrongdoing.

congregation (kən'grə·gā'shən) *n.*: gathering.

The king spoke to a congregation of villagers.

LATIN AND ANGLO-SAXON ROOTS

English is made up of words borrowed from other languages. Many of these words come from Anglo-Saxon and French (the languages of two peoples that conquered England). English words taken from Anglo-Saxon are often short. They tend to be common words that you use all the time, such as *book*, *house*, and *yes*. Words taken from French, most of which were derived from Latin, tend to be longer and “fancier.” Here are some examples.

Anglo-Saxon Words

deer, pig, cow, man, wife, foot, for, the, in, is

Words from Latin

turbulent	<i>turba</i> , meaning “crowd”
tournament	<i>tornare</i> , meaning “turn”
messenger	<i>mittere</i> , meaning “send”

KING ARTHUR: THE SWORD IN THE STONE

Hudson Talbott

BACKGROUND: Literature and Social Studies

The hero behind the legend of King Arthur probably lived about A.D. 500. The real Arthur is believed to have been a military leader of people called the Britons. In the first century B.C., the Romans invaded Britain, and they ruled for about four hundred years. After the armies of Rome pulled out of England in A.D. 410, several tribes tried to seize control. According to the earliest legends, a leader named Arthur united the Britons and led them to victory against one of those invading tribes, the Saxons. After Arthur's death the Saxons and the Angles, another tribe, conquered the Britons, but stories about the warrior king's unusual courage and goodness lived on among his people through the telling of legends.

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 1–6. Underline information in the passage that sounds as if it might be factual.

In ancient times, when Britain was still a wild and restless place, there lived a noble king named Uther.¹ After many years of turmoil, Uther defeated the invading barbarians and drove them from the land. For this triumph, his fellow British lords proclaimed him their high king, or Pendragon, meaning “Dragon’s Head.”

Soon after his coronation,² Uther Pendragon met and fell in love with the beautiful Lady Igraine,³ a widow whose husband Uther had killed in battle. Uther married Igraine
10 and adopted her two young daughters, Margaise⁴ and

1. **Uther** (yōō'thər).
2. **coronation** *n.*: ceremony for crowning a king or a queen.
3. **Igraine** (ē-grān').
4. **Margaise** (mār-gāz').

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Morgan le Fay. The price for this love was a high one, however. In his passion, the king had asked for the help of his sorcerer, Merlin, in winning the hand of Lady Igraine. In return Uther had agreed to give up their firstborn son. Merlin had foreseen great evil descending upon the king and felt that he alone could protect a young heir in the dangerous times ahead.

Before long, a beautiful boy child was born. But the joy surrounding the birth was brief, for Merlin soon appeared
20 to take the child away.

“But the child was just born!” exclaimed Uther. “How did you find out so quickly?”

Silently, the old sorcerer led the king to a balcony and pointed upward. There overhead was a great dragon formed by the stars. Its vast wings arched over the countryside, and its tail swept north beyond the horizon. “You see by this sign, my lord, that it is not I who calls for your son, but destiny.”

Sadly, the king gave up his son, for Merlin convinced
30 him that the child’s great future was threatened. Indeed, Uther Pendragon died within a year from a traitor’s poison and Britain was once again plunged into darkness.

After the death of the high king, the struggle for leadership tore Britain to pieces. The great alliance King Uther had forged was shattered into dozens of quarreling, petty kingdoms—leaving no united force to oppose foreign invasion. Barbarians swept in once again and order gave way to chaos. Marauding knights roamed the countryside, taking what they wanted and burning the rest. No one was safe at
40 home, and travel was even more dangerous, with outlaws ruling the roads. Fear was a constant companion of those who managed to stay alive.

RETELL

Re-read lines 11–20. What deal was made between King Uther and Merlin?

WORD STUDY

Marauding (mə·rōd'īŋ), in line 38, means “raiding or plundering.” It comes from the French *maraud*, meaning “vagabond.”

IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT

What effect did King Uther’s death have on Britain (lines 33–42)? Underline that information.

VOCABULARY

turbulent (tur'byə-lənt) *adj.*: wild; disorderly.

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 51–60 carefully. Circle the word *sun* each time it appears, and underline the word *son*. Why does Merlin deliberately play with the words *sun* and *son* in his discussion with the archbishop?

WORD STUDY

Heir (er), in line 58, is derived from the Latin *heres*. Both *heir* and *heres* mean “person who inherits title or property from someone who dies.”

RETELL

What has happened in lines 43–68? Retell the events briefly and clearly.



Knights and horse (detail) (13th century) from Stained Glass Program at Sainte-Chapelle in Paris, France.

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After sixteen **turbulent** years, the archbishop of Canterbury⁵ summoned Merlin to help restore order. Although the two men were of different faiths, they had great respect for each other and shared much wisdom between them.

“I am at a loss, Sir Wizard!” confided the archbishop. “I don’t know how to help the people, and they are suffering more each day. If only Uther Pendragon were here!”

“I share your concerns, my lord, but I have good news,” said Merlin. “Although the end of King Uther’s reign left us in the dark for many years, it is at last time for the sun to return to Britain. A brilliant sun, my lord. Perhaps the brightest that Britain will ever know.”

“But the sun was out this morning, sire,” said the archbishop. “What has the weather to do with this?”

