

PREPARING to Read

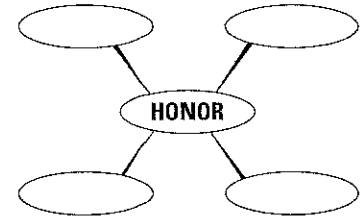
from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Romance by THE GAWAIN POET

Translated by JOHN GARDNER

Connect to Your Life

A Person of Honor Suppose that you hear someone say, "The student-council president should be a person of honor." What qualities or ideals come to mind? Create a word web like the one shown, jotting down words or phrases that you think describe an honorable person.



Build Background

An Ideal World Medieval aristocrats relished tales of adventure, especially stories of brave and gallant knights. Although real knights were far from perfect, the knights of legend strove continually to obey a code of chivalry, a set of rules for gentlemanly and heroic behavior. Their code represented a combination of Christian and military ideals, including faith, modesty, loyalty, courtesy, bravery, and honor. The ideal knight respected and vigorously defended his church, his king, his country, and victims of injustice.

Especially popular during the medieval period were legends of King Arthur and his heroic knights of the Round Table. The popularity of these tales was due in part to the idealized world in which they were set. It was a world of castles, heroes, courtly love, and magical spells—a world quite unlike the real medieval England, with its plagues, political battles, and civil unrest.

Although Launcelot was often presented as the greatest and most distinguished of Arthur's knights, in early tales that role was given to Arthur's nephew Gawain (gə-wān'), who was famous for his courage and for his unfailing chivalry.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

aghast	pivot
amended	renown
chagrin	reproof
daunt	respite
efficacious	uncanny
flinch	unwieldy
heft	wince
ingeniously	

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS ROMANCE The **romance** has been a popular narrative form since the Middle Ages. Generally, the term *romance* refers to any imaginative adventure concerned with noble heroes, gallant love, a chivalric code of honor, and daring deeds. Romances usually have faraway settings, depict events unlike those of ordinary life, and idealize their heroes as well as the eras in which the heroes lived. Medieval romances are also often lighthearted in tone and involve fantasy. Be aware of the characteristics of romance as you read the excerpt from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

ACTIVE READING READING A NARRATIVE POEM

Like all narrative poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* contains the same elements as a short story—**setting**, **characters**, and **plot**. These elements combine to develop one or more **themes**. With any narrative poem, it is important to identify details of setting, character, and plot as you read.

READER'S NOTEBOOK Keep track of the plot by writing brief notes about the actions of each character. Note the ways in which honor plays a role in the course of events.

from

SIR GAWAIN and the



As the poem begins, Arthur and his knights are gathered to celebrate Christmas and the new year with feasting and revelry. In the midst of their festivities, an enormous man—who is entirely green—bounds through the door.

Splendid that knight errant stood in a splay of green,
And green, too, was the mane of his mighty destrier;
Fair fanning tresses enveloped the fighting man's shoulders,
And over his breast hung a beard as big as a bush;
5 The beard and the huge mane burgeoning forth from his head
Were clipped off clean in a straight line over his elbows,
And the upper half of each arm was hidden underneath
As if covered by a king's chaperon, closed round the neck.
The mane of the marvelous horse was much the same,
10 Well crisped and combed and carefully pranked with knots,
Threads of gold interwoven with the glorious green,
Now a thread of hair, now another thread of gold;
The tail of the horse and the forelock were tricked the same way,
And both were bound up with a band of brilliant green
15 Adorned with glittering jewels the length of the dock,
Then caught up tight with a thong in a criss-cross knot
Where many a bell tinkled brightly, all burnished gold.
So monstrous a mount, so mighty a man in the saddle
Was never once encountered on all this earth
20 till then;
His eyes, like lightning, flashed,
And it seemed to many a man,
That any man who clashed
With him would not long stand.

GUIDE FOR READING

1 knight errant (ër'ənt): a knight who wanders about, searching for adventure in order to prove his chivalry;
splay: display.

2 destrier (dēs'trē-ər): war horse.

5 burgeoning (būr'jē-nĭng): growing.

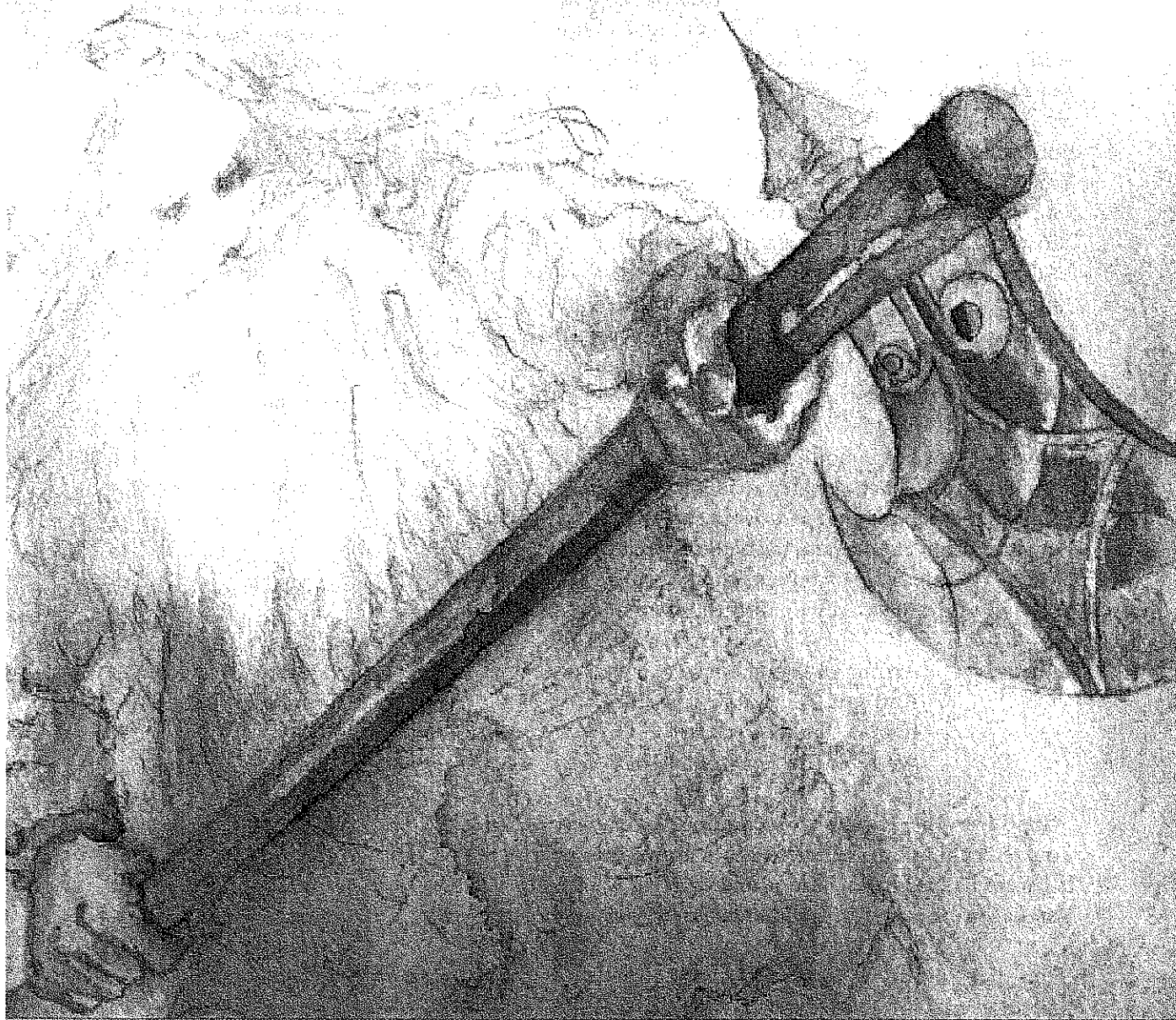
8 chaperon (shăp'ə-rŏn'): hood.

10 pranked with knots: decorated with bows.

13 forelock: the part of a horse's mane that falls forward between the ears.

15 dock: the fleshy part of an animal's tail.

