



THE SWORD AND THE CIRCLE

This *Tapestry Stitches Literature Book Study*:

- Designed for the Dialectic Level (approximately grades 6-9)
- Recommended for two weeks of study in the context of medieval England (approximately 600-1200 A.D.).
- Required Texts
 - The Sword and the Circle*, by Rosemary Sutcliff (ISBN: 978-0140371499)
 - The Literary Toolbox*, by Christina Somerville¹
- Literary Analysis Concepts

<input type="checkbox"/> Artistry	<input type="checkbox"/> Plot
<input type="checkbox"/> Character	<input type="checkbox"/> Realistic Mode
<input type="checkbox"/> Content	<input type="checkbox"/> Reality
<input type="checkbox"/> Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Romantic Mode
<input type="checkbox"/> Form Follows Function	<input type="checkbox"/> Setting
<input type="checkbox"/> Genre	<input type="checkbox"/> Story
<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Theme
<input type="checkbox"/> Meaning Through Form	<input type="checkbox"/> Topic
<input type="checkbox"/> Mode	<input type="checkbox"/> Values
<input type="checkbox"/> Morality	<input type="checkbox"/> Worldview
- Worldviews:
 - Introduction to Worldviews and Correspondence Theory of Truth
 - Influences on the Medieval Worldview Supplement
 - Biblical analysis of worldviews in the story
- Warnings: We always recommend parental previews of books!
 - On pages 36-37, King Arthur is seduced by and impregnates his own half-sister Morgawse, though he is unaware of her identity at the time. (No overtly sexual description is given, and the encounter is a “forbidden thing” that Arthur deeply regrets later.)
 - On pages 119-122, a married lady gives Sir Gawain kisses and tempts him to “love” her. (There is no sexual detail. Gawain politely accepts the kisses to avoid offending her, but refuses to go further and is later rewarded by her husband for his chastity.)
 - The book mentions that Lancelot and Guinevere fall in love with one another, but only passing and sorrowful references are made to their future adulterous relationship.
 - These stories include magical beings and events. For our philosophy of choosing books, or for a preview of our approach to magic in literature, please see the resource *Teaching Dialectic Literature* included with this Dialectic Literature Stitches product.

¹ Access to the web page content version of *The Literary Toolbox* is included in the purchase price of this product, but please note that the content on the *Literary Toolbox* page is under copyright: it should not be copied or shared with others outside your family. If you would like to purchase a downloadable digital or print editions of *The Literary Toolbox*, please see our store or contact us for further information.



TEACHER MATERIALS

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

- ❑ If you have not done so already, please read *Teaching Dialectic Literature*, a resource included with this Dialectic Literature Stitches study. That document explains each component of the following class plan and provides ideas about how to use them.
- ❑ You will find the main text for this week summarized below, but we do recommend that you read the *Literary Toolbox* sections that your student has been assigned this week (see the “Reading” section below).
- ❑ We suggest that you open this week’s class discussion by asking students to share their favorite character or episode from their reading as we do below in Question #7 the Class Topics section. Students appreciate genuine interest in their personal preferences and opinions. Please feel free to move that question earlier if you wish!
- ❑ In these teaching materials you will find our sample student answers in *italics* below the original questions. Sample answers that were provided in the student materials will appear in unitalicized text, as will extra comments that you might wish to share.
- ❑ Please note that in our sample answers we often give a variety of examples. As we explain in *Teaching Dialectic Literature*, we do this so that your student’s chosen example will be more likely to appear in the list, and also so that you can switch from one example to another if your student has trouble understanding the first one. However, we strongly urge that your student *not* be expected to provide as many examples as we list, nor necessarily examples that are as detailed and maturely expressed as those we list. Unless he was asked to find a specific number, one or two basically correct examples of any given literary concept from your student should be fine. Just as importantly, you should *never* feel obligated to review our whole list of examples with your student in class.

Reading

- ❑ *The Sword and the Circle*, by Rosemary Sutcliff, p. 9-84 (Week 1 of 2)
- ❑ Read or Review the following as needed from *The Literary Toolbox*
NOTE: You can most easily find these by searching for the article titles on the *Literary Toolbox* page.
 - ❑ “Biblical Poetics: A Theory of Language and Literature” (including both sub-sections)
 - ❑ In “Worldview, Purposes, and Literature”: “Worldviews and the Correspondence Theory of Truth”
 - ❑ In “Frameworks” “Mode: A Definition” through “Realistic and Romantic Modes” under “Modes”
 - ❑ In “Content”: “Reality, Morality, and Values”
- ❑ Student Supplement: Influences on the Medieval Worldview

Defining Terms

You may ask your student to write out vocabulary flashcards for the following new words this week:

- ❑ Artistry: The selection and arrangement of elements in such a way that the artist’s purposes for the whole are fulfilled.
- ❑ Literature: The portrayal and interpretation of reality, in a verbal artistic form for a purpose.
- ❑ Mode: A speaker’s attitude towards what he is speaking.
- ❑ Morality: Beliefs about what is right and wrong.
- ❑ Realistic Mode: Emphasizes the horizontal and natural elements of reality.
- ❑ Reality: Beliefs about what is real and true, or not real and not true.
- ❑ Romantic Mode: Emphasizes the vertical and supernatural elements of reality.
- ❑ Values: Beliefs about what is valuable, or not, and to what degree.
- ❑ Worldview: A person’s view of the world, consisting of the set of beliefs on which he bases his life.