“I speak of the son of Uther Pendragon, the true heir of royal blood who lives in a distant land and must now be summoned forth to keep his date with destiny.”

5. **archbishop of Canterbury**: even today, the highest-ranking bishop of the Church of England.

“His date with who?” asked the archbishop. “But the king had no heirs! Alas, that is our problem!”

“I wish to prove otherwise, my lord,” replied Merlin. “If I have your leave to use my magic, I shall create an event to bring forth this young heir and prove to the world that he is the true and rightful high king of Britain.”

The delighted archbishop agreed immediately, and Merlin withdrew to devise his scheme.

70 On a Sunday morning in late November the great cathedral of London was filled to capacity. As Mass was being said, a sudden murmur rippled through the crowd on the cathedral steps. Turning to see the cause of the commotion, the archbishop stopped in midprayer and walked toward the door. In the churchyard he discovered a block of white marble with an anvil sitting on top. Driven into the anvil, gleaming in the pale winter sun, was a sword. Its blade was of flawless blue-white steel, and the hilt was of highly wrought gold, inlaid with rubies, sapphires, and emeralds. Engraved in the marble block were these words:

80 WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD
FROM THIS STONE AND ANVIL IS RIGHTWISE
KING BORN OF ENGLAND.

Ah, so this is Merlin’s plan! thought the archbishop, smiling to himself. A group of barons and knights suddenly pushed their way through the crowd, each stating loudly that he should be the first to try. A few managed to leap onto the stone and give the sword an unsuccessful yank before the archbishop stopped them.

90 “Order! Order!” he shouted, raising his hands to quiet the crowd. “I hereby proclaim that on Christmas morning, one month from today, all those who consider themselves

PREDICT

Pause at line 68. Based on what you know about the King Arthur legend, what event might Merlin be planning?

WORD STUDY

The word *wrought* (line 78) is an alternative past tense or past participle of *work*. Here, *highly wrought* means “highly decorated.”

CLARIFY

Pause at line 94. What test will prove who the rightful king is?

VOCABULARY

tournament (tʊər'nə-mənt)
n.: series of contests.

INFER

Who is the boy that Sir Ector and his wife adopted as an infant (lines 105–113)?

worthy of attempting to pull this sword from the stone and anvil will be given the opportunity. He who wins the sword, thereby wins the kingdom.”

A mighty roar of approval rose from the crowd. Some even danced and stomped their feet. Noticing how pleased they were, the archbishop went further. “And to celebrate this momentous occasion, a **tournament** shall be held on Christmas Eve.”

100 With this, the delighted parishioners swept the flustered archbishop onto their shoulders and carried him jubilantly around the stone several times before setting him down. They hadn’t had such cause for celebration in a long, long time.

To all parts of the kingdom, messengers rushed out, carrying the archbishop’s proclamation.⁶ Every castle and village was alerted, from Sussex to Cornwall and, finally, to the dark forest of Wales. There lived a certain gentle knight by the name of Sir Ector Bonmaison⁷ with his two sons.

110 The elder was a handsome, robust youth, recently knighted and now known as Sir Kay. The younger was a gentle blond lad of about sixteen whom Sir Ector and his wife had adopted as an infant. His name was Arthur. Although Arthur was not of his blood, Sir Ector loved both sons equally and devoted himself to their upbringing.

Sir Kay was the first to hear the news of the great events in London, for as usual, he was in the courtyard polishing his helmet when the messenger arrived.

120 “A tournament! At last, a tournament!” he shouted. “We must set out for London at once! Father, you know what this means to me.”

“Yes, son, I do,” said Sir Ector, bringing the weary messenger a bowl of food. “I was young and hotblooded

6. **proclamation** *n.*: official public announcement.

7. **Bonmaison** (bōn'mā-zōn'): This name is French for “good house.”

once, too, and eager to show the world my worthiness of knighthood. But this sword-pulling contest—do you wish to be king, as well?” he asked Kay with a smile.

“I make no pretense about that, sir. To prove myself on the field of battle is my dream.”

“Please remember that, my son,” said Sir Ector.

130 “Pursuing one’s goals with **integrity** is all that matters. Now go find Arthur so that we may prepare to leave. London is a long way off.”

Arthur had wandered off alone, as he often did after finishing his chores. He was as devoted as ever to being a good squire for his brother. But, after all, Kay was *Sir Kay* now, and he rarely had anything to say to his younger brother except to bark orders at him. Arthur didn’t mind, though. He was happy just to watch Kay practice his jousting and to dream of someday riding beside him in battle.

140 In the meantime, he had to content himself with his other companions—Lionel and Jasper, his dogs; Cosmo, his falcon; the orphaned fox cubs he kept hidden in the hollow log; and the deer that came to the edge of the woods when he whistled. He was in the woods now, patiently holding out a handful of oats for the deer, when Kay came bounding through the meadows to find him.

“Arthur, come quickly!” he shouted. “We’re leaving for London at once! There’s a big tournament. Here’s your chance to show me what a good squire you can be! Hurry!”

150 Arthur stood silently for a moment. He had never been more than a few miles from his home. Was he daydreaming? Or was he really going to London to help Sir Kay bring honor and glory to their family as the whole world looked on? He ran back home, doubting his own ears until he reached the courtyard and saw Sir Ector preparing their horses for the journey.