Green Knight



- 25 But the huge man came unarmed, without helmet or hauberk,
 No breastplate or gorget or iron cleats on his arms;
 He brought neither shield nor spearshaft to shove or to smite,
 But instead he held in one hand a bough of the holly
 That grows most green when all the groves are bare
 30 And held in the other an ax, immense and unwieldy,
 A pitiless battleblade terrible to tell of.

- ~~~~~
- King Arthur stared down at the stranger before the high dais
 And greeted him nobly, for nothing on earth frightened him.
 And he said to him, "Sir, you are welcome in this place;
 35 I am the head of this court. They call me Arthur.
 Get down from your horse, I beg you, and join us for dinner,
 And then whatever you seek we will gladly see to."
 But the stranger said, "No, so help me God on high,
 My errand is hardly to sit at my ease in your castle!
 40 But friend, since your praises are sung so far and wide,
 Your castle the best ever built, people say, and your barons
 The stoutest men in steel armor that ever rode steeds,
 Most mighty and most worthy of all mortal men
 And tough devils to toy with in tournament games,
 45 And since courtesy is in flower in this court, they say,
 All these tales, in truth, have drawn me to you at this time.
 You may be assured by this holly branch I bear
 That I come to you in peace, not spoiling for battle.
 If I'd wanted to come in finery, fixed up for fighting,
 50 I have back at home both a helmet and a hauberk,
 A shield and a sharp spear that shines like fire,
 And other weapons that I know pretty well how to use.
 But since I don't come here for battle, my clothes are mere cloth.
 Now if you are truly as bold as the people all say,
 55 You will grant me gladly the little game that I ask
 as my right."

- Arthur gave him answer
 And said, "Sir noble knight,
 If it's a duel you're after,
 60 We'll furnish you your fight."

"Good heavens, I want no such thing! I assure you, Sire,
 You've nothing but beardless babes about this bench!
 If I were hasped in my armor and high on my horse,
 You haven't a man that could match me, your might is so feeble.

25 hauberk (hó'berk): a coat of chain mail (a type of armor).

26 breastplate or gorget (gór'jít) or **iron cleats**: armor for the chest, the throat, or the shoulders and elbows.

32 dais (dā'ys): a raised platform where honored guests are seated.

34 this place: Camelot, Arthur's favorite castle and the site of his court of the Round Table.

44 In medieval tournaments, knights on horseback fought one another for sport.

45 courtesy: the high standards of behavior expected in a king's court;
in flower: at its best.

48 spoiling for; eager for.

63 hasped: fastened.

61-64 What is the Green Knight's tone as he addresses King Arthur?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

unwieldy (ŭn-wēl'dē) *adj.* so large, heavy, or oddly shaped as to be difficult to hold or use

65 And so all I ask of this court is a Christmas game,
 For the Yule is here, and New Year's, and here sit young men;
 If any man holds himself, here in this house, so hardy,
 So bold in his blood—and so brainless in his head—
 That he dares to stoutly exchange one stroke for another,
 70 I shall let him have as my present this lovely gisarme,
 This ax, as heavy as he'll need, to handle as he likes,
 And I will abide the first blow, bare-necked as I sit.
 If anyone here has the daring to try what I've offered,
 Leap to me lightly, lad; lift up this weapon;
 75 I give you the thing forever—you may think it your own;
 And I will stand still for your stroke, steady on the floor,
 Provided you honor my right, when my inning comes,
 to repay.

70 gisarme (gĭ-zärm'): a battle-ax with a long shaft and a two-edged head.

80 But let the respite be
 A twelvemonth and a day;
 Come now, my boys, let's see
 What any here can say."

67-82 What challenge does the Green Knight offer?

If they were like stone before, they were stiller now,
 Every last lord in the hall, both the high and the low;
 85 The stranger on his destrier stirred in the saddle
 And ferociously his red eyes rolled around;
 He lowered his grisly eyebrows, glistening green,
 And waved his beard and waited for someone to rise;
 When no one answered, he coughed, as if embarrassed,
 90 And drew himself up straight and spoke again:
 "What! Can this be King Arthur's court?" said the stranger,
 "Whose renown runs through many a realm, flung far and wide?
 What has become of your chivalry and your conquest,
 Your greatness-of-heart and your grimness and grand words?
 95 Behold the radiance and renown of the mighty Round Table
 Overwhelmed by a word out of one man's mouth!
 You shiver and blanch before a blow's been shown!"
 And with that he laughed so loud that the lord was distressed;
 In chagrin, his blood shot up in his face and limbs

97 blanch: turn white.

100 so fair;
 More angry he was than the wind,
 And likewise each man there;
 And Arthur, bravest of men,
 Decided now to draw near.

99-101 Why is King Arthur so angry?

WORDS **respite** (rĕs'pĭt) *n.* a period of rest or delay
 TO **renown** (rĭ-noun') *n.* fame
 KNOW **chagrin** (shə-grĭn') *n.* a feeling of embarrassment caused by humiliation or failure

105 And he said, "By heaven, sir, your request is strange;
 But since you have come here for folly, you may as well find it.
 I know no one here who's aghast of your great words.
 Give me your gisarme, then, for the love of God,
 And gladly I'll grant you the gift you have asked to be given."
 110 Lightly the King leaped down and clutched it in his hand;
 Then quickly that other lord alighted on his feet.
 Arthur lay hold of the ax, he gripped it by the handle,
 And he swung it up over him sternly, as if to strike.
 The stranger stood before him, in stature higher
 115 By a head or more than any man here in the house;
 Sober and thoughtful he stood there and stroked his beard,
 And with patience like a priest's he pulled down his collar,
 No more unmanned or dismayed by Arthur's might
 Than he'd be if some baron on the bench had brought him a glass
 120 of wine.

Then Gawain, at Guinevere's side,
 Made to the King a sign:
 "I beseech you, Sire," he said,
 "Let this game be mine.

125 "Now if you, my worthy lord," said Gawain to the King,
 "Would command me to step from the dais and stand with you there,
 That I might without bad manners move down from my place
 (Though I couldn't, of course, if my liege lady disliked it)
 I'd be deeply honored to advise you before all the court;
 130 For I think it unseemly, if I understand the matter,
 That challenges such as this churl has chosen to offer
 Be met by Your Majesty—much as it may amuse you—
 When so many bold-hearted barons sit about the bench:
 No men under Heaven, I am sure, are more hardy in will
 135 Or better in body on the fields where battles are fought;
 I myself am the weakest, of course, and in wit the most feeble;
 My life would be least missed, if we let out the truth.
 Only as you are my uncle have I any honor,
 For excepting your blood, I bear in my body slight virtue.
 140 And since this affair that's befallen us here is so foolish,
 And since I have asked for it first, let it fall to me.
 If I've reasoned incorrectly, let all the court say,
 without blame."

The nobles gather round
 145 And all advise the same:
 "Let the King step down
 And give Sir Gawain the game!"

106 folly: dangerous and foolish activity.

118 unmanned: deprived of manly courage.

121 Guinevere: King Arthur's wife.

128 liege (lēj) lady: a lady to whom one owes loyalty and service; here used by Gawain to refer to Queen Guinevere.

131 churl: rude, uncouth person.

136-139 How does Gawain's description of himself reflect a knight's code of chivalry?

WORDS
 TO
 KNOW

aghast (ə-găst') *adj.* struck with terror or amazement; shocked



Arthur grants Gawain's request to take on the Green Knight's challenge.
The Green Knight asks Gawain to identify himself, and the two agree on
their pact. Gawain then prepares to strike his blow against the Green Knight.

On the ground, the Green Knight got himself into position,
His head bent forward a little, the bare flesh showing,
150 His long and lovely locks laid over his crown
So that any man there might note the naked neck.
Sir Gawain laid hold of the ax and he hefted it high,
His pivot foot thrown forward before him on the floor,
And then, swiftly, he slashed at the naked neck;
155 The sharp of the battleblade shattered asunder the bones
And sank through the shining fat and slit it in two,
And the bit of the bright steel buried itself in the ground.
The fair head fell from the neck to the floor of the hall
And the people all kicked it away as it came near their feet.
160 The blood splashed up from the body and glistened on the green,
But he never faltered or fell for all of that,
But swiftly he started forth upon stout shanks
And rushed to reach out, where the King's retainers stood,
Caught hold of the lovely head, and lifted it up,
165 And leaped to his steed and snatched up the reins of the bridle,
Stepped into stirrups of steel and, striding aloft,
He held his head by the hair, high, in his hand;
And the stranger sat there as steadily in his saddle
As a man entirely unharmed, although he was headless
170 on his steed.

He turned his trunk about,
That baleful body that bled,
And many were faint with fright
When all his say was said.

175 He held his head in his hand up high before him,
Addressing the face to the dearest of all on the dais;
And the eyelids lifted wide, and the eyes looked out,
And the mouth said just this much, as you may now hear:
"Look that you go, Sir Gawain, as good as your word,
180 And seek till you find me, as loyally, my friend,
As you've sworn in this hall to do, in the hearing of the knights.
Come to the Green Chapel, I charge you, and take
A stroke the same as you've given, for well you deserve
To be readily requited on New Year's morn.

162 shanks: legs.

163 retainers: servants or attendants.

172 baleful: threatening evil; sinister.

184 requited: paid back.
For what does Gawain
deserve to be requited?
How do you expect this
will be done?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

heft (hĕft) *v.* to lift up; hoist
pivot (pĭv'et) *adj.* acting as a center around which something turns

185 Many men know me, the Knight of the Green Chapel;
 Therefore if you seek to find me, you shall not fail.
 Come or be counted a coward, as is fitting.”
 Then with a rough jerk he turned the reins
 And haled away through the hall-door, his head in his hand.
 190 And fire of the flint flew out from the hooves of the foal.
 To what kingdom he was carried no man there knew,
 No more than they knew what country it was he came from.

What then?

The King and Gawain there
 195 Laugh at the thing and grin;
 And yet, it was an affair