LITERARY INTRODUCTION

Suppose that you have been shipwrecked on a desert island with a few hundred others, and the only books you have are the Bible, a book on geometry, and *The Adventures of Winnie the Pooh*? If you were to build a community based on these books, what would it be like? Would future island-dwellers who grew up reading *Winnie the Pooh* believe that there are talking animals in the country from which their ancestors came? Would they ever discover algebra or astronomy? Might they write stories in which Christopher Robin is associated with God and Pooh represents mankind?

After the fall of the Roman Empire, Europeans were like that shipwrecked group of refugees. Few of them had the ability to read or write at all, but men treasured the few precious volumes that survived, even though they were quite a strange mixture of stories and beliefs—much stranger than *Winnie the Pooh* mixed with *Narnia*. From the Bible and the growing Christian faith, medieval men learned of God, angels, and demons. From the influence of their ancestors—the German, Gaul, Celtic, Viking, and other European peoples—they learned about many other gods and supernatural beings such as dwarves, giants, and fairies. From the stories of Greece and Rome came philosophy and tales of goddesses like Natura and Fortuna. Adventure, unpredictability, warfare, heroes, princes, warriors, treacherous ladies, and noble-hearted princesses were all part of their stories. Who could hope to make sense of such a mess?

The medieval Christian's one great comfort was the belief that all other supernatural beings who might or might not exist were firmly subject to God and under His authority. All these things shaped medieval stories, in which God and fairies were both firmly believed, and people expected enchantments as much as they hoped for miracles. Out of this fantastical mixture of beliefs was born the story of King Arthur and his knights, which you will begin this week.

LITERATURE SUMMARY (P. 9-84)

Chapter 1: When Welsh Lord Vortigern conquers Roman King Constantine's kingdom of Britain, he faces opposition from the Picts and Scots, so he asks two Saxon warchiefs to help him. They soon betray Vortigern and begin to attack Britain. Seeking protection, Lord Vortigern sets about building a strong tower, but learns from his magicians that a special human sacrifice (a child with no earthly father) is needed to finish it. This child is Merlin. When brought to be sacrificed, Merlin tells Vortigern that the magicians lied and foretells the destruction of Lord Vortigern at the hands of the sons of King Constantine: Ambrosius and Utha. Merlin prophesies that each of these two men will be High King in turn, but that after them another, greater than they, will come. Merlin's prophecy comes true. Much later, with Merlin's help, High King Utha has an affair with virtuous Duchess Igraine by disguising himself as her husband, and Arthur is conceived. After the death of Igraine's husband far away in battle, Utha makes Igraine his Queen. Newborn Arthur is given to Merlin, who brings him to Lord Ector to be raised.

Chapter 2: Queen Igraine had three daughters with Duke Gorloise, her first husband: Margawse, Elaine, and Morgan La Fay, who has magical powers. When Utha dies, there is a civil war as lesser lords fight for his throne. Working with the Archbishop, Merlin sets up a contest in which the lord or knight who successfully removes a sword lodged in an anvil and marble slab is the true High King of Britain chosen by God. Many men try and fail. Lord Ector's son, Sir Kay, travels to London for the contest with his squire, Arthur. On the eve of a jousting tournament, Kay realizes that he is without his sword. Arthur, seeking a replacement sword for Kay, happens upon the sword in the stone and easily removes it. Merlin identifies Arthur, and the Archbishop crowns him High King.

Chapter 3: Arthur's half-sister, Margawse, pays him a visit. Disguised, she deceives him and conceives a son with him. When Mordred is born, Margawse tells the horrified Arthur the truth. Although guilt-stricken and deeply saddened by the event that he already recognizes as his death-sentence, Arthur continues to lead his kingdom. A little before these events, Arthur encounters the troublesome King Pellinore, a powerful knight who has been challenging other knights to jousts and killing them. One of Arthur's own knights is killed, so Arthur sends the newly-knighted but bold Sir Gryflet to Pellinore for revenge, only to receive him back wounded to death. Arthur himself goes out to face Pellinore under disguise. Arthur loses his sword in the battle and is saved only because Merlin interferes, putting Pellinore to sleep. Arthur is ashamed, but Merlin merely remarks that while Arthur's first sword served a purpose, he is now ready for a new one: Excalibur. Merlin brings Arthur to a lake where Excalibur, whose blade and sheath are of equal beauty,



is elevated above the water by a mysterious hand. Arthur makes a promise in exchange for the sword: its blade will never be used for unjust purposes.