VOCABULARY

integrity (in-teg'ra-tē) *n.*: honesty; uprightness.

WORD STUDY

Knights who are jousting (joust'ɪŋ), lines 138–139, are engaging in combat using lances while on horseback. The word *joust* derives from Latin *juxtare*, meaning “to approach.”

COMPARE & CONTRAST

In lines 133–146, what differences do you see in Arthur and his brother, Sir Kay?

CLARIFY

Pause at line 162. Why were so many people coming to London Town for Christmas?

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 157–167. Do you see anything that **foreshadows**, or gives you a clue about, what might happen later in the story? Draw a box around the passage that helps you predict what will happen.

160 All of Britain seemed to be making its way to London
Town that Christmas. Kings and dukes, earls and barons,
counts and countesses funneled into the city gates for the
great contest. Sir Ector was pleased to see old friends and
fellow knights. Sir Kay was eager to register for the jousting.
And Arthur was simply dazzled by it all.

As Sir Ector and his sons made their way through the
city streets, a glint of sunlight on steel caught Arthur’s eye.
How odd, he thought. A sword thrust point first into an
anvil on top of a block of marble, sitting in a churchyard—
surrounded by guards! London is so full of wonders!

170 Dawn arrived with a blare of trumpets, calling all con-
testants to the tournament. In Sir Ector’s tent, Arthur buck-
led the chain mail⁸ onto Sir Kay and slipped the tunic of
the Bonmaison colors over his brother’s head. Sir Ector
stood and watched until the preparation was complete and
his son stood before him in all his knightly glory. Silently
they embraced, mounted their horses, and headed for the
tournament grounds.



8. chain mail *n.*: flexible armor made of thousands of tiny metal links.

The stadium for the event was the grandest ever built. Never had there been such a huge **congregation** of lords and ladies in the history of England. The stands surrounded a great meadow, swept clean of all snow, with the combatants' tents at either end. In the central place of honor sat the archbishop. Patiently, he greeted each king and noble as they came forth to kiss his hand. "I should do this more often," he chuckled to himself.

The first event was the mock battle, or *mêlée*. The contestants were divided into two teams—the Reds and the Greens. Sir Kay was with the Reds, who gathered at the southern end of the field, while their opponents took the north. They all readied their lances and brought down their helmet visors in anticipation of combat. Everyone looked to the archbishop for a signal. Slowly, he raised his handkerchief, paused, and let it flutter to the ground. From either end of the field, the thunder of thousands of horse hooves rolled forward, shaking the earth, rattling the stands—louder and louder until a terrifying crash of metal split the air. A shower of splintered lances rained down in all directions. The audience gasped, and a few ladies fainted. Nothing had prepared them for this scale of violence.

Sir Kay performed admirably, for he charged ahead of his teammates and unseated two of the Greens. He was already winning accolades⁹ as he wheeled his charger around to aid a fellow Red.

As the teams withdrew, they revealed a battleground strewn with fallen warriors, some struggling to rise under the weight of their armor, others lying ominously still. Bits and pieces of armor and broken lances littered the field.

The next charge was to be undertaken with swords. Sir Kay was appointed captain of his team for having done so

VOCABULARY

congregation
(kən'grə-gā'ʃən) *n.*:
gathering.

WORD STUDY

The word *mêlée* (mā'lā'), in line 184, is a French word meaning "hand-to-hand combat."

CONNECT

Re-read lines 184–205. Do you think this kind of sport would be acceptable today? Why or why not?

9. **accolades** *n.*: words of praise.

WORD STUDY

Magnificent (line 210) is from the Latin *magnus*, meaning “great,” and *facere*, meaning “to do.” What does Arthur mean when he tells Sir Kay he was magnificent?

PREDICT

Pause at line 235. Where will Arthur get a sword for Sir Kay?

well in the first round. He trotted over to Arthur and handed down his lance.

210 “Kay! You were magnificent!” gushed Arthur, wiping down the steaming war horse. “You’ve brought great honor to our house this day!”

“I need my sword, Arthur,” said Sir Kay, struggling to take his helmet off.

“Your sword, of course!” said Arthur brightly. He turned to get it, but then stopped suddenly. Where was the sword? His eyes scanned the little tent with its collection of weaponry. Spear, halberd, mace, bludgeon¹⁰ . . . but no sword.

220 “Excuse me, Kay,” said Arthur, “could you use a battle axe?”

“Arthur, please! My sword!” said Sir Kay. “We haven’t much time.”

“Of course, Kay! But just a moment—I’ll finish polishing it,” said Arthur, slipping out through the slit in their tent. With one great leap, he landed on his pony’s back and galloped madly through the deserted streets, rushing back to their camp.

230 “Sword. Sword. Where did I put that *sword*?” he muttered, desperately searching through the chests and bags. But to no avail.

How could this happen? he thought. Kay without a sword . . . and the whole world watching!

He paced back and forth, and then a thought struck him: Kay will not be without a sword today. I know where I can get one!

240 A few minutes later, he trotted into the churchyard where the sword in the anvil stood on the marble block. There wasn’t a guard in sight—even they had gone to the tourney. Quietly, he brought his pony up to the stone and tugged on the reins.

10. **halberd** (hal’bærd), **mace** (mās), **bludgeon** (bluj’əŋ): weapons.