 Most marvelous to men.



As the end of the year approaches, Gawain leaves on his quest to find the Green Chapel and fulfill his pledge. After riding through wild country and encountering many dangers, he comes upon a splendid castle. The lord of the castle welcomes Gawain and invites him to stay with him and his lady for a few days.

The lord proposes that he will go out to hunt each day while Gawain stays at the castle. At the end of the day, they will exchange what they have won. While the lord is out hunting, the lady attempts to seduce Gawain. Gawain resists her, however, and on the first two days accepts only kisses, which he gives to the lord at the end of each day in exchange for what the lord has gained in the hunt. On the third day Gawain continues to resist the lady, but she presses him to accept another gift.

She held toward him a ring of the yellowest gold
 And, standing aloft on the band, a stone like a star
 200 From which flew splendid beams like the light of the sun;
 And mark you well, it was worth a rich king's ransom.
 But right away he refused it, replying in haste,
 “My lady gay, I can hardly take gifts at the moment;
 Having nothing to give, I'd be wrong to take gifts in turn.”
 205 She implored him again, still more earnestly, but again
 He refused it and swore on his knighthood that he could take nothing.
 Grieved that he still would not take it, she told him then:
 “If taking my ring would be wrong on account of its worth,
 And being so much in my debt would be bothersome to you,
 210 I'll give you merely this sash that's of slighter value.”
 She swiftly unfastened the sash that encircled her waist,
 Tied around her fair tunic, inside her bright mantle;
 It was made of green silk and was marked of gleaming gold

205 implored: begged.

212 tunic: a shirtlike garment worn by both men and women; mantle: a sleeveless cloak worn over the tunic.

Embroidered along the edges, ingeniously stitched.

215 This too she held out to the knight, and she earnestly begged him
To take it, trifling as it was, to remember her by.

216 trifling: of little value.

But again he said no, there was nothing at all he could take,
Neither treasure nor token, until such time as the Lord
Had granted him some end to his adventure.

220 “And therefore, I pray you, do not bē displeased,
But give up, for I cannot grant it, however fair
or right.

I know your worth and price,
And my debt's by no means slight;

225 I swear through fire and ice
To be your humble knight."

"Do you lay aside this silk," said the lady then, "Because it seems unworthy—as well it may?"

230 Listen. Little as it is, it seems less in value,
But he who knew what charms are woven within it
Might place a better price on it, perchance.

For the man who goes to battle in this green lace,
As long as he keeps it looped around him,
No man under Heaven can hurt him, whoever may try,

235 For nothing on earth, however uncanny, can kill him."

The knight cast about in distress, and it came to his heart
This might be a treasure indeed when the time came to take
The blow he had bargained to suffer beside the Green Chapel.
If the gift meant remaining alive, it might well be worth it;

240 So he listened in silence and suffered the lady to speak,
And she pressed the sash upon him and begged him to take it,
And Gawain did, and she gave him the gift with great pleasure
And begged him, for her sake, to say not a word,
And to keep it hidden from her lord. And he said he would,

242 Why do you think Gawain finally accepts the green sash?

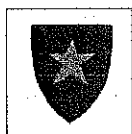
245 That except for themselves, this business would never be known
to a man.

He thanked her earnestly,
And boldly his heart now ran;
And now a third time she

250 Leaned down and kissed her man.

When the lord returns at the end of the third day, Gawain gives him a kiss but does not reveal the gift of the sash.

WORDS TO KNOW **ingeniously** (ŷn-jēn'yəs-lē) *adv.* in a way marked by skill and imagination; cleverly
uncanny (ŷn-kăn'ē) *adj.* frighteningly unnatural or supernatural; mysterious

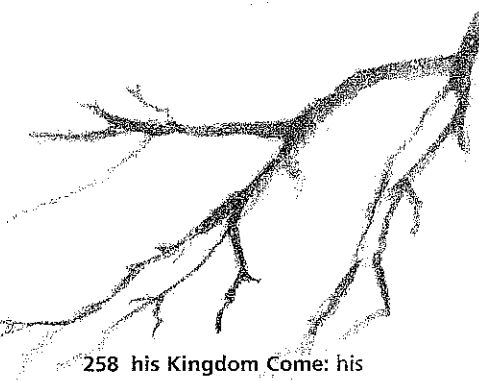


On New Year's Day Gawain must go to meet the Green Knight. Wearing the green sash, he sets out before dawn. Gawain arrives at a wild, rugged place, where he sees no chapel but hears the sound of a blade being sharpened. Gawain calls out, and the Green Knight appears with a huge ax. The Green Knight greets Gawain, who, with pounding heart, bows his head to take his blow.

Quickly then the man in the green made ready,
Grabbed up his keen-ground ax to strike Sir Gawain;
With all the might in his body he bore it aloft
And sharply brought it down as if to slay him;
255 Had he made it fall with the force he first intended
He would have stretched out the strongest man on earth.
But Sir Gawain cast a side glance at the ax
As it glided down to give him his Kingdom Come,
And his shoulders jerked away from the iron a little,
260 And the Green Knight caught the handle, holding it back,
And mocked the prince with many a proud reproof:
"You can't be Gawain," he said, "who's thought so good,
A man who's never been daunted on-hill or dale!
For look how you flinch for fear before anything's felt!
265 I never heard tell that Sir Gawain was ever a coward!
I never moved a muscle when you came down;
In Arthur's hall I never so much as winced.
My head fell off at my feet, yet I never flickered;
But you! You tremble at heart before you're touched!
270 I'm bound to be called a better man than you, then,
my lord."

Said Gawain, "I shied once:
No more. You have my word.
But if my head falls to the stones
275 It cannot be restored.

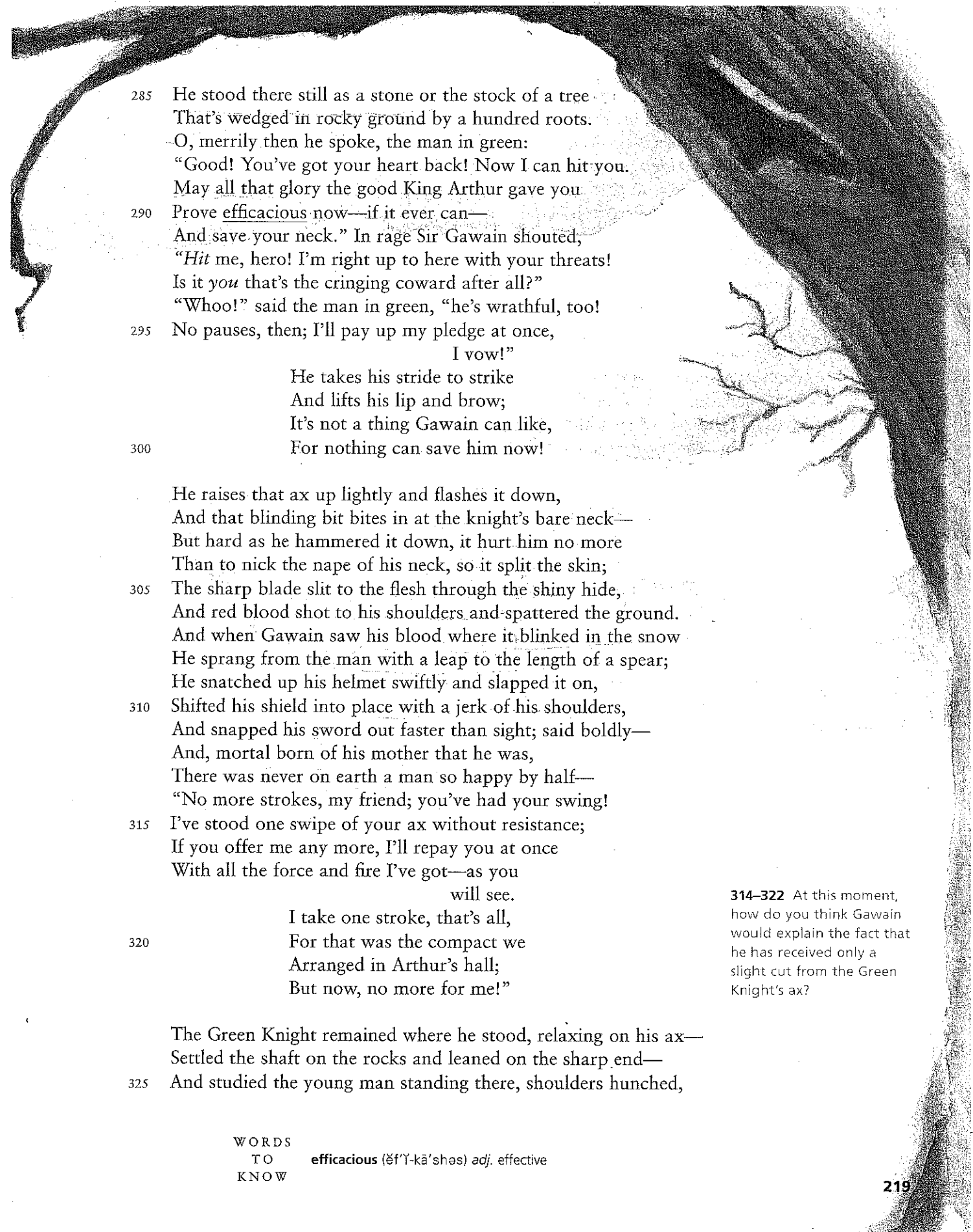
"But be brisk, man, by your faith, and come to the point!
Deal out my doom if you can, and do it at once,
For I'll stand for one good stroke, and I'll start no more
Until your ax has hit—and that I swear."
280 "Here goes, then," said the other, and heaves it aloft
And stands there waiting, scowling like a madman;
He swings down sharp, then suddenly stops again,
Holds back the ax with his hand before it can hurt,
And Gawain stands there stirring not even a nerve;



258 his Kingdom Come: his death and entry into the afterlife; a reference to the sentence "Thy kingdom come" in the Lord's Prayer.

274–275 The Green Knight has proclaimed himself a better man than Gawain. How does Gawain dispute that idea in these lines?

WORDS TO KNOW	reproof (rĭ-prōōf') <i>n.</i> an expression of disapproval; criticism
	daunt (dōnt) <i>v.</i> to destroy the courage of; dismay
	flinch (flĭnch) <i>v.</i> to pull back from something unpleasant or surprising
	wince (wĭns) <i>v.</i> to spring back involuntarily, as in pain



285 He stood there still as a stone or the stock of a tree
That's wedged in rocky ground by a hundred roots.
O, merrily then he spoke, the man in green:
"Good! You've got your heart back! Now I can hit you.
May all that glory the good King Arthur gave you
290 Prove efficacious now—if it ever can—
And save your neck." In rage Sir Gawain shouted,
"Hit me, hero! I'm right up to here with your threats!
Is it you that's the cringing coward after all?"
"Whoo!" said the man in green, "he's wrathful, too!"
295 No pauses, then; I'll pay up my pledge at once,

I vow!"

He takes his stride to strike
And lifts his lip and brow;
It's not a thing Gawain can like,
300 For nothing can save him now!

He raises that ax up lightly and flashes it down,
And that blinding bit bites in at the knight's bare neck—
But hard as he hammered it down, it hurt him no more
Than to nick the nape of his neck, so it split the skin;
305 The sharp blade slit to the flesh through the shiny hide,
And red blood shot to his shoulders and spattered the ground.
And when Gawain saw his blood where it blinked in the snow
He sprang from the man with a leap to the length of a spear;
He snatched up his helmet swiftly and slapped it on,
310 Shifted his shield into place with a jerk of his shoulders,
And snapped his sword out faster than sight; said boldly—
And, mortal born of his mother that he was,
There was never on earth a man so happy by half—
"No more strokes, my friend; you've had your swing!
315 I've stood one swipe of your ax without resistance;
If you offer me any more, I'll repay you at once
With all the force and fire I've got—as you

will see.

I take one stroke, that's all,
320 For that was the compact we
Arranged in Arthur's hall;
But now, no more for me!"

The Green Knight remained where he stood, relaxing on his ax—
Settled the shaft on the rocks and leaned on the sharp end—
325 And studied the young man standing there, shoulders hunched,

314–322 At this moment, how do you think Gawain would explain the fact that he has received only a slight cut from the Green Knight's ax?

WORDS
TO
KNOW

efficacious (ěf'ĭ-kā'shəs) *adj.* effective

And considered that staunch and doughty stance he took,
 Undaunted yet, and in his heart he liked it;
 And then he said merrily, with a mighty voice—
 With a roar like rushing wind he reproved the knight—
 330 “Here, don’t be such an ogre on your ground!
 Nobody here has behaved with bad manners toward you
 Or done a thing except as the contract said.
 I owed you a stroke, and I’ve struck; consider yourself
 Well paid. And now I release you from all further duties.
 335 If I’d cared to hustle, it may be, perchance, that I might
 Have hit somewhat harder, and then you might well be cross!
 The first time I lifted my ax it was lighthearted sport,
 I merely feinted and made no mark, as was right,
 For you kept our pact of the first night with honor
 340 And abided by your word and held yourself true to me,
 Giving me all you owed as a good man should.
 I feinted a second time, friend, for the morning
 You kissed my pretty wife twice and returned me the kisses;
 And so for the first two days, mere feints, nothing more
 345 severe.

A man who’s true to his word,
 There’s nothing he needs to fear;
 You failed me, though, on the third
 Exchange, so I’ve tapped you here.

350 “That sash you wear by your scabbard belongs to me;
 My own wife gave it to you, as I ought to know.
 I know, too, of your kisses and all your words
 And my wife’s advances, for I myself arranged them.
 It was I who sent her to test you. I’m convinced
 355 You’re the finest man that ever walked this earth.
 As a pearl is of greater price than dry white peas,
 So Gawain indeed stands out above all other knights.
 But you lacked a little, sir; you were less than loyal;
 But since it was not for the sash itself or for lust
 360 But because you loved your life, I blame you less.”
 Sir Gawain stood in a study a long, long while,
 So miserable with disgrace that he wept within,
 And all the blood of his chest went up to his face
 And he shrank away in shame from the man’s gentle words.