Chapter 4: Merlin tells Arthur that it is time for him to marry. Remembering Guenever, whom he saw once as a child, Arthur chooses her. As a dowry her father sends him the Round Table, given to him by Arthur's father. On the wedding night, a deer comes running into the hall followed by a female hunting hound and a trail of hunting dogs. A knight seizes the hound and rides off with it. Then a damsel rides in on a horse claiming the hound as hers. Suddenly, a black knight enters, seizes the damsel, and flees. Merlin advises Arthur to send out three knights—Sir Gawain, Sir Lamorack, and King Pellinore (now Arthur's ally)—to retrieve respectively the deer, the female hound with the knight who took it, and the damsel with the knight who took her, dead or alive. The hounds kill the deer before Sir Gawain arrives, and are being killed by a strange knight, so Gawain challenges the strange knight and is victorious. In the heat of battle, though it is against the rules of warfare, Gawain prepares to cut off the head of the knight crying for mercy. However, his sword instead strikes the fallen knight's damsel, who throws herself over her knight. Sir Gawain is guilt-stricken. Meanwhile, after an adventure in which he acquires a dwarf companion, Sir Lamorack finds the hound and Sir Abellus, the knight who stole it. Lamorack jousts with and executes Abellus at the request of a damsel whom Abellus wronged. At the same time, King Pellinore, with his quest in mind, passes by a damsel and her wounded knight and does not stop though she asks for his help. Pellinore then finds two knights fighting over the damsel he seeks. Pellinore successfully rescues her, but on his way back Pellinore finds the damsel and knight he had passed earlier dead. He feels grief because he had the opportunity to help them and did not. While all this is going on, Merlin tells Arthur that he is leaving to pursue his own fate, which lies with the damsel whom King Pellinore has saved. She is Nimue, the one who gave Arthur Excalibur. The knights return to tell their tales, and Arthur shows mercy to their failures by allowing them to keep their places at the Round Table.

Chapter 5: Merlin and Nimue pay a visit to the young Lancelot, who is to join Arthur's Round Table. Merlin foretells Lancelot's future greatness. After this visit, Merlin finishes teaching magic to Nimue and rests under the hawthorn tree. Meanwhile Arthur, his half-sister Morgan La Fay, and their companions, come across a seemingly abandoned ship while on a hunting trip. They meet twelve damsels who invite them to feast and rest. When Arthur wakes up, he finds himself in the dark dungeon of Sir Damas, with twenty others. Sir Damas has a grudge against all knights because he could not find one to fight for him against his brother. Arthur agrees to fight in exchange for his and the other prisoners' freedom. At the same time, Morgan La Fay has persuaded Sir Accalon, one of Arthur's knights who is in love with her, to fight against a knight she hates. Neither the King nor Sir Accalon know that they will be fighting each other. Morgan secretly gives Excalibur to Sir Accalon so that he will win, but Nimue appears and returns Excalibur to Arthur, who then discovers that he is fighting his own knight. Meanwhile, thinking that Arthur is dead, Morgan schemes to kill her husband (King Uriens), marry Sir Accalon, and take over the kingdom. When her plans fail, Morgan decides to steal Excalibur, but is only able to take the sheath. Pursued by Arthur, Morgan tosses the sheath away and it is lost forever. After returning to Camelot, Morgan seeks to deceive Arthur again, sending him a message of repentance and a beautiful mantle. Just as Arthur is about to accept the mantle, Nimue appears and warns Arthur. He tells the damsel who brought the mantle to put it on, and it burns her to death.



ANSWERS TO WORKSHEET

1. This week you learned the definition for a “worldview” as well as the definitions for “reality,” “morality,” and “values.” The stories of King Arthur reflect the mixing of ancient polytheistic and biblical worldviews that you read about in the supplement this week. Try to find examples of beliefs from each of these two worldviews in *The Sword and the Circle*. Some sample answers have been included, but you should find at least six examples of your own. Remember to include page numbers just as you see done in the samples:
Student answers will vary. We have provided at least one other possible example in addition to the samples that the student received with his assignment this week:

- Examples of Biblical Worldview Beliefs:
 - Reality:
 - Sample: Sir Accalon says, “I see that God is with you” (77), which shows that in this story there is some belief in the reality of God.
 - Your Example: The contest for the Sword in the Stone is held on Christmas Day in the belief that Christ is real and that He will reveal the true king of England on a day that is sacred to Him (24). Since Arthur does pull the sword from the stone on that day, it seems to confirm that Christ is real.*
 - Morality:
 - Sample: It is right for rulers to serve God, as when Arthur says, “I will serve God and the realm of Britain with the best that is in me” (29).
 - Your Example: Morgan La Fey claims that “fends of hell” tempted her to kill her sleeping husband (79-80). The idea that demons may tempt humans to sin, as Satan did Eve, is a biblical one.*
 - Values:
 - Sample: The Knights of the Round Table make an oath to “keep faith” with God, showing that to them it is valuable to have a faithful relationship with God (66).
 - Your Example: Sir Ector asks Arthur to be a “gentle lord” to himself and to Kay (29). Gentleness is a virtue much prized among Christians, though less so in ancient polytheistic cultures.*
- Examples of Ancient Polytheistic Worldview Beliefs:
 - Reality:
 - Sample: In the beginning of the story, Vortigern tries to make a human sacrifice of Merlin to his gods (11). This shows that in the story the old gods are considered real.
 - Your Example: Merlin insists that the Lordly Ones, though neither wicked nor good, are definitely real. He says they “simply are” (64). Any similar example from the story that shows the reality of supernatural beings other than God would be an acceptable example.*
 - Morality:
 - Sample: Merlin does not describe Utha’s adulterous love for the married Igraine (17-18) as wrong. Instead of trying to stop Utha, Merlin helps him to deceive Igraine. Merlin seems to feel that this is simply part of the will of God, since Arthur is “God’s choice” for king (31).
 - Your Example: When Arthur sins with his half-sister, Morgawse, and finds out that she is expecting a child, he feels that he has “let loose his own doom,” and that “no tears or prayers” could undo it (37). This is consistent with the ancient polytheistic worldview, but not with a Christian worldview in which Christ offers salvation to sinners like Arthur who truly repent and pray for mercy from God.*
 - Values:
 - Sample: When Vortigern decides to sacrifice Merlin to the gods so that his fortress will be strong, he shows that he believes having the favor of the gods is valuable (11-12).
 - Your Example: Arthur holds his honor so dear that he would rather die than lose it (76). This attachment to personal honor comes from the polytheistic ancient cultures.*



2. A mode is a *speaker's attitude towards what he is speaking*. It is made up of things like mood, tone, manner of talking, and what the speaker chooses to emphasize. This week you learned in the *Literary Toolbox* about two modes that focus on what a speaker chooses to emphasize: the realistic and romantic modes.¹
- Realistic Mode: A mode that *emphasizes the horizontal and natural elements of reality*.
 - The realistic mode might be described as horizontal, dealing with people on earth and their relationships.
 - The realistic mode tends to describe the natural earthly realm as it usually seems to our earthly senses, in concrete, vivid, specific detail.
 - Realism concentrates on the horizontal and the earthly. It does not tend to focus on the reality, power, influence, and (or) significance of the supernatural realm as it touches life (including human life) on earth.
 - It also tends to portray people from the middle or lower classes and shows them as they ordinarily are, with typical strengths and weaknesses.
 - It emphasizes history, community (especially social issues), and human thoughts, feelings, and motivations.
 - Romantic Mode: A mode that *emphasizes the vertical and supernatural elements of reality*.
 - The romantic mode is called vertical in that it emphasizes man's interactions with the supernatural.
 - Tends to use a lavish, emotionally intense, and lyrical descriptive style, often rich with imagery
 - It tends to focus on supernatural beings and events and on their effects on earthly people and events.
 - Tends to portray people from the upper classes and shows them with extraordinary strengths and (or) weaknesses.
 - Tends to emphasize heroism, redemption, clear presentations of good and evil, and romantic love.

In at least two sentences and not more than four sentences, explain whether you think *The Sword and the Circle* is written more in the realistic or romantic mode, and why. Be sure to name the characteristics of either mode that you see in this story!

This story is clearly written in the Romantic Mode. Your student may give any of the following reasons, but should include at least one or two of them. He should also provide at least one specific example from the book, as we have done in the sample sentences below:

- This story is most clearly written in the Romantic Mode because it includes and emphasizes the human characters' interactions with a whole cast of supernatural beings: God, the Lordly Ones, the White and Red Dragons, the Lady of the Lake, Merlin, Nimue, etc.*
- The story portrays people from the upper classes (King Arthur, and his knights, Queen Guenevere, etc.) who have extraordinary strengths and weaknesses. Lancelot, for example, is both the strongest knight in the world and is also a knight with a fatal weakness for the married Queen Guenevere.*
- The story emphasizes heroism in Arthur's knights, the redemption of England from evil, clear presentations of good (such as King Arthur) and evil (such as Vortigern), and romantic love (Arthur's love for Guenevere).*

¹ We are indebted for a few of the following observations to Leland Ryken in *Words of Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992) 36-37.