“OK, Blaze. . . . We’ll just see if this sword can be unstuck,” he whispered. He stretched out his arm until his fingers touched the hilt.

“Hey, it’s looser than I thought. . . . Steady, Blaze! Steady, boy!” As the pony stepped back a few paces, the sword glided out of the anvil’s grip, unbalancing Arthur. He regained his seat and looked down in wonder at the mighty blade in his hand.

250 “This isn’t just *any* sword. . . . Perhaps it’s something the church provides for needy strangers. Yes, that must be it! Well, I’ll return it after the tournament. Someone else may need it. Thank you, sword, for saving me,” he said, pressing its cross to his lips. “Wait until Kay sees this!”

He flung his cloak around the great sword and drove his little horse back to the tournament with lightning speed.

By now, Sir Kay had dismounted and was rather chafed.¹¹

“Arthur, where have you been?” he shouted. “You . . .”

260 He caught himself as Arthur dropped to one knee and opened the cloak.

“Your sword, my lord,” Arthur said confidently. But his smile quickly disappeared when he saw Sir Kay’s reaction. Frozen in place, his face white as milk, Sir Kay stared at the sword. Finally, he spoke.

“Where did you get this?” he asked Arthur, although he knew the answer.

Arthur confessed that he had searched in vain for Sir Kay’s sword and had borrowed this one instead.

270 “Get Father at once, and tell no one of this!” said Sir Kay sternly.

Arthur thought he must be in terrible trouble. Surely he could return the sword without his father knowing. Why

CLARIFY

In lines 244–253, does Arthur realize what he has just done? What does Arthur think the sword’s purpose is?

INFER

Why is Sir Kay so disturbed when he sees the sword (lines 261–270)?

11. **chafed** (chāft) *v.* used as *adj.*: annoyed.

INFER

Why do beads of sweat form on Sir Kay's brow when he explains the situation to his father (lines 282–284)?

RETELL

How does Sir Kay attempt to become king of all Britain (lines 278–300)?

did Father have to be told? Nevertheless, he obeyed his brother and returned quickly with Sir Ector.

Sir Kay closed the curtains of the tent and opened the cloak, revealing the sword to his father.

Sir Ector gasped when he saw it. “How can this be?”

“Father, I am in possession of this sword,” said Sir Kay nervously. “That is what matters. Therefore, I must be king
280 of all Britain.”

“But how came you by it, son?” asked Sir Ector.

“Well, sire, I needed a sword . . . and we couldn’t find mine . . . so, I decided to use this one!” said Sir Kay. Beads of sweat formed on his brow.

“Very well, lad. You drew it out of the stone. I want to see you put it back. Let’s go,” said Sir Ector.

“But *I have the sword!*” said Sir Kay. “Isn’t that enough?”

“No,” replied Sir Ector, as he mounted his horse and headed toward the cathedral. Arthur rode close behind and,
290 ever so slowly, Sir Kay mounted and followed.

The churchyard was still deserted when the three arrived. “Put the sword back in the anvil,” said Sir Ector bluntly. “I must see it.”

“Father, I . . .”

“Just do it, Kay, and you shall be king. If that’s what you want.” Sir Kay climbed onto the block. Sweat was now pouring off him. He raised the mighty sword over his head and plunged it downward. But the sharp point skidded across the surface of the anvil, causing Sir Kay to fall
300 headfirst off the block.

“Now, son, tell me. How came you by this sword?” asked Sir Ector again.

“Arthur brought it to me,” said Sir Kay, dusting himself off. “He *lost* my other one.”

Suddenly a fear gripped Sir Ector’s heart. “Arthur, my boy,” he said quietly, “will you try it for us?”

“Certainly, Father,” said Arthur, “but do we have to tell anyone about this? Can’t we just . . .”

310 “Son, please,” said Sir Ector solemnly. “If you can put the sword in that anvil, please do so now.”

With a pounding heart, the lad took the sword from Sir Kay’s hand and climbed slowly onto the block of marble. Raising it with both hands over his head, he thrust it downward, through the anvil, burying the point deep within the stone. Effortlessly he pulled it out again, glanced at his stunned father, and shoved the sword into the stone, even deeper this time.

320 Sir Ector shrieked and sank to his knees. His mouth moved, but no words came out. He put his hands together as in prayer. Silently, Sir Kay knelt and did the same.

“Father! What are you doing?” cried Arthur, leaping down from the stone. “Please! Get up! Get up! I don’t understand!”

“Now I know!” sputtered Sir Ector, choking back tears. “Now I know who you are!”

“I’m your son, Father!” said the bewildered lad, crouching down by his father and putting his head to Sir Ector’s chest.

330 After a few deep breaths, Sir Ector regained his composure. He smiled sadly down at Arthur and stroked his head.

“Fate would have it otherwise, my boy. Look there behind you.” He pointed to the gold lettering on the marble block, which stated the purpose of the sword and the anvil.

Arthur sat in silence and stared at the words in the marble.

“Although you were adopted, I’ve loved you like my own child, Arthur,” said Sir Ector softly. “But now I realize

INFER

Pause at line 306. Why does fear grip the heart of Sir Ector? What does his emotional reaction reveal to you about his character?

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 311–317. Underline the fantastic elements that identify this story as a legend.

CLARIFY

Sir Kay has until now treated Arthur as a servant. Why does Sir Kay kneel before Arthur (line 320)?