 365 The first words Gawain could find to say were these:
 “Cursed be cowardice and covetousness both,
 Villainy and vice that destroy all virtue!”
 He caught at the knots of the girdle and loosened them
 And fiercely flung the sash at the Green Knight.

326 staunch: firm;
doughty (dou’tē): brave.

338 feinted (fān’tīd):
 pretended to attack.

337–343 What does the
 Green Knight reveal about
 himself?

350 scabbard (skăb’ərd): a
 sheath for a dagger or
 sword.

354 What was the Green
 Knight’s test?

368 girdle: sash.

370 "There, there's my fault! The foul fiend vex it!
 Foolish cowardice taught me, from fear of your stroke,
 To bargain, covetous, and abandon my kind,
 The selflessness and loyalty suitable in knights;
 Here I stand, faulty and false, much as I've feared them,
 375 Both of them, untruth and treachery; may they see sorrow
 and care!

I can't deny my guilt;
 My works shine none too fair!
 Give me your good will
 380 And henceforth I'll beware."

At that, the Green Knight laughed, saying graciously,
 "Whatever harm I've had, I hold it amended
 Since now you're confessed so clean, acknowledging sins
 And bearing the plain penance of my point;
 385 I consider you polished as white and as perfectly clean
 As if you had never fallen since first you were born.
 And I give you, sir, this gold-embroidered girdle,
 For the cloth is as green as my gown. Sir Gawain, think
 On this when you go forth among great princes;
 390 Remember our struggle here; recall to your mind
 This rich token. Remember the Green Chapel.
 And now, come on, let's both go back to my castle
 And finish the New Year's revels with feasting and joy,
 not strife,

395 I beg you," said the lord,
 And said, "As for my wife,
 She'll be your friend, no more
 A threat against your life."

"No, sir," said the knight, and seized his helmet
 400 And quickly removed it, thanking the Green Knight,
 "I've reveled too well already; but fortune be with you;
 May He who gives all honors honor you well."

And so they embraced and kissed and commended each other
 To the Prince of Paradise, and parted then
 405 in the cold;
 Sir Gawain turned again
 To Camelot and his lord;
 And as for the man in green,
 He went wherever he would.

WORDS
 TO
 KNOW

amended (ə-měn'dĭd) *adj.* corrected **amend** *v.*

370 vex: harass; torment.

371–372 What does Gawain mean when he says, "Foolish cowardice taught me . . . to bargain . . . and abandon my kind"?

384 penance: punishment accepted by a person to show sorrow for wrongdoing; **point:** blade.

382–386 The Green Knight is saying that Gawain has paid for his fault by admitting it and offering his head to the ax.

387–388 Why do you think the Green Knight gives Gawain the sash?



Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What is your reaction to this romance?

Comprehension Check

- What challenge does the Green Knight present to Arthur and his knights?
- Why does the Green Knight raise his ax three times over Gawain's neck?

Think Critically

2. ACTIVE READING READING A NARRATIVE POEM

Review the notes you took in your **READER'S NOTEBOOK** about the actions of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight. What do these actions reveal about each character's sense of honor?

3. Why do you think Gawain requests to take up the Green Knight's challenge?

THINK ABOUT

- the Green Knight's behavior
- the response of the other knights
- the code of chivalry

4. In your opinion, how well does Gawain fulfill the Green Knight's challenge? Use details from the poem to support your opinion.

5. Think about the way in which the Green Knight tests Gawain's virtues at the castle. Do you think the test is fair? Why or why not?

6. Look again at the word web you created for Connect to Your Life on page 209. Compare and contrast your own concept of honor with that of Gawain.

Extend Interpretations

7. What If? What might have happened if Gawain had refused to accept the sash? Explain your answer.

8. Comparing Texts Compare and contrast Gawain and Beowulf. In your opinion, who is the more honorable **character**?

9. Connect to Life King Arthur and his knights were judged by their conduct, specifically by how well they followed the code of chivalry. Do you think today's leaders are judged by a specific code of conduct? If so, what is it?

Literary Analysis

ROMANCE

Set in a faraway time and place, a **romance** involves noble heroes who perform daring deeds according to a strict code of honor. In *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, for example, the noble Gawain accepts the Green Knight's deadly challenge to uphold the honor of Arthur's court. Like other medieval romances, the story is filled with extraordinary events and fantastic scenes, including this description of the Green Knight just before he addresses Sir Gawain:

*He held his head by the hair, high,
in his hand;
And the stranger sat there as
steadily in his saddle
As a man entirely unharmed,
although he was headless. . . .*

Although Gawain berates himself for not fully measuring up to his own ideals, his struggle for perfection is typical of the **hero** of romance.

Cooperative Learning Activity Get together in a group and discuss how a modern story or event could be retold as a romance. You might consider retelling a current news story or the plot of a realistic film. Use as many elements of romance as you can as you develop your story's setting, characters, and plot.

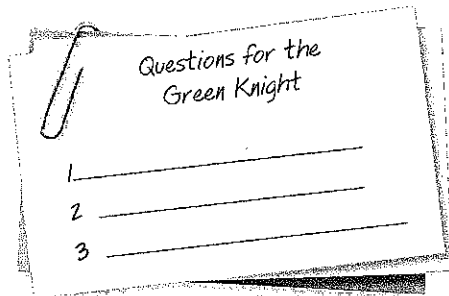
REVIEW

CONFLICT

A **conflict** is a struggle between opposing forces that moves a plot forward. What would you say are the key conflicts in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? Note whether they are **external** or **internal**.

Writing Options

1. Questions for the Green Knight Prepare a list of questions that you would ask the Green Knight in an interview for your school paper.



2. New Story Ending Suppose that Gawain failed to meet the Green Knight in 12 months and a day. In prose, write a new story ending to show what you think might happen.
3. Essay on Romance You have read that *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is a medieval romance. In a short essay, explain why you think the romance remains a popular narrative form.
4. Television News Report Write a television news story in which you report the Green Knight's intrusion into Arthur's court. You might interview one of the knights at the Round Table for his eyewitness account of the strange event.

5. Speech Honoring Gawain Imagine that you are King Arthur presiding over the Round Table. Write the speech that you would make upon Gawain's safe return to Camelot.

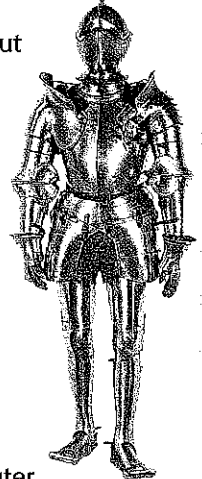
Activities & Explorations

1. Computer Game Challenge Devise a computer game based on the Green Knight's challenge. Make one or more drawings to illustrate the way the game would be played. ~ TECHNOLOGY
2. Dramatic Presentation With a small group of classmates, prepare a dramatic interpretation of a scene from the poem. After deciding on roles, lines, and actions, rehearse your performance before presenting it to the class. ~ VIEWING AND REPRESENTING
3. Special Effects Diagram Investigate the techniques used to create special effects in movies. Then draw a diagram that illustrates the technique you would use to film the beheading of the Green Knight. ~ ART
4. A Set for a Play Imagine that you are producing a play based on this selection. Choose a scene and design a miniature set for it, depicting the scenery, the props, and the characters. ~ ART/DRAMA

5. Storyboard Scene Create a storyboard, or sequence of sketches, depicting the Green Knight's appearance and speech before Arthur and his knights. Write a brief caption or explanatory note for each sketch. ~ ART

Inquiry & Research

1. Weapons of War Find out more about the armor and weaponry used in medieval England. How did real-life warriors typically prepare for battle? What were their weapons? If you have access to a CD-ROM encyclopedia or an on-line encyclopedia, you might use a computer to start your research.



More Online: Research Starter
www.mcdougallittell.com

2. Honorable Pursuits Research the activities of real knights. How were they appointed? Who were they expected to defend? What, if anything, did they have to do to prove their bravery and strength?

Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE: ANALOGIES Write the letter of the pair of terms that express the relationship closest to that of the capitalized pair.

1. RENOWN : FAME :: (a) greed : cowardice, (b) courtesy : politeness, (c) friendship : conflict
2. DAUNT : ENCOURAGE :: (a) notify : warn, (b) neglect : leave, (c) rejoice : mourn
3. WEIGHT LIFTER : HEFT :: (a) pianist : piano, (b) artist : draw, (c) actor : applaud
4. ERROR : AMENDED :: (a) accident : avoided, (b) storm : predicted, (c) crack : repaired
5. PAINFUL : WINCE :: (a) proud : succeed, (b) satisfied : eat, (c) funny : laugh
6. RESPITE : WEEKEND :: (a) exercise : jogging, (b) failure : victory, (c) problem : food
7. AGHAST : SHOCKED :: (a) angry : jealous, (b) surprised : shy, (c) cautious : careful
8. GHOST : UNCANNY :: (a) comedian : serious, (b) scholar : intelligent, (c) volunteer : numerous
9. EFFICACIOUS : USELESS :: (a) loyal : unfaithful, (b) honest : wise, (c) important : significant
10. FLINCH : UNSHAKABLE :: (a) perspire : cold, (b) gamble : daring, (c) smile : friendly
11. MANAGEABLE : UNWIELDY :: (a) wide : deep, (b) lost : crumpled, (c) light : heavy
12. INGENIOUSLY : CLEVERLY :: (a) slowly : speedily, (b) joyfully : nicely, (c) carelessly : recklessly
13. PIVOT : TURNING :: (a) vehicle : moving, (b) axis : rotating, (c) crosswalk : stopping
14. CHAGRIN : UNPLEASANT :: (a) regret : amused, (b) bliss : joyful, (c) impatience : calm
15. REPROOF : APPROVE :: (a) hatred : oppose, (b) assistance : encourage, (c) recognition : ignore

WORDS
TO
KNOW

aghast
amended
chagrin

daunt
efficacious
flinch

heft
ingeniously
pivot

renown
reproof
respite

uncanny
unwieldy
wince

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth lesson on analogies, see page 1317.

The Gawain Poet

Mystery Man The identity of the author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* is unknown. The only surviving early manuscript of the poem, produced by an anonymous copyist around 1400, contains three other poems—*Pearl*, *Purity*, and *Patience*—that are believed to be the work of the same man. (Since *Pearl* is the most technically brilliant of the four poems, their author is also known as the Pearl Poet.) The Gawain Poet's descriptions and language suggest that he wrote in the second half of the 14th century and was therefore a contemporary of Chaucer. His dialect, however, indicates that he was not a Londoner like Chaucer but lived somewhere in the northwestern part of England.