CLASS TOPICS

3. Thinking Question: In the Literary Introduction, you learned about how the medieval world was shaped by at least three different worldview beliefs that were strongly held by different cultures: 1) Christians, 2) Non-Christian European peoples, such as the Celts, Saxons, Welsh, Danes, Gauls, etc., and 3) Ancient Greeks and Romans. After reading through this week's Student Supplement, try to give examples of these different cultures in *The Sword and the Circle*. The last one has already been done for you as an example.
- Christian:
 - There is a Christian archbishop (23-24).*
 - God is frequently mentioned (29, 31, 66).*
 - Non-Christian Europeans: *Vortigern is Welsh and the Saxons are Germanic in origin (9).*
 - Ancient Greeks and Romans: *Utha and Ambrosius are descended from Constantine, a Roman ruler (15). This means that Arthur's ancestors are Romans (37).*
4. The study of artistry means trying to find out what literary elements the author has chosen and arranged. It also means trying to understand what purpose the author wants to fulfill with his choices and arrangement, whether that is 1) to be pleasing or interesting, or 2) to show readers something that the writer thinks is important, or 3) both. Below is an example from one episode in *The Sword and the Circle*, the story of Merlin's encounter with Vortigern over the red and white dragons (see p. 9-15):
- Choice: What people, places, and things does the author choose for this story?
 - People: Vortigern, his wise men, and Merlin
 - Places: The place where Vortigern wants to build his new palace
 - Things: The red dragon and the white dragon
 - Arrangement: How does the author arrange the things he has chosen?
The writer arranges his story so that readers meet Vortigern first and find out how ruthless he is, then meet Merlin and find out how powerful he is, then finally learn from Merlin what will happen to Vortigern.
- Try to decide what Sutcliff's purpose might have been in telling this episode about Vortigern and Merlin, which occurs before Arthur is born?
- To be pleasing or interesting: *This episode is pleasing and interesting because it is magical and dramatic, including dragons, prophecies, and a strange boy who is not afraid of the king even though that king is trying to kill him!*
 - To show readers something that the writer thinks is important: *This episode gradually reveals the greatness of Merlin, as well as the future redemption of England from evil rulers such as Vortigern, which will happen when a powerful and good ruler named Arthur is born.*
5. Thinking Question:
- What kind of worldview beliefs—about reality, morality, and (or) values—do you think the following passages show? (One of these has been answered for you as an example.)
 - “Merlin and the Archbishop” (23-24): *The Archbishop agrees to work with Merlin and listen to him, even though Merlin is a magician, because he “recognizes a wisdom older than his own,” and was “wise enough to listen to other wisdom and other patterns than his own.” This shows how people during the Middle Ages tried to find ways of making their Christian beliefs work together with ancient polytheistic beliefs.*
 - “The Lordly Ones Simply Are” (64): *Merlin says that the Lordly Ones are neither wicked nor good, but that they simply exist. This statement shows how people in the Middle Ages believed in other supernatural beings besides God who did not specifically fit the moral biblical scheme of good and evil, but nevertheless—they believed—existed.*
 - “Mistaking the Actions of a Lordly One for the Actions of God” (77, 82): *Although He is mentioned in the story frequently, Sutcliff does not portray God as active in the natural world. Rather, the actions of the Lordly Ones (Nimue in restoring Excalibur to Arthur, and Morgan La Fay in disguising herself and her ladies as*



stones), are mistaken as the actions of God. This fits the medieval belief that God exists, but that other supernatural beings under His rule are much more active in human affairs.

- ❑ Do you have any concerns about the passages above, from a biblical perspective? If so, what bothers you?

There are a number of possible concerns.

- ❑ “Merlin and the Archbishop” (23-24): *While polytheistic faiths were in fact older than Christianity, and did possess some wisdom, the partnership of Christianity with other faiths results in a distortion of Christianity, which sadly did occur in the Middle Ages.*
- ❑ “The Lordly Ones Simply Are” (64): *The idea that the Lordly Ones exist outside of right and wrong is concerning because it seems that they are outside of God’s moral law, yet influence human lives and affairs.*
- ❑ “Mistaking the Actions of a Lordly One for the Actions of God” (77, 82): *The idea that God is too distant to interest Himself in human affairs, and that He instead allows magical beings to do so instead, is a false portrayal of God’s attitude towards man. It is also morally dangerous, for the characters in the story confuse the actions of God and the Lordly Ones, how are they to know which actions are morally good or evil?*

6. Thinking Questions:

- ❑ According to the definition in the *Literary Toolbox*, is *The Sword and the Circle* literature?

Yes, we think it is. Literature is “the portrayal and interpretation of reality, in a verbal artistic form, for a purpose.” Although it describes people, supernatural beings, and magical events that may never have existed, The Sword and the Circle still portrays and interprets some real beliefs and cultural practices of early Britain, in a verbal artistic form called a story, for the purpose of bringing those beliefs and that culture to life.

- ❑ Why do you think we study literature at all? Why not just read it?

Answers will vary. After hearing your student’s thoughts, discuss the following:

- ❑ Although we can “just read” literature and get a great deal out of it, we will benefit still more if we take time to study it. Great works of literature have more to offer than what we immediately notice.
- ❑ Also, it takes study to learn how to separate content from artistry, to discern whether content is true, and to see how artistry is being used to enhance the content.

7. Thinking Question: Which was your favorite character or episode so far in *The Sword and the Circle*. Why?

Your student was not asked to consider this question beforehand, so he may need a moment to consider. Obviously, answers will vary. We hope you will take some time to draw your student out and enjoy the story with him! In fact, we highly recommend this thinking question as a good one for the beginning of your next discussion.



TEACHER MATERIALS

NOTES FOR TEACHERS

- You will find the main text for this week summarized below, but we do recommend that you read the *Literary Toolbox* sections that your student has been assigned this week (see the “Reading” section below).
- We suggest that you open this week’s class discussion by asking students to share their favorite character or episode from their reading. Students appreciate genuine interest in their personal preferences and opinions!