IDENTIFY

Re-read lines 341–349. In what way does Arthur seem like a child? In what way does he show his maturity?

CLARIFY

Re-read lines 355–370. Did Merlin's scheme work as expected? How did Arthur surprise the wizard?

you have the blood of kings in you. To discover your birthright is the true reason we came to London. You are
340 now our king and we your faithful servants.”

At this, Arthur broke into tears. “I don’t want to be king. Not if it means losing my father!” he sobbed.

“You have a great destiny before you, Arthur. There’s no use avoiding it,” said Sir Ector.

Arthur wiped his eyes with his sleeve. He straightened up so he could look Sir Ector in the eyes. A few minutes passed.

“Very well,” Arthur finally said slowly. “Whatever my destiny may be, I am willing to accept it. But I still need you with me.”

350 “Then so it shall be, lad. So it shall be,” said Sir Ector.

They sat quietly for a time, comforting each other, until they felt another presence. From across the yard a hooded figure quietly floated into the fading light of the winter afternoon and knelt down beside them.

“Merlin,” said Sir Ector, bowing his head to the famous enchanter.

“I’ve been waiting for you, Arthur,” said the wizard.

“You know me, my lord?” asked Arthur.

360 “I put you in this good man’s care many years ago and have kept an eye on you ever since.”

“How did you do that, sire? We live far from here.”

“Oh, I have my ways,” replied Merlin. “But you still managed to surprise me. The sword-pulling contest isn’t until tomorrow, and you pulled it out today!” he said with a chuckle.

“But what is to become of me now?” asked Arthur.

370 “Well, let us start with tomorrow,” replied the old sorcerer. “We must still have the contest to prove to the world that you are the rightful heir. I will come for you when the time is right.”

“But after that, sire, what is my future?” asked the boy.

Merlin weighed this question carefully. He wasn’t at all sure whether the boy was prepared for his answer. Finally, he spoke. “I can tell you only what my powers suggest—and they point to greatness. Greatness surrounds you like a golden cloak. Your achievements could inspire humankind for centuries to come. But you alone can fulfill this destiny and then only if you wish it. You own your future. You alone.”

Arthur breathed deeply and cast his eyes downward.
380 He thought of all the goodbyes he would have to say. He thought of his fishing hole, and the birds that ate seeds from his hand. He thought of the deer that came when he called them.

“What time tomorrow, sire?” he asked.

“After all have tried and failed, whenever that may be,” replied Merlin.

“I will be ready, sire,” said Arthur. Then he rose, bade Merlin farewell, and silently returned to his tent.

390 On Christmas morning, the archbishop said Mass for the largest gathering he had seen in years. The grounds surrounding the cathedral were also filled—with those seeking to make history or watch it being made. As soon as the service ended, those who wished to try for the throne formed a line next to the marble block.

400 Leading the line was King Urien of Gore, husband to Margaise, Uther Pendragon’s adoptive daughter. Ever since the high king’s death, Urien had claimed loudly that he was the rightful heir. Indeed, he took his position on the marble block with a great sense of authority and gave the sword a confident tug, then another, and another. Urien was sweating and yanking furiously when finally asked to step down.

Next came King Lot of Orkney, husband to Morgan le Fay. King Lot felt certain that his wife’s magical powers

CLARIFY

According to the information in lines 372–378, what has to happen for Arthur’s future to be great? What must Arthur do?

WORD STUDY

Bid is an old-fashioned word, meaning “tell.” Locate and circle the past tense of *bid* in lines 387–388.

INFER

Pause at line 388. Is Arthur excited about becoming king? Explain.

COMPARE & CONTRAST

How are these men who try to pull the sword from the stone different from Arthur (lines 395–415)?

WORD STUDY

What might the word *waned* (line 414) mean? Look for and underline context clues that help you figure out the meaning of this word.

INFER

Pause at line 435. What kind of reaction would you expect Merlin’s announcement to have on the archbishop and the listening crowd?

would assure his victory. But pull and tug as he might, he couldn’t move the sword. After that, King Mark of Cornwall, King Leodegrance of Cameliard, and King Ryence of North Wales all took their place on the stone—and failed. The dukes of Winchester, Colchester, Worcester, and Hamchester did not fare any better. Some thought the longer they waited, the looser the sword would become, thereby improving their chances. But this wasn’t the case, for the sword never budged, not even slightly. Kings, dukes, earls, counts, and knights all left that marble block empty-handed. Finally, as the day waned and the line neared its end, the crowd grew impatient for a winner. Merlin went for Arthur.

410

Sir Ector and Sir Kay opened the curtains of their tent when they saw Merlin approaching.

“Your hour has come, my lord,” said the old wizard to Arthur, who was standing alone in the center of the tent.

420

Silently, the boy walked forth as one in a dream.

The crowd made way for them as they entered, for Merlin was still revered by all. But who could these other people be? Especially that young blond lad dressed all in red. What was he doing here?

Merlin brought Arthur before the archbishop and bowed deeply. Arthur dropped to one knee.

“My lord,” said Merlin, “I present to you a most worthy candidate for this contest. Has he your permission to attempt to pull yonder sword from the stone?”

430

The archbishop gazed down at the handsome lad. “Merlin, we are not familiar with this youth, nor with his credentials. By what right does he come to this place?”