Man for All Seasons The Gawain Poet's works reveal that he was widely read in French and Latin and had some knowledge of law and theology. Although he was familiar with many details of medieval aristocratic life, his descriptions and metaphors also show a love of the countryside and rural life. Because of his rich imagination, sophisticated technique, and wide knowledge, he is considered one of the greatest of medieval English poets.

Author Activity

Locate a translation of *Pearl* and read excerpts from it. Then compare its themes and characteristics with those in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Share your findings with your classmates.

from *Le Morte d'Arthur*

Romance by SIR THOMAS MALORY

Retold by KEITH BAINES



Comparing Literature of the World

Le Morte d'Arthur and the Ramayana

This lesson and the one that follows present an opportunity for comparing legendary deeds in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and the *Ramayana*. Specific points of comparison in the *Ramayana* lesson will help you contrast characters and scenes in *Le Morte d'Arthur* with those in Valmiki's epic.

Connect to Your Life

A Second Chance Have you ever done or said something that you later regretted? If so, why did you regret it? Given a second chance, how would you have behaved differently? Share your thoughts with your classmates.

Build Background

Arthurian Legends The legend of King Arthur is one of the most popular and enduring legends in Western culture. Some historians believe that the fictional Arthur was modeled on a real fifth- or sixth-century Celtic military leader whose cavalry defended Britain against the invading Anglo-Saxons. However, the historical Arthur was undoubtedly very different from the king of later legend, who ruled an idealized world of romance, chivalry, and magic.

Since the sixth century, there have been many variations of the stories celebrating King Arthur. Most English-speaking readers have been introduced to the Arthurian legends through Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* or one of its many adaptations. Malory's work consists of a number of interwoven tales that chronicle the rise and fall of the Arthurian world. These tales are based on earlier English and French stories about Arthur's court and are populated by such famous characters as Merlin the magician, Queen Gwynevere (also spelled Guinevere), and a host of knights, including Sir Launcelot, Sir Gawain—whom you encountered in the previous selection—Sir Tristram, and Sir Galahad. Although the title *Le Morte d'Arthur* ("The Death of Arthur") perhaps applies best to the last section of Malory's work, it is by this title that the entire work has come to be known.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

acquiesce	ensue	ravage
assail	entreaty	redress
depredation	forbearance	reeling
dissuade	guile	succor
dwindle	incumbent	usurp

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS CHARACTERIZATION

Characterization is the way in which writers guide readers' impressions of characters. Malory combines details of appearance, speech, thoughts, and actions with comments on the characters to establish the essential nature of his characters.

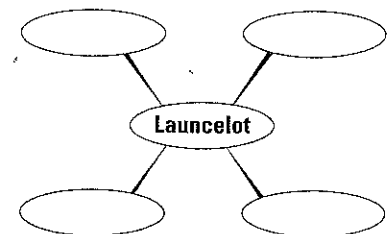
During the absence of King Arthur from Britain, Sir Modred, already vested with sovereign powers, had decided to usurp the throne. Accordingly, he had false letters written—announcing the death of King Arthur in battle—and delivered to himself.

As you read this story, be aware of details of appearance, behavior, and action that contribute to characterization.

ACTIVE READING UNDERSTANDING CHARACTERIZATION

In describing Malory's **characterizations**, one critic has said that Launcelot always seems noble in spite of his faults. As you read the selection, note Launcelot's words and actions and those of other characters in response to him. Think about whether these details of characterization support the view of Launcelot as flawed but noble.

READER'S NOTEBOOK Use a cluster diagram to record examples of Launcelot's speech and behavior, as well as the words and acts of others, that contribute to Malory's characterization of him.





KING ARTHUR'S FAVORITE KNIGHT, SIR LAUNCELOT, HAS FALLEN IN LOVE WITH THE KING'S WIFE, GWYNEVERE. THE SECRET LOVE AFFAIR IS EXPOSED BY SIR MODRED, ARTHUR'S SON BY ANOTHER WOMAN. AND GWYNEVERE IS SENTENCED TO BURN AT THE STAKE. WHILE RESCUING THE IMPRISONED GWYNEVERE, LAUNCELOT SLAYS TWO KNIGHTS WHO, UNKNOWN TO HIM AT THE TIME, ARE THE BROTHERS OF SIR GAWAIN, A FAVORITE NEPHEW OF ARTHUR'S. AFTER A RECONCILIATION, LAUNCELOT RETURNS GWYNEVERE TO ARTHUR TO BE REINSTATED AS QUEEN. AT THE URGING OF SIR GAWAIN, WHO STILL WANTS REVENGE ON LAUNCELOT, THE KING BANISHES LAUNCELOT TO FRANCE, WHERE THE FOLLOWING EXCERPT BEGINS.

Detail of Arthur from the Nine Heroes Tapestry (about 1385), probably Nicolas Bataille. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, The Cloisters Collection, Munsey Fund, 1932 (32.130.3a).

from

LE MORTE D'ARTHUR

The siege of Benwick

When Sir Launcelot had established dominion over France, he garrisoned the towns and settled with his army in the fortified city of Benwick, where his father King Ban had held court.

King Arthur, after appointing Sir Modred ruler in his absence, and instructing Queen Gwynevere to obey him, sailed to France with an army of sixty thousand men, and, on the advice of Sir Gawain, started laying waste¹ all before him.

News of the invasion reached Sir Launcelot, and his counselors advised him. Sir Bors spoke first:

"My lord Sir Launcelot, is it wise to allow King Arthur to lay your lands waste when sooner or later he will oblige you to offer him battle?"

Sir Lyonel spoke next: "My lord, I would recommend that we remain within the walls of our city until the invaders are weakened by cold and hunger, and then let us sally forth² and destroy them."

Next, King Bagdemagus: "Sir Launcelot, I understand that it is out of courtesy that you permit the king to ravage your lands, but where

will this courtesy end? If you remain within the city, soon everything will be destroyed."

Then Sir Galyhud: "Sir, you command knights of royal blood; you cannot expect them to remain meekly within the city walls. I pray you, let us encounter the enemy on the open field, and they will soon repent of their expedition."

And to this the seven knights of West Britain all muttered their assent. Then Sir Launcelot spoke:

"My lords, I am reluctant to shed Christian blood in a war against my own liege;³ and yet I do know that these lands have already suffered depredation in the wars between King Claudas and my father and uncle, King Ban and King Bors. Therefore I will next send a messenger to King Arthur and sue⁴ for peace, for peace is always preferable to war."

1. **laying waste**: destroying.

2. **sally forth**: rush out suddenly in an attack.

3. **liege** (lēj): a lord or ruler to whom one owes loyalty and service.

4. **sue**: appeal; beg.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

ravage (rāv'ij) *v.* to cause great damage to; devastate

depredation (dēp'rī-dā'shən) *n.* destruction caused by robbery or looting

Accordingly a young noblewoman accompanied by a dwarf was sent to King Arthur. They were received by the gentle knight Sir Lucas the Butler.

"My lady, you bring a message from Sir Launcelot?" he asked.

"My lord, I do. It is for the king."

"Alas! King Arthur would readily be reconciled to Sir Launcelot, but Sir Gawain forbids it; and it is a shame, because Sir Launcelot is certainly the greatest knight living."

The young noblewoman was brought before the king, and when he had heard Sir Launcelot's entreaties for peace he wept, and would readily have accepted them had not Sir Gawain spoken up:

"My liege, if we retreat now we will become a laughingstock, in this land and in our own. Surely our honor demands that we pursue this war to its proper conclusion."

"Sir Gawain, I will do as you advise, although reluctantly, for Sir Launcelot's terms are generous and he is still dear to me. I beg you make a reply to him on my behalf."

Sir Gawain addressed the young noblewoman:

"Tell Sir Launcelot that we will not bandy words with him, and it is too late now to sue for peace. Further that I, Sir Gawain, shall not cease to strive against him until one of us is killed."

The young noblewoman was escorted back to Sir Launcelot, and when she had delivered Sir Gawain's message they both wept. Then Sir Bors spoke:

"My lord, we beseech you, do not look so dismayed! You have many trustworthy knights behind you; lead us onto the field and we will put an end to this quarrel."

"My lords, I do not doubt you, but I pray you, be ruled by me: I will not lead you against our liege until we ourselves are endangered; only then can we honorably sally forth and defeat him."

Sir Launcelot's nobles submitted; but the next day it was seen that King Arthur had laid siege to the city of Benwick. Then Sir Gawain rode

before the city walls and shouted a challenge:

"My lord Sir Launcelot: have you no knight who will dare to ride forth and break spears with me? It is I, Sir Gawain."

Sir Bors accepted the challenge. He rode out of the castle gate, they encountered, and he was wounded and flung from his horse. His comrades helped him back to the castle, and then Sir Lyonel offered to joust. He too was overthrown and helped back to the castle.

Thereafter, every day for six months Sir Gawain rode before the city and overthrew whoever accepted his challenge. Meanwhile, as a result of skirmishes, numbers on both sides were beginning to dwindle. Then one day Sir Gawain challenged Sir Launcelot:

"My lord Sir Launcelot: traitor to the king and to me, come forth if you dare and meet your mortal foe, instead of lurking like a coward in your castle!"

Sir Launcelot heard the challenge, and one of his kinsmen spoke to him:

"My lord, you must accept the challenge, or be shamed forever."

"Alas, that I should have to fight Sir Gawain!" said Sir Launcelot. "But now I am obliged to."

Sir Launcelot gave orders for his most powerful courser⁵ to be harnessed, and when he had armed, rode to the tower and addressed King Arthur:

"My lord King Arthur, it is with a heavy heart that I set forth to do battle with one of your own blood; but now it is incumbent upon my honor to do so. For six months I have suffered your majesty to lay my lands waste and to besiege me in my own city. My courtesy is repaid with insults, so deadly and shameful that now I must by force of arms seek redress."

"Have done, Sir Launcelot, and let us to battle!" shouted Sir Gawain.

5. courser: a horse trained for battle.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

entreaty (ĕn-trē'tē) *n.* an earnest request; plea