Reading

- The Sword and the Circle*, by Rosemary Sutcliff, p. 85-148 (Week 2 of 2)
- Read or Review the following as needed from *The Literary Toolbox*
 - “Believers and Unbiblical Literature” (including both sub-sections)
 - “How Imaginative Literature Works” (including all four sub-sections)
 - In “The Study of Literature”: “Look to Learn and Like” through “Our Major Activities and Goals”
 - In “Frameworks”: “Genre: A Definition” through “The Story”
 - In “Characters”: “Character: A Definition”
 - In “Plot”: “Plot: A Definition”
 - In Settings: “Setting: A Definition” through “Cultural Settings”
 - In “Content”:
 - “Content: A Definition” through “Topic and Theme”
 - “Topic, Theme, and Worldviews in Stories”

Defining Terms

You may ask your student to write out vocabulary flashcards for the following new words this week:

- Character: A personality, whether human or non-human, in a story.
- Content: Meaningful information expressed in literature.
- Form: The artistic forms through which content is embodied, expressed, and enhanced in literature.
- Form Follows Function: An author chooses and arranges literary forms to function in support of his artistic work.
- Genre: A type of literature.
- Meaning through Form: The audience receives meaning through artistic forms chosen to embody and convey it.
- Plot: The arrangement of events in a story such that they have a beginning, middle, and end (from Aristotle’s *Poetics*).
- Setting: A location or situation in time, space, and culture that forms the background for a work of literature.
- Story: A piece of literature that has at least one character, plot, and setting, and uses narrative as its primary medium of expression.
- Theme: A message or meaning in literature.
- Topic: A subject(s) addressed in literature.

LITERARY INTRODUCTION

This week, you will learn about the term “Genre,” which means a kind of literature. There are three main kinds of fictional literature: drama (play scripts), poems, and stories. So far you have only read stories, but did you know that stories can be written as poems (called “Narrative” or “Storytelling” Poems), and that medieval people wrote most of their stories in poetry? In fact, most of the stories that you read about Arthur this week were originally poems, some of them quite beautiful. For example, this week’s story of “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” comes from a narrative poem by the same name that is considered one of the world’s most beautiful medieval poems.

Why were these stories originally written as poems? In the Middle Ages, where there were no televisions and few written things, a lot of stories were handed down as poetry so that they would be easier to memorize and more interesting to hear. People would recite them to each other for fun. The medieval people who did know how to write were good



at making poetry, and they used special literary tools to make their poems even more interesting. So, as you read this week, remember that many of these stories have been translated from English poetry into English prose stories!

LITERATURE SUMMARY (P. 85-148)

Chapter 6: Sir Lancelot seeks knighthood from King Arthur and receives it. Lancelot and Queen Guenever also become attracted to each other, though neither admits it. Lancelot sets out on a quest with his brother, Sir Lionel, to prove himself worthy of knighthood. One night while Lancelot is sleeping, Sir Lionel tries to win honor by saving three knights who are held captive by Sir Tarquine, but is himself captured. Meanwhile, Lancelot is captured by Morgan La Fay, but escapes with the aid of one of her maiden attendants. In exchange for the girl's help, Lancelot fights for her father in a tournament and succeeds. Lancelot then sets out to find Sir Lionel and frees him after defeating Sir Tarquine. Later, while visiting the manor house of an aged woman, Lancelot saves Sir Kay from three attacking knights and leaves the house wearing Sir Kay's armor. (Sir Kay, who was not a mighty fighter, returned home safely only because he was wearing Sir Lancelot's armor. No one dared to attack "Sir Lancelot!") Continuing his quest for adventure, Lancelot agrees to save Sir Meliot de Logure, the brother of a distressed damsel. Lancelot is able to accomplish this by retrieving a sword and piece of cloth from a dead knight in a haunted chapel. Lancelot then returns to Camelot, having earned a name for himself and proving himself worthy of knighthood. It is also revealed at the end that Lancelot's feelings for Queen Guenever have not changed.

Chapter 7: On New Year's Eve, a mysterious knight clad in green appears at Camelot. He challenges the knights: would one of them agree to strike him with his ax, and then be struck in the same spot a year and a day later? Sir Gawain eventually takes up the challenge, feeling that he has not yet fully earned his place at the Round Table. The Green Knight allows Gawain to strike off his head, but then calmly picks it up. The mouth speaks, telling Gawain to visit the Green Chapel in a year's time for his return blow. Gloom descends on Gawain, who feels this to be a death sentence. Nevertheless, he courageously sets out to keep his challenge to the Green Knight at the appointed time. He is made welcome at a castle near the Green Chapel, and the lord of the castle makes a bet with him: for the next three days, the lord will go out hunting while Gawain remains at his home. Each will give the other whatever he has won at the day's end. On the first morning, the lord's wife speaks lovingly to Gawain and gives him a single kiss; Gawain politely receives the kiss, and at the end of the day gives a kiss to the lord. The next day, Gawain receives two kisses, which he gives to the lord at the end of the day. On the final day of his stay, the lord's wife tempts Gawain to love her, but Gawain refuses. She gives him three kisses instead, and a magical green girdle that protects the wearer from harm. That night, Gawain gives the lord three kisses but not the girdle. The next morning, Gawain sets off to find the Green Knight and prepares to die. On the Knight's first swing, Gawain flinches and is spared; on the second swing, the Knight misses; and on the third swing, he only cuts Gawain's neck slightly. Gawain jumps up, saying that he has received the agreed blow. The Green Knight then reveals himself as the lord of the castle! He and his wife had agreed to test King Arthur's Knights, to see if they are as courageous and chaste as rumor says. The first two missed blows represent Gawain's honesty in giving the lord the kisses he had received and proceeding no further with the lord's wife. The final, more painful blow is a rebuke because Gawain did not give up the girdle, but on the whole the Green Knight is pleased with Gawain's integrity. Gawain returns to Arthur's court having truly earned his place at the Round Table.