“By the greatest right, my lord,” said Merlin. “For this is the trueborn son of King Uther Pendragon and Queen Igraine.”

The crowd broke into a loud clamor at hearing this. The startled archbishop raised his hands, but order was not easily restored.

“Merlin, have you proof of this?” asked the archbishop.

440 “With your permission, sire,” blurted Arthur suddenly, “perhaps I can prove it by handling yonder sword in the anvil.”

“Very well then, lad,” said the archbishop, admiring Arthur’s youthful boldness. “You have my permission. If what Merlin says is true, may God be with you.”

450 Arthur rose and stepped up onto the marble block. He grabbed hold of the mighty golden hilt with both hands. A surge of sparkling warmth traveled up his arms, across his shoulders, and throughout his body. With one mighty tug, he freed the sword from the anvil and lifted it heavenward. The blade flashed like lightning as he swung it around his head for all to see. Then, turning the point downward again, he drove it back into the anvil with equal ease.



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WORD STUDY

Clamor (line 436) is from the Latin *clamare*, meaning “to cry out.”

PREDICT

Pause at line 453. How do you think the crowd will react now that Arthur has pulled the sword from the stone?

FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage to yourself a few times. Take note of its meaning and the words the writer has chosen to bring that scene to life. Then, take turns reading the passage aloud with a partner.

WORD STUDY

Keeping in mind that the word *dumb* means “mute,” what might *dumbstruck* (line 454) mean? Read on, and underline the context clue later in that paragraph that helps you define *dumbstruck*.

INFER

Whom is Arthur addressing in line 463 when he says, “Thank you, Father”?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 483. How does the crowd’s attitude toward Arthur’s becoming king of Britain differ from the attitude of King Lot and King Urien?

The entire gathering stood dumbstruck for a long moment, trying to comprehend what they had just seen. Arthur looked about for reassurance. He looked to Sir Ector, then Merlin, and then the archbishop. They all simply stared at him, with eyes wide in amazement. A child giggled and clapped his hands in glee, then so did another, and another. Cheers began to ring out as people found their voices again. Suddenly, a thunder of shouting and clapping rose up around Arthur. Amidst the tumult, he closed his eyes and whispered, “Thank you, Father.”

Then he grabbed the sword’s hilt for a second time and withdrew it. As he brought it above his head, a thousand swords throughout the crowd were raised in solidarity.¹² Arthur drove the sword back into the anvil and pulled it out once again. This time, as he lifted the great blade to the sky, more swords and halberds were raised, along with brooms, rakes, and walking sticks, as counts and common folk alike saluted their newfound king.

Not everyone was overjoyed at this turn of events, however. Although all had seen the miracle performed, several kings and dukes were unwilling to recognize Arthur’s right to the throne. Loudest among the grumblers were King Lot and King Urien, Arthur’s brothers-in-law. “How dare this beardless, unknown country boy think he can be made high king to rule over us!” they said. “Obviously, Merlin is using the boy to promote himself!”

But these malcontents¹³ gained no support from those around them and were quickly shouted down. So they gathered themselves together and stormed away in a huff of indignation.¹⁴

12. **solidarity** (sāl'ə-dar'ə-tē) *n.*: unity among a group.

13. **malcontents** (mal'kən-tents') *n.*: discontented or unhappy people.

14. **indignation** *n.*: righteous anger.

To everyone else, the day belonged to Arthur. All the other kings and nobles rushed forth to show their acceptance, for they trusted Merlin and were grateful to have a leader at last. They hoisted the young king-to-be above their heads to parade him through the streets of London.

490 As the noisy procession flowed out of the churchyard, the archbishop hobbled over to Merlin to offer congratulations for a successful plan.

“Thank you, my lord, but I think we are not yet finished,” said the wizard.

The archbishop looked puzzled.

“I fear that King Lot and King Urien and those other discontented souls will leave us no peace until they have another chance at the sword,” continued Merlin. “We must offer them a new trial on New Year’s Day.”

500 And so they did. But again, no one could budge the sword but Arthur. These same troublesome kings and dukes still refused to acknowledge his victory, though. So another trial took place on Candlemas,¹⁵ and yet another on Easter.

By now, the people had grown impatient, for they had believed in Arthur all along and had grown to love him. The idea of having a fresh young king inspired hope and optimism. The world suddenly felt young again.

Finally, after the trial held on Pentecost,¹⁶ they cried out, “Enough! Arthur has proven himself five times now! We will have him for our king—and no other!”

510 The archbishop and Merlin agreed. There was proof beyond dispute at this point. So the coronation was set for May Day in the great cathedral of London.

Upon arriving that morning, Arthur stepped up on the block and pulled the sword from the anvil for the last time.

WORD STUDY

A procession (line 489) is a sort of formal or ceremonial parade. The word *procession* comes from the Latin prefix *pro-*, meaning “forward,” and the Latin word *cedere*, meaning “to go.”

RETELL

In lines 495–509, how is it officially settled that Arthur is the rightful king of Britain?

15. **Candlemas** (kan'dəl-məs): church feast on February 2.

16. **Pentecost** (pen'tə-kōst'): Christian festival on the seventh Sunday after Easter, celebrating the “birthday” of the Christian Church.