dwindle (dw'ɪn'dl) *v.* to become steadily less

incumbent (ɪn-kŭm'bent) *adj.* required as a duty or obligation

redress (rĭ-drēs') *n.* repayment for a wrong or injury

Sir Launcelot rode from the city at the head of his entire army. King Arthur was astonished at his strength and realized that Sir Launcelot had not been boasting when he claimed to have acted with forbearance. "Alas, that I should ever have come to war with him!" he said to himself.

It was agreed that the two combatants should fight to the death, with interference from none. Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain then drew apart and galloped furiously together, and so great was their strength that their horses crashed to the ground and both riders were overthrown.

A terrible sword fight commenced, and each felt the might of the other as fresh wounds were inflicted with every blow. For three hours they fought with scarcely a pause, and the blood seeped out from their armor and trickled to the ground. Sir Launcelot found to his dismay that Sir Gawain, instead of weakening, seemed to increase in strength as they proceeded, and he began to fear that he was battling not with a knight but with a fiend incarnate.⁶ He decided to fight defensively and to conserve his strength.

It was a secret known only to King Arthur and to Sir Gawain himself that his strength increased for three hours in the morning, reaching its zenith⁷ at noon, and waning again. This was due to an enchantment that had been cast over him by a hermit⁸ when he was still a youth. Often in the past, as now, he had taken advantage of this.

Thus when the hour of noon had passed, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain's strength return to normal, and knew that he could defeat him.

A TERRIBLE
SWORD FIGHT
COMMENCED,
AND EACH
FELT THE
MIGHT OF
THE OTHER.

"Sir Gawain, I have endured many hard blows from you these last three hours, but now beware, for I see that you have weakened, and it is I who am the stronger."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot redoubled his blows, and with one, catching Sir Gawain side-long on the helmet, sent him reeling to the ground. Then he courteously stood back.

"Sir Launcelot, I still defy you!" said Sir Gawain from the ground. "Why do you not kill me now? for I warn you that if ever I recover I shall challenge you again."

"Sir Gawain, by the grace of God I shall endure you again," Sir Launcelot replied, and then turned to the king:

"My liege, your expedition can find no honorable conclusion at these walls, so I pray you withdraw and spare your noble knights. Remember me with kindness and be guided, as ever, by the love of God."

"Alas!" said the king, "Sir Launcelot scruples⁹ to fight against me or those of my blood, and once more I am beholden to him."

Sir Launcelot withdrew to the city and Sir Gawain was taken to his pavilion, where his wounds were dressed. King Arthur was doubly grieved, by his quarrel with Sir Launcelot and by the seriousness of Sir Gawain's wounds.

For three weeks, while Sir Gawain was recovering, the siege was relaxed and both sides skirmished only halfheartedly. But once recovered,

6. **fiend incarnate**: devil in human form.

7. **zenith**: highest point; peak.

8. **hermit**: a person living in solitude for religious reasons.

9. **scruples**: hesitates for reasons of principle.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

forbearance (fôr-bâr'əns) *n.* self-control; patient restraint
reeling (rē'līng) *adj.* falling back **reel** *v.*

Sir Gawain rode up to the castle walls and challenged Sir Launcelot again:

"Sir Launcelot, traitor! Come forth, it is Sir Gawain who challenges you."

"Sir Gawain, why these insults? I have the measure of your strength and you can do me but little harm."

"Come forth, traitor, and this time I shall make good my revenge!" Sir Gawain shouted.

"Sir Gawain, I have once spared your life; should you not beware of meddling with me again?"

Sir Launcelot armed and rode out to meet him. They jousting and Sir Gawain broke his spear and was flung from his horse. He leaped up immediately, and putting his shield before him, called on Sir Launcelot to fight on foot.

"The issue¹⁰ of a mare has failed me; but I am the issue of a king and a queen and I shall not fail!" he exclaimed.

As before, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain's strength increase until noon, during which period he defended himself, and then weaken again.

"Sir Gawain, you are a proved knight, and with the increase of your strength until noon you

must have overcome many of your opponents, but now your strength has gone, and once more you are at my mercy."

Sir Launcelot struck out lustily and by chance reopened the wound he had made before. Sir Gawain fell to the ground in a faint, but when he came to he said weakly:

"Sir Launcelot, I still defy you. Make an end of me, or I shall fight you again!"

"Sir Gawain, while you stand on your two feet I will not gainsay¹¹ you; but I will never strike a knight who has fallen.

God defend me from such dishonor!"

Sir Launcelot walked away and Sir Gawain continued to call after him: "Traitor! Until one of us is dead I shall never give in!"

For a month Sir Gawain lay recovering from his wounds, and the siege remained; but then, as Sir Gawain was preparing to fight Sir Launcelot once more, King Arthur received news which caused him to strike camp and lead his army on a forced march to the coast, and thence to embark for Britain.



10. issue: offspring.

11. gainsay: deny.

The Day of Destiny

During the absence of King Arthur from Britain, Sir Modred, already vested with sovereign powers,¹² had decided to usurp the throne.

Accordingly, he had false letters written—announcing the death of King Arthur in battle—and delivered to himself. Then, calling a parliament, he ordered the letters to be read and persuaded the nobility to elect him king. The coronation took place at Canterbury and was celebrated with a fifteen-day feast.

Sir Modred then settled in Camelot and made overtures to Queen Gwynevere to marry him. The queen seemingly acquiesced, but as soon as she had won his confidence, begged leave to make a journey to London in order to prepare her trousseau.¹³ Sir Modred consented, and the queen rode straight to the Tower which, with the aid of her loyal nobles, she manned and provisioned for her defense.

Sir Modred, outraged, at once marched against her, and laid siege to the Tower, but despite his large army, siege engines, and guns, was unable to effect a breach. He then tried to entice the queen from the Tower, first by guile and then by threats, but she would listen to neither. Finally the Archbishop of Canterbury came forward to protest:

“Sir Modred, do you not fear God’s displeasure? First you have falsely made yourself king; now you, who were begotten by King Arthur on his aunt, try to marry your father’s wife! If you do not revoke your evil deeds I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle.”¹⁴

“Fie on you! Do your worst!” Sir Modred replied.

“Sir Modred, I warn you take heed! or the wrath of the Lord will descend upon you.”

“Away, false priest, or I shall behead you!”

The Archbishop withdrew, and after excom-

municating Sir Modred, abandoned his office and fled to Glastonbury. There he took up his abode as a simple hermit, and by fasting and prayer sought divine intercession¹⁵ in the troubled affairs of his country.

Sir Modred tried to assassinate the Archbishop, but was too late. He continued to assail the queen with entreaties and threats, both of which failed, and then the news reached him that King Arthur was returning with his army from France in order to seek revenge.

Sir Modred now appealed to the barony to support him, and it has to be told that they came forward in large numbers to do so. Why? it will be asked. Was not King Arthur, the noblest sovereign Christendom had seen, now leading his armies in a righteous cause? The answer lies in the people of Britain, who, then as now, were fickle. Those who so readily transferred their allegiance to Sir Modred did so with the excuse that whereas King Arthur’s reign had led them into war and strife, Sir Modred promised them peace and festivity.

Hence it was with an army of a hundred thousand that Sir Modred marched to Dover to battle against his own father, and to withhold from him his rightful crown.

As King Arthur with his fleet drew into the harbor, Sir Modred and his army launched forth

12. **vested with sovereign powers:** given the authority of a king.

13. **trousseau** (trōō’sō): clothes and linens that a bride brings to her marriage.

14. **I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle:** The archbishop is threatening to excommunicate Modred—that is, to deny him participation in the rites of the church. In the medieval ritual of excommunication, a bell was rung, a book was shut, and a candle was extinguished.

15. **divine intercession:** assistance from God.

WORDS TO KNOW

usurp (yōō-sûrp’) *v.* to seize unlawfully by force
acquiesce (ăk’wē-ēs’) *v.* to agree or give in without protest
guile (gīl) *n.* clever trickery; deceit
assail (ə-sāl’) *v.* to attack, either with blows or with words

in every available craft, and a bloody battle ensued in the ships and on the beach. If King Arthur's army were the smaller, their courage was the higher, confident as they were of the righteousness of their cause. Without stint¹⁶ they battled through the burning ships, the screaming wounded, and the corpses floating on the bloodstained waters. Once ashore they put Sir Modred's entire army to flight.

The battle over, King Arthur began a search for his casualties, and on peering into one of the ships found Sir Gawain, mortally wounded. Sir Gawain fainted when King Arthur lifted him in his arms; and when he came to, the king spoke:

"Alas! dear nephew, that you lie here thus, mortally wounded! What joy is now left to me on this earth? You must know it was you and Sir Launcelot I loved above all others, and it seems that I have lost you both."

"My good uncle, it was my pride and my stubbornness that brought all this about, for had I not urged you to war with Sir Launcelot your subjects would not now be in revolt. Alas, that Sir Launcelot is not here, for he would soon drive them out! And it is at Sir Launcelot's hands that I suffer my own death: the wound which he dealt me has reopened. I would not wish it otherwise, because is he not the greatest and gentlest of knights?

"I know that by noon I shall be dead, and I repent bitterly that I may not be reconciled to Sir Launcelot; therefore I pray you, good uncle, give me pen, paper, and ink so that I may write to him."

YOU MUST
KNOW IT WAS
YOU AND
SIR LAUNCELOT
I LOVED
ABOVE ALL
OTHERS.