Chapter 8: One day, a young man arrives at Arthur's court. He does not identify himself but asks Arthur for three unidentified gifts. Arthur agrees, as is his custom. The first gift is food and clothing for a year's time, so Arthur makes the man a kitchen servant, whom Sir Kay mockingly nicknames Beaumains ("White Hands," meaning he is not used to hard work). A year later, a damsel named Linnet comes to Arthur's court, requesting help for her sister Lionese, who is held captive by a Red Knight. Beaumains asks for his last two gifts: that he should be given the quest, and that Sir Lancelot should accompany him to knight him. Arthur grants his wishes, but Linnet leaves in disdain at the idea of a "kitchen knight" aiding her. Beaumains rides off in pursuit. When Sir Kay follows to tease him, Beaumains challenges, defeats, and sends Sir Kay home in embarrassment. After defeating another knight, Beaumains explains to Sir Lancelot that he is Gareth, youngest son of King Lot and Queen Margawse, brother to Sir Gawain. Sir Lancelot makes Sir Gareth a knight and leaves him to his quest. Along the journey, Gareth encounters yet another knight and has victory over him, finally earning the approval of Linnet. Eventually Gareth challenges the Red Knight and prevails over him. Arthur then grants Sir Gareth the hand of Lionese in marriage, thus bringing Gareth's quest to a successful end.



ANSWERS TO WORKSHEET

1. This week you learned that a story must include character, plot, and setting. Below are the characters, plot, and setting in this week's "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Write down what you think are the characters, plot, and setting for "Beaumains, the Kitchen Knight":

"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight"

- Characters: King Arthur, Sir Gawain, the Green Knight, and the Green Knight's Lady.
- Plot: Sir Gawain accepts a challenge from a Green Knight that it seems he cannot lose but soon finds himself oath-bound to die. While on his way to keep his deadly appointment, Sir Gawain meets the Green Knight (in disguise) and his lady. They test Sir Gawain and, finding him courageous, spares his life. Gawain returns to Camelot, having now fully earned his seat at the Round Table.
- Setting: Camelot, the Green Chapel, the home of the Green Knight, England, the Middle Ages.

"Beaumains, the Kitchen Knight"

- Characters: King Arthur, Sir Beaumains, Sir Kay, Linnet, Lionese, the Red Knight
- Plot: Beaumains, son of King Lot and Queen Morgawse, comes in disguise to Arthur's court, where he works as a kitchen servant for a year before asking Arthur to let him undertake a quest for the lady Linnet. Since he still has not revealed his name, Linnet is disdainful of this "kitchen knight." However, during their journey Beaumains proves himself in contests with other knights and reveals his name to Sir Lancelot, who accompanied them. Sir Lancelot knights Beaumains, who also eventually wins Linnet's respect and accomplishes her quest to free her sister, Lionese. Arthur grants Lionese's hand in marriage to Beaumains.
- Setting: Camelot, England, the Middle Ages.

2. Based on what you learned about content this week in the *Literary Toolbox*, try to write down theme(s) for at least two of the following topics in *The Sword and the Circle*. Because this is a more complex story, we have helped you by writing down some of the topics. Your job is to decide what you think Rosemary Sutcliff is saying about each of these topics and write down some themes. Remember that a theme cannot be single word or a phrase: it should be a complete sentence that expresses the author's comment on a given subject, like the theme for *The Story of the Three Little Pigs*. One has been done for you as an example, and for each topic we have provided some page numbers where the topic is discussed:

- Knighthood:
 - Fighting in a Just Cause/Justice/Fairness (44, 60-61, 66, 89): *Justice is honorable and is upheld by the knights and the king.*
 - Honor (55, 76): *It is better to die with honor than to live with shame.*
 - Courage (41, 98): *Courage is valuable and is required of knights who are worthy of the name.*
 - Showing Mercy (55, 57, 92, 100-101): *Showing mercy is good, honorable, valuable, and right.*
 - Keeping Faith with God (66): *A knight is supposed to keep faith with God.*
 - Taking Adventures (72): *Taking adventures is a way to get glory (and a way for Lancelot to escape his feelings for Guenever).*
 - Loving Another Man's Wife (122): *It is wrong and shameful to romantically love another man's wife.*
 - Serving and Protecting Ladies (53, 55, 62, 65): *A true knight serves and protects all ladies who are in distress, and if he does not, or worse, if he harms a lady needlessly, it is to his everlasting shame.*
- Kingship (32):
 - Kingship is grand, valuable, and difficult.*
 - When he claims his crown, Arthur urges the men of England to help him make their nation a place where "men are strong for the Right" (32). He shows that kings should love justice and uprightness.*
- Treachery to Friends and Family (36-37, 79-82): *Treachery to friends and family is an evil thing, dishonorable and shameful.*
- The Lordly Ones (23-24, 37, 64, 77, 82): *Beings who are "neither good nor evil" exist and influence the lives of men on earth, sometimes in such a way that their actions are mistaken for those of God. They have wisdom and power, and it is not wrong to accept their help or seek their advice, even though they have no explicit allegiance to Christ.*



CLASS TOPICS

3. Thinking Questions: Do you agree with any of these themes? If so, which ones, and why?

Answers will vary. With the exception of the themes about the Lordly Ones, which we discussed last week, students will likely agree with most of these themes, as many of them are originally biblical or parallel biblical principles.

- The themes dealing with seeking adventure, glory, and honor do require some balanced thinking in that they show a strong desire among the knights for personal glory and honor. Christians know that our own glory and honor are less meaningful and less valuable to us than God's glory and honor.
- At the same time, we recommend that in your discussion you consider Scripture's own clear statement that "He [God] will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life" (Romans 2:6-7). God rewards believers for seeking glory and honor within His plan for our lives, though He also reminds us that "for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury" (Romans 2:8).
- As with so many of God's other good gifts, a believer need not shun the desire for them, since God has provided good ways for us to seek glory and honor. At the same time, a good desire for these must not become a bad demand that exceeds our desire to see God glorified and honored.

4. Thinking Question: This week you learned about Meaning through Form and Form Follows Function:

- Meaning through Form: This principle tells us that when an author is trying to communicate his beliefs about what is real, right, wrong, and (or) valuable, he does it by embodying his meaning in particular forms such as characters, settings, and plot.
- Form Follows Function: This principle tells us that an author will always pick out and arrange such characters, settings, and things that happen in the plot, so that he can communicate what he wants to say.

Could any of the exercises you did last week or this week serve as examples of these principles? If so, how so?

Exercise 2 from this week, as well as Exercise 4 from last week, each relate to one of these two principles:

- Exercise 2 from Week 2: The exercise on topics and themes in The Sword and the Circle is an example of the principle of Meaning through Form, because the themes tell us what medieval people believed was real or not real, right or wrong, valuable or not valuable.*
- Exercise 4 from Week 1: This exercise exemplifies the principle of Form Follows Function, since it asked you to explain how the author's choice and arrangement of forms (people, places, things) resulted in a meaningful point: the greatness of Merlin and the future redemption of England by Arthur.*

5. Thinking Question: This week you read about literature written by unbiblical authors, and about how we can value it even while disagreeing with the worldviews in it. Consider the following questions and be prepared to offer your thoughts in class.

- Why would we choose to study a story that shows polytheistic beliefs tangled together with biblical beliefs?
Answers will vary, but hopefully your student will express some part of what he read in The Literary Toolbox about the value of better understanding various worldviews and the people who believe them so that we are positioned to speak the truth to others in love with a clear, compassionate articulation of our own beliefs and theirs.
- Do these stories also offer us any hints of common grace, or help us to develop discernment and strength in any way? If so, how so?
Answers will vary. We think that many of the themes in the story show common grace, and that a careful discussion of the Lordly Ones can help us to develop discernment, as well as a stronger understanding of our own biblical worldview.
- Do these stories in *The Sword and the Circle* give us a vicarious experience of the worldviews that came together to form medieval beliefs? If so, is that useful?
Answers will vary. We think they do offer a vicarious experience of some common medieval beliefs, and that this is useful because it allows us to "test everything and keep that which is good," as well as building our ability to truly understand others and thus communicate with them more skillfully.
- Are there ways in which you can be grateful for this book? If so, what are they?
Answers will vary.



6. Thinking Questions: This week you read in the *Literary Toolbox* about our three big goals for literature studies: understanding, evaluating, and enjoying. Consider the following questions about those three big goals and the story that you read on this week:
- ❑ Did you notice that we took time this week to study and try to understand what is going on in *The Sword and the Circle*, and to evaluate its worldview from a biblical perspective?
Answers will vary. Hopefully your student did notice it after reading this question, if not before.
 - ❑ Did you enjoy this week's reading in *The Sword and the Circle* more or less than other stories that you have read, because we took extra time to understand and evaluate it?
Answers will vary. We do not recommend that you put any pressure on the student to give the "right" answer of "Yes, I did enjoy it more." If the student expresses that he did not enjoy the story more as a result of taking time to understand and evaluate it, we suggest that you simply acknowledge his opinion as valid and express hope that he may feel differently after more experience. Often it takes students as much as six months of repeated exposure to develop a sense of value for understanding and evaluating literature!