King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone

Retelling Chain **Legends** are stories that are based on a real person or event. Complete the chart below with events from *King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone*. Then, indicate whether each event is likely to be based on actual historic events or on the writer’s imagination. To do this, place a check mark under events you think are based on real events.



Literary Skills
Analyze legends.
Reading Skills
Retell a story.

Event	Event	Event	Event

Event	Event	Event	Event

Event	Event	Event	Event

Skills Review

King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone

VOCABULARY AND COMPREHENSION

Word Bank

turbulent
tournament
integrity
congregation

A. Latin and Anglo-Saxon Roots Match the Word Bank words with their roots.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| _____ 1. congregation | a. <i>integer</i> , meaning "untouched" or "whole" |
| _____ 2. turbulent | b. <i>congregatio</i> , meaning "an assembling" |
| _____ 3. tournament | c. <i>turner</i> , meaning "turn" |
| _____ 4. integrity | d. <i>turba</i> , meaning "crowd" |

B. Reading Comprehension Answer each question below.

1. What agreement does King Uther make with Merlin in order to win the hand of Lady Igraine? _____

2. What scheme does Merlin come up with in order to reveal Britain's new king? _____

3. Why do Sir Kay and Arthur go to London Town for Christmas Eve? _____

4. Why does Arthur pull the sword out of the anvil and stone the first time? Why is that event so important? _____

5. How do King Lot and King Urien feel about Arthur's becoming king of all Britain? _____

SKILLS
FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills

Recognize
Anglo-Saxon
and Latin roots.

3. Loo-Wit is an old lady who still has fire after it has been taken away from all the other people. The Creator rewards her because she stays out of the quarreling.
4. Loo-Wit is very beautiful, and the chiefs of the two peoples both want her for their wife. The quarreling begins again.
5. The brothers are turned into Mount Adams and Mount Hood, and Loo-Wit is turned into Mount St. Helens.

COLLECTION 7

King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone, page 232

Page 234

IDENTIFY

Information that sounds as if it might be factual includes “In ancient times . . . there lived a noble king named Uther”; “Uther defeated the invading barbarians and drove them from the land”; “his fellow British lords proclaimed him their high king.”

Page 235

RETELL

Possible retelling: Uther agreed to give his firstborn son to Merlin if Merlin would help him win the hand of Lady Igraine.

IDENTIFY CAUSE & EFFECT

King Uther’s death caused a “struggle for leadership that tore Britain to pieces.” “Barbarians swept in once again and order gave way to chaos. Marauding knights roamed the countryside, taking what they wanted and burning the rest. No one was safe.”

Page 236

INTERPRET

Answers will vary. Possible response: Merlin plays with the words *sun* and *son* to create a metaphor in which the sun’s brightness is compared to Uther’s son bringing Britain out of darkness.

RETELL

Retellings will vary. Possible retelling: After sixteen years of chaos, the archbishop of Canterbury asks Merlin for help in restoring order to Britain. Merlin tells the archbishop that Uther’s son will soon take the throne to restore Britain to its former glory. Merlin asks the archbishop for permission to use magic to create an event that will prove the boy’s royal blood, and the archbishop agrees. Merlin leaves to come up with his plan.

Page 237

PREDICT

Answers will vary. Possible response: Most students will correctly predict that Merlin will prove who the true king is by enabling him to pull a sword out of a stone. No one but Arthur will be able to remove the sword.

Page 238

CLARIFY

The test to prove who the rightful king is will be a contest to see who can pull a sword out of a stone. Whoever can remove the sword will become king.

INFER

Possible response: The boy that Sir Ector and his wife adopted as an infant is Arthur, the son of King Uther.

Page 239

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Answers may vary. Possible answer: Arthur is happy to be a squire for his older brother, Sir Kay. He enjoys watching Kay practice jousting, and he dreams of riding beside him in battle. Sir Kay doesn’t talk to Arthur except to yell orders at him. Arthur is kind and patient; Sir Kay is not.

Page 240

CLARIFY

Many people were coming to London Town to participate in or watch the tournament.

IDENTIFY

The passage that foreshadows what might happen later in the story is “As Sir Ector and his sons made their way through the city streets, a glint of sunlight on steel caught Arthur’s eye. How odd, he thought. A sword thrust point first into an anvil on top of a block of marble, sitting in a churchyard—surrounded by guards! London is so full of wonders!”

Page 241

CONNECT

Responses will vary. Possible responses: Many students will say this kind of sport would not be acceptable today because most people don’t enjoy watching a sport in which humans are seriously injured or killed. Other students will point out the popularity of violent sports like boxing and football. They may also mention that people are killed in car racing and that some fans seem to enjoy watching crashes.

Page 242

WORD STUDY

By “magnificent,” Arthur means that Sir Kay performed extremely well in the tournament.

PREDICT

Possible prediction: Arthur will remember the sword he saw in the churchyard and will try to get it for Sir Kay.

Page 243

CLARIFY

Arthur does not realize what he has just done. The sword seems loose to him, so he thinks the sword was left in the churchyard for needy strangers.

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: Sir Kay is disturbed when he sees the sword because he knows where the sword came from and he knows about the contest to prove who is the rightful king.

Page 244

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: Beads of sweat form on Sir Kay’s brow because he isn’t being honest with his father. He’s trying to conceal the fact that Arthur pulled the sword from the stone.