A priest was summoned and Sir Gawain confessed; then a clerk brought ink, pen, and paper, and Sir Gawain wrote to Sir Launcelot as follows:

"Sir Launcelot, flower of the knighthood: I, Sir Gawain, son of King Lot of Orkney and of King Arthur's sister, send you my greetings!

"I am about to die; the cause of my death is the wound I received from you outside the city of Benwick; and I would make it known that my death was of my own seeking, that I was moved by the spirit of revenge and spite to provoke you to battle.

"Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I beseech you to visit my tomb and offer what prayers you will on my behalf; and for

myself, I am content to die at the hands of the noblest knight living.

"One more request: that you hasten with your armies across the sea and give succor to our noble king. Sir Modred, his bastard son, has usurped the throne and now holds against him with an army of a hundred thousand. He would have won the queen, too, but she fled to the Tower of London and there charged her loyal supporters with her defense.

"Today is the tenth of May, and at noon I shall give up the ghost; this letter is written partly with my blood. This morning we fought our way ashore, against the armies of Sir Modred, and that is how my wound came to be reopened. We won the day, but my lord King Arthur needs you, and I too, that on my tomb you may bestow your blessing."

16. stint: holding back.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

ensue (ěŋ-sōō') *v.* to occur as a result; follow
succor (sŭk'er) *n.* aid in a time of need; relief

Sir Gawain fainted when he had finished, and the king wept. When he came to he was given extreme unction,¹⁷ and died, as he had anticipated, at the hour of noon. The king buried him in the chapel at Dover Castle, and there many came to see him, and all noticed the wound on his head which he had received from Sir Launcelot.

Then the news reached Arthur that Sir Modred offered him battle on the field at Baron Down. Arthur hastened there with his army, they fought, and Sir Modred fled once more, this time to Canterbury.

When King Arthur had begun the search for his wounded and dead, many volunteers from all parts of the country came to fight under his flag, convinced now of the rightness of his cause.

Arthur marched westward, and Sir Modred once more offered him battle.

It was assigned for the Monday following Trinity Sunday, on Salisbury Down.

Sir Modred levied fresh troops from East Anglia and the places about London, and fresh volunteers came forward to help Arthur. Then, on the night of Trinity Sunday, Arthur was vouchsafed¹⁸ a strange dream:

He was appareled in gold cloth and seated in a chair which stood on a pivoted scaffold. Below him, many fathoms deep, was a dark well, and in the water swam serpents, dragons, and wild beasts. Suddenly the scaffold tilted and Arthur was flung into the water, where all the creatures struggled toward him and began tearing him limb from limb.

Arthur cried out in his sleep and his squires hastened to waken him. Later, as he lay between waking and sleeping, he thought he saw Sir Gawain, and with him a host of beautiful noblewomen. Arthur spoke:

"My sister's son! I thought you had died; but now I see you live, and I thank the lord Jesu! I pray you, tell me, who are these ladies?"

"My lord, these are the ladies I championed¹⁹ in righteous quarrels when I was on earth. Our lord God has vouchsafed that we visit you and plead with you not to give battle to Sir Modred tomorrow, for if you do, not only will you yourself be killed, but all your noble followers too. We beg you to be warned, and to make a treaty with Sir Modred, calling a truce for a month, and granting him whatever terms he may demand. In a month Sir Launcelot will be here, and he will defeat Sir Modred."

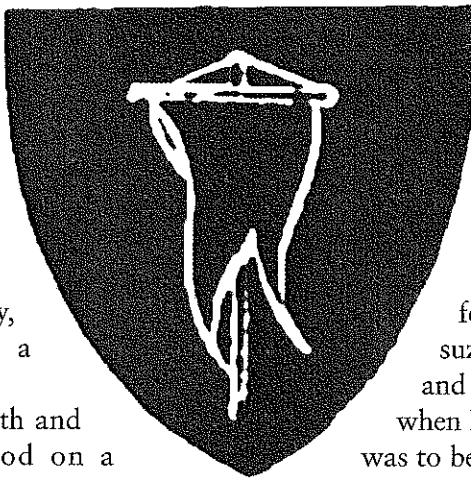
Thereupon Sir Gawain and the ladies vanished, and King Arthur once more summoned his squires and his counselors and told them his vision. Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere were commissioned to make a treaty with Sir Modred. They were to be accompanied by two bishops and to

grant, within reason, whatever terms he demanded.

The ambassadors found Sir Modred in command of an army of a hundred thousand and unwilling to listen to overtures of peace. However, the ambassadors eventually prevailed on him, and in return for the truce granted him suzerainty²⁰ of Cornwall and Kent, and succession to the British throne when King Arthur died. The treaty was to be signed by King Arthur and Sir Modred the next day. They were to meet

between the two armies, and each was to be accompanied by no more than fourteen knights.

Both King Arthur and Sir Modred suspected the other of treachery, and gave orders for their armies to attack at the sight of a naked sword. When they met at the appointed place the treaty was signed and both drank a glass of wine.



17. **extreme unction**: a ritual in which a priest anoints and prays for a dying person.

18. **vouchsafed**: granted.

19. **championed**: defended or fought for.

20. **suzerainty** (sōō'zər-ən-tē): the position of feudal lord.

Then, by chance, one of the soldiers was bitten in the foot by an adder²¹ which had lain concealed in the brush. The soldier unthinkingly drew his sword to kill it, and at once, as the sword flashed in the light, the alarums²² were given, trumpets sounded, and both armies galloped into the attack.

"Alas for this fateful day!" exclaimed King Arthur, as both he and Sir Modred hastily mounted and galloped back to their armies. There followed one of those rare and heartless battles in which both armies fought until they were destroyed. King Arthur, with his customary valor, led squadron after squadron of cavalry into the attack, and Sir Modred encountered him unflinchingly. As the number of dead and wounded mounted on both sides, the active combatants continued dauntless until nightfall, when four men alone survived.

King Arthur wept with dismay to see his beloved followers fallen; then, struggling toward him, unhorsed and badly wounded, he saw Sir Lucas the Butler and his brother, Sir Bedivere.

"Alas!" said the king, "that the day should come when I see all my noble knights destroyed! I would prefer that I myself had fallen. But what has become of the traitor Sir Modred, whose evil ambition was responsible for this carnage?"

Looking about him King Arthur then noticed Sir Modred leaning with his sword on a heap of the dead.

"Sir Lucas, I pray you give me my spear, for I have seen Sir Modred."

"Sire, I entreat you, remember your vision—how Sir Gawain appeared with a heaven-sent message to dissuade you from fighting Sir Modred. Allow this fateful day to pass; it is ours, for we three hold the field, while the enemy is broken."

"My lords, I care nothing for my life now! And while Sir Modred is at large I must kill him: there may not be another chance."

"God speed you, then!" said Sir Bedivere.

When Sir Modred saw King Arthur advance with his spear, he rushed to meet him with drawn sword. Arthur caught Sir Modred below the shield and drove his spear through his body; Sir Modred, knowing that the wound was mortal, thrust himself up to the handle of the spear, and then, brandishing his sword in both hands, struck Arthur on the side of the helmet, cutting through it and into the skull beneath; then he crashed to the ground, gruesome and dead.

King Arthur fainted many times as Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere struggled with him to a small chapel nearby, where they managed to ease his wounds a little. When Arthur came to, he thought he heard cries coming from the battlefield.

"Sir Lucas, I pray you, find out who cries on the battlefield," he said.

Wounded as he was, Sir Lucas hobbled painfully to the field, and there in the moonlight saw the camp followers stealing gold and jewels from the dead, and murdering the wounded. He returned to the king and reported to him what he had seen, and then added:

"My lord, it surely would be better to move you to the nearest town?"

"My wounds forbid it. But alas for the good Sir Launcelot! How sadly I have missed him today! And now I must die—as Sir Gawain warned me I would—repenting our quarrel with my last breath."

Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere made one further attempt to lift the king. He fainted as they did so. Then Sir Lucas fainted as part of his intestines broke through a wound in the stomach. When the king came to, he saw Sir Lucas lying dead with foam at his mouth.

"Sweet Jesu, give him succor!" he said. "This noble knight has died trying to save my life—alas that this was so!"

Sir Bedivere wept for his brother.

21. **adder**: a poisonous snake.

22. **alarums**: calls to arms.

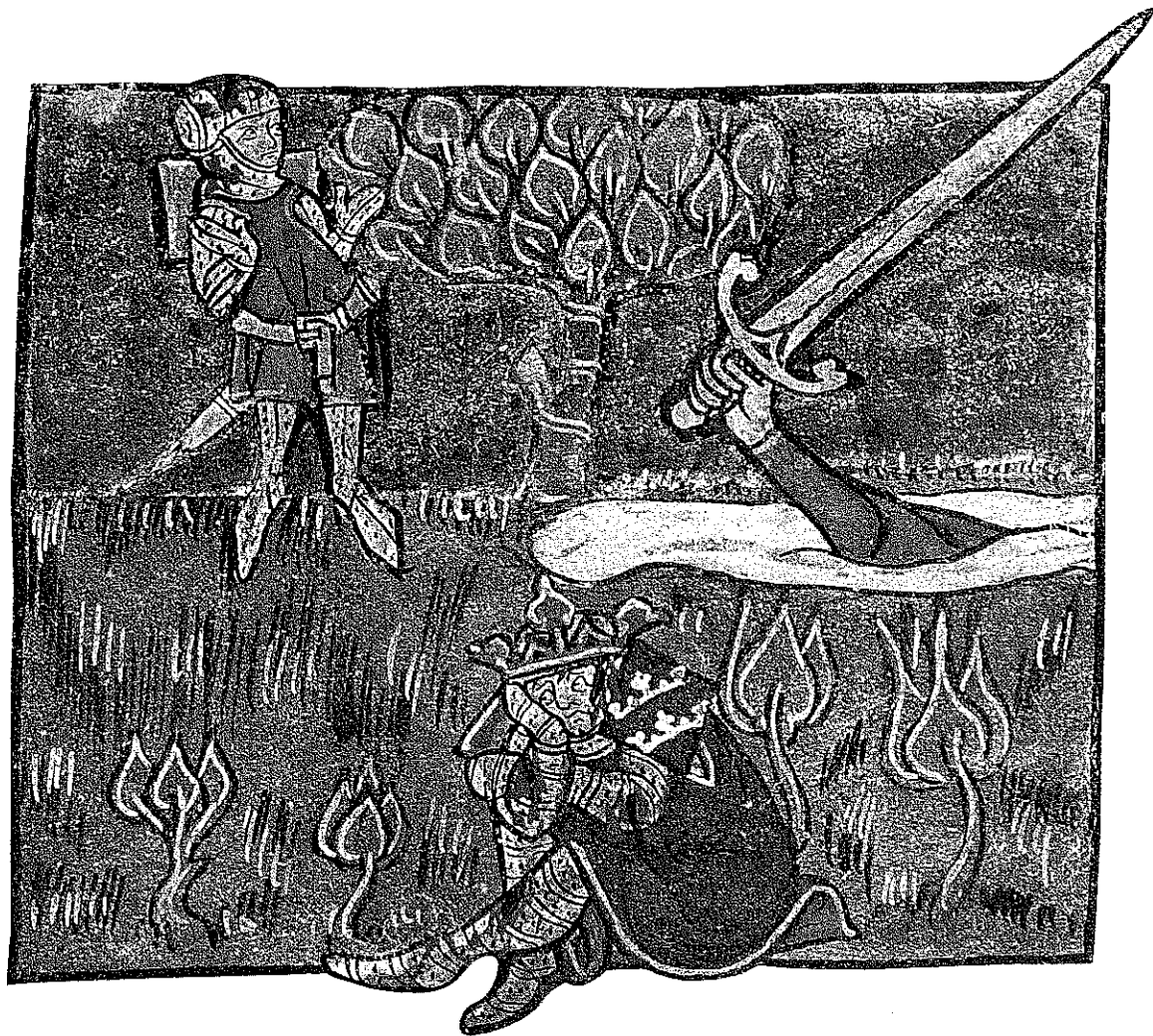


Illustration from an illuminated manuscript showing a wounded Arthur in the foreground waiting for Sir Bedivere, who watches a hand appear from the lake to take King Arthur's sword, Excalibur.

"Sir Bedivere, weep no more," said King Arthur, "for you can save neither your brother nor me; and I would ask you to take my sword Excalibur to the shore of the lake and throw it in the water. Then return to me and tell me what you have seen."

"My lord, as you command, it shall be done."

Sir Bedivere took the sword, but when he came to the water's edge, it appeared so beautiful that he could not bring himself to throw it in, so instead he hid it by a tree, and then returned to the king.

"Sir Bedivere, what did you see?"

"My lord, I saw nothing but the wind upon the waves."

"Then you did not obey me; I pray you, go

swiftly again, and this time fulfill my command."

Sir Bedivere went and returned again, but this time too he had failed to fulfill the king's command.

"Sir Bedivere, what did you see?"

"My lord, nothing but the lapping of the waves."

"Sir Bedivere, twice you have betrayed me! And for the sake only of my sword: it is unworthy of you! Now I pray you, do as I command, for I have not long to live."

This time Sir Bedivere wrapped the girdle around the sheath and hurled it as far as he could into the water. A hand appeared from below the surface, took the sword, waved it thrice, and disappeared again. Sir Bedivere re-

turned to the king and told him what he had seen.

"Sir Bedivere, I pray you now help me hence, or I fear it will be too late."

Sir Bedivere carried the king to the water's edge, and there found a barge in which sat many beautiful ladies with their queen. All were wearing black hoods, and when they saw the king, they raised their voices in a piteous lament.

"I pray you, set me in the barge," said the king.

Sir Bedivere did so, and one of the ladies laid the king's head in her lap; then the queen spoke to him:

"My dear brother, you have stayed too long: I fear that the wound on your head is already cold."

Thereupon they rowed away from the land and Sir Bedivere wept to see them go.

"My lord King Arthur, you have deserted me! I am alone now, and among enemies."

"Sir Bedivere, take what comfort you may, for my time is passed, and now I must be taken to Avalon²³ for my wound to be healed. If you hear of me no more, I beg you pray for my soul."

The barge slowly crossed the water and out of sight while the ladies wept. Sir Bedivere walked alone into the forest and there remained for the night.

In the morning he saw beyond the trees of a copse²⁴ a small hermitage. He entered and found a hermit kneeling down by a fresh tomb. The hermit was weeping as he prayed, and then Sir Bedivere recognized him as the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been banished by Sir Modred.

"Father, I pray you, tell me, whose tomb is this?"

"My son, I do not know. At midnight the body was brought here by a company of ladies. We buried it, they lit a hundred candles for the service, and rewarded me with a thousand bezants."²⁵

"Father, King Arthur lies buried in this tomb."

Sir Bedivere fainted when he had spoken, and

when he came to he begged the Archbishop to allow him to remain at the hermitage and end his days in fasting and prayer.

"Father, I wish only to be near to my true liege."

"My son, you are welcome; and do I not recognize you as Sir Bedivere the Bold, brother to Sir Lucas the Butler?"

Thus the Archbishop and Sir Bedivere remained at the hermitage, wearing the habits of hermits and devoting themselves to the tomb with fasting and prayers of contrition.²⁶

Such was the death of King Arthur as written down by Sir Bedivere. By some it is told that there were three queens on the barge: Queen Morgan le Fay, the Queen of North Galys, and the Queen of the Waste Lands; and others include the name of Nyneve, the Lady of the Lake who had served

King Arthur well in the past, and had married the good knight Sir Pelleas.

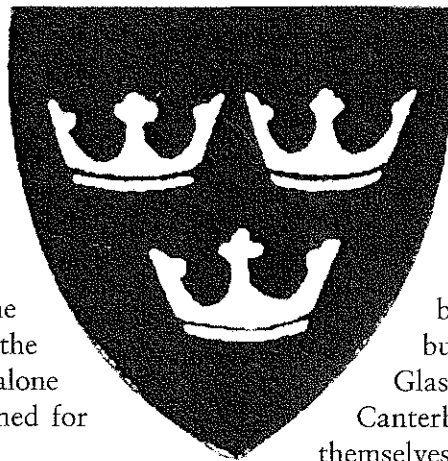
In many parts of Britain it is believed that King Arthur did not die and that he will return to us and win fresh glory and the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesu Christ; but for myself I do not believe this, and would leave him

buried peacefully in his tomb at

Glastonbury, where the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Bedivere humbled

themselves, and with prayers and fasting honored his memory. And inscribed on his tomb, men say, is this legend:

HIC IACET ARTHURUS,
REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS.²⁷



23. Avalon: an island paradise of Celtic legend, where heroes are taken after death.

24. copse (kŏps): a grove of small trees.

25. bezants (bĕz'ənts): gold coins.

26. contrition (kən-trīsh'ən): sincere regret for wrongdoing.

27. *Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam rexque futurus*
(hĭk yă'kĕt ār-tŏŏ'rŏŏs rāks kwŏn'dām rāk'skwĕ fŏŏ-tŏŏ'rŏŏs)
Latin: Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.

Connect to the Literature

1. What Do You Think?

What thoughts were in your mind as you finished reading this selection? Share them with the class.

Comprehension Check

- What happens when Gawain and Launcelot meet on the field of battle?
- What is Gawain's secret weakness in combat?
- What warning does Sir Gawain give to Arthur in a vision?

Think Critically

2. In your opinion, which character in the selection is most admirable, and which is least admirable?

THINK ABOUT

- the ways in which Launcelot shows loyalty and disloyalty to the king
- Arthur's willingness to forget his loyalty to Launcelot and follow Gawain's advice
- Modred's seizure of the throne
- Gwynevere's involvement with Launcelot

3. How much choice do you think Arthur has in determining his own fate?

THINK ABOUT

- the importance of chivalry to his followers
- the consequences of his long stay in France
- the warnings he receives in his dreams

4. If Arthur, Launcelot, and Gawain were given a second chance to resolve their conflicts, what do you think they might do differently?

5. ACTIVE READING UNDERSTANDING CHARACTERIZATION

Look again at your **READER'S NOTEBOOK**. What did you discover about the characterization of Launcelot as you recorded examples of his words and behavior in the cluster diagram?

Extend Interpretations

6. **What If?** Suppose that Sir Launcelot had arrived with his army in time to help Arthur battle Modred. How might things have turned out differently for the major characters?
7. **Connect to Life** Would you say that the forces that end Arthur's reign are the same forces that bring down governments in the real world? Support your answer with examples from local, national, or world history.

Literary Analysis


CHARACTERIZATION The way in which writers guide readers' impressions of characters is called **characterization**. There are four basic methods of developing a character: (1) description of the character's physical appearance; (2) presentation of the character's speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions; (3) presentation of other characters' speech, thoughts, feelings, and actions; and (4) direct comments about the character.

Cooperative Learning Activity With a group of classmates, look back through this selection, identifying passages that help create readers' impressions of Launcelot, Arthur, Gawain, Modred, and Gwynevere. In a chart, record the character, passage, method of characterization, and the qualities of character that are revealed in the passage.

Character	Passage	Method	Qualities
Launcelot	"I will not lead you against..."	Launcelot's own words	Nobility and honor
Arthur			

REVIEW ROMANCE The term **romance** refers to an imaginative adventure concerned with noble heroes, gallant love, a chivalric code of honor, and daring deeds. Romances usually have faraway settings, depict events unlike those of ordinary life, and idealize heroes as well as the eras in which the heroes lived. What characteristics of romance can you find in this excerpt?

Writing Options

Essay on Virtues Many virtues are portrayed in this excerpt from Malory. Write a two-or-three paragraph essay in which you explain which virtues of Malory's characters are most important to you in your life. Place the essay in your **Working Portfolio**. 

Sir Thomas Malory

1405?–1471

An Active Life A son of prosperous parents, the Thomas Malory who many scholars think to be the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur* led a surprisingly unsettled life that ended in prison. A native of Warwickshire, England, he fought in the Hundred Years' War, was knighted around 1442, and was elected to Parliament in 1445. Malory then became embroiled in the violent political conflicts that preceded the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses.

Political Turmoil A staunch supporter of the house of Lancaster and its claim to the throne, Malory was imprisoned repeatedly by the Yorkist government on a variety of charges, including robbery, cattle rustling, bribery, and attempted murder. He pleaded innocent to all the charges, and his guilt was never proven. It is possible that his outspoken opposition to the ruling family provoked enemies to accuse him falsely in some instances.

Prisoner and Writer Malory seems to have written *Le Morte d'Arthur* while he served a series of prison terms that began in 1451. He finished the book about two years before his death in 1471. William Caxton, who introduced the art of printing to England, published the first edition of Malory's work in 1485, giving the book the title by which it is known today. *Le Morte d'Arthur* remains the most complete English version of the Arthurian legends and has been the source of many later adaptations of the tales.

Vocabulary in Action

EXERCISE: CONTEXT CLUES Choose the word that could be substituted for the italicized word or phrase in each sentence below.

1. The king's followers began to *attack* his honor.
2. Everyone marveled at the *patience* with which he reacted to the attacks.
3. The king's enemies tried to *unlawfully take over* the throne.
4. The king hoped to *discourage* them from doing harm.
5. The enemies ignored the king's *plea* for peace.
6. They used *trickery* and threats against him.
7. The king had to *agree without protest* to a declaration of war.
8. He felt that it was *laid as a duty* on him to fight for his honor.
9. His army sought *repayment* for crimes against the king.
10. The king knew that after he issued his challenge, a full-scale war would *follow*.
11. His advisers warned that the war would *greatly damage* the land.
12. The number of healthy soldiers began to *decline*.
13. Wounded soldiers were seen *falling back* all over the battlefield.
14. Other kingdoms were asked to give *assistance* to the weakened army.
15. The plundering soldiers caused *damage* and sorrow throughout the land.

WORDS
TO
KNOW

acquiesce~
assail~
depredation
dissuade~
dwindle~
ensue~

entreaty -
forbearance -
guile~
incumbent~
ravage~
redress~

reeling
succor~
usurp~

Building Vocabulary

For an in-depth study of context clues, see page 938.

from

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

Le Morte d' Arthur

William Caxton, the first English printer, had a significant impact on the literature of his day. In his preface to the first edition of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*, published in 1485, Caxton describes his anticipated audience and reveals his purpose in publishing the work.



- ① I have, after the simple cunning that God hath sent to me, under the favor and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen, enprised to enprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French and reduced it into English.
- ② And I, according to my copy, have done set it in enprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in tho[se] days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies with all other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shall see and read in this said book and work, that
- ③ they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same; wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalries. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame.

Reading for Information

The **preface** to a literary work typically sheds light on why the author wrote the work. Imagine that you are a printer at a time when books are scarce. What might you want to include in your preface to a first edition?

PARAPHRASING AND SUMMARIZING

As you might expect, Caxton's language and syntax are typical of 15th-century English. To unlock the meanings of such challenging texts, you can use the skills of paraphrasing and summarizing. Review the primary source as you complete these activities:

- ① **