RETELL

Sir Kay attempts to become king of Britain by making his father think he pulled the sword from the stone. Sir Ector insists on seeing Sir Kay replace the sword, and Sir Kay tries to resist, fearing that he might not be able to replace it.

Page 245

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: Fear grips the heart of Sir Ector because he is beginning to think his adopted son may be the true king of Britain. His emotional reaction reveals that he is a humble person who is awed by the thought that he has raised the son of King Uther.

IDENTIFY

The fantastic elements that identify this story as a legend are “Raising it with both hands over his head, he thrust it downward, through the anvil, burying the point deep within the stone. Effortlessly he pulled it out again, glanced at his stunned father, and shoved the sword into the stone, even deeper this time.”

CLARIFY

Sir Kay kneels before Arthur because he finally accepts the fact that he is standing before the true king of Britain.

Page 246

IDENTIFY

Arthur seems like a child because he cries and tells his father he doesn’t want to be king. He shows his maturity by saying that he accepts his destiny.

CLARIFY

Merlin’s scheme didn’t work as planned. Merlin had planned for Arthur to pull the sword from the stone during the contest so that all the people would see him. Arthur surprised Merlin by pulling the sword from the stone a day early in an attempt to give the sword to Sir Kay.

Page 247

CLARIFY

In order for Arthur’s future to be great, Arthur must wish it to happen. Merlin says Arthur owns his future.

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: Arthur is not excited about becoming king. He is thinking about how much he will miss his family and friends and all the animals he feeds.

Page 248

COMPARE & CONTRAST

The other men who try to pull the sword from the stone are men of royalty. Unlike Arthur, they want to be king of Britain and feel it is their right to be king. They are proud and confident, whereas Arthur is humble and less confident.

WORD STUDY

The word *waned* means “grew long” or “came to a close.” Context clues include “line neared its end” and “crowd grew impatient.”

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: The archbishop and the listening crowd would probably be stunned and might not believe Merlin. After all, no one knew King Uther had a son.

Page 249

PREDICT

Responses will vary. Possible prediction: The crowd will cheer and welcome Arthur as their king.

Page 250

WORD STUDY

Possible response: The word *dumbstruck* means “caused to become silent.” The context clue that helps you understand *dumbstruck* is “They all simply stared at him, with eyes wide in amazement.”

INFER

Answers will vary. Possible responses: Some students will probably infer that Arthur is recognizing King Uther, the father he never knew. Others may infer that Arthur is giving thanks to Sir Ector, whom Arthur obviously loves very much.

COMPARE & CONTRAST

The crowd is joyful and salutes Arthur as he pulls the sword from the stone. King Lot and King Urien are not persuaded that Arthur should be king. They claim that Merlin is using Arthur to promote himself.

Page 251

RETELL

The matter is settled by holding four more trials. The same kings and dukes try to pull the sword from the stone, but only Arthur succeeds. After the fifth trial, the people cried out “Enough!” and declared Arthur the only king.

Page 252

CONNECT

Answers will vary. Possible response: Most students will say Arthur would make a good leader because he is humble and loyal. His words “For your good I dedicate my life” as well as his reaction when he first heard he was to be king show that he accepts the position as his duty and destiny rather than as a way to gain glory for himself.

■ Possible Answers to Skills Practice

Retelling Chain (page 253)

Event: Uther proclaimed “high king.” (Could be factual)

Event: Uther gets help from Merlin to marry Igraine. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Uther and Igraine have a son, whom Merlin takes away. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Uther dies; barbarians invade. (Could be factual)

Event: Archbishop summons Merlin. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Merlin reveals that son of Uther will save the land. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Sword driven into anvil appears in churchyard. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Decree issued that whoever removes stone will be king. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Sir Ector and sons attend the tournament. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Arthur forgets Sir Kay’s sword. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Arthur pulls the sword from the stone in the churchyard. (Writer’s imagination)

Event: Arthur is crowned king. (Could be factual)

■ Possible Answers to Skills Review

Vocabulary and Comprehension (page 254)

A. 1. b

2. d

3. c

4. a

B. 1. King Uther agrees to give Merlin his firstborn son if Merlin helps him win the hand of Lady Igraine.

2. Merlin devised a tournament in which only the true king of Britain would be able to pull a sword from an anvil and stone.

3. Sir Kay and Arthur go to London Town for Christmas Eve so Sir Kay can participate in a tournament.

4. Arthur pulls the sword from the anvil and stone the first time because he had misplaced Sir Kay’s sword, and he wanted to give the sword to Sir Kay. The event proved to Sir Ector and Sir Kay that Arthur was heir to the throne of Britain.

5. King Lot and King Urien are unhappy about Arthur’s kingship. They think Merlin is cheating them.

Sir Gawain and the Loathly Lady, page 255

Page 257

INFER

Inferences will vary. Possible response: King Arthur seems to be honest, courageous, and persistent.

Page 258

WORD STUDY

Answers may vary. Possible answer: The two words no longer in common use are *slay* and *amiss*. *Slay* means “to kill,” and *amiss* means “wrong” or “unsettled.” (Some students may identify *nay* as one of the words.)

IDENTIFY

The riddle presented to King Arthur is “What thing do women most desire?”

Page 259

RETELL

Before King Arthur returns to meet the knight in one year, he must find the answer to the riddle “What thing do women most desire?” If he doesn’t have the correct answer, he will be killed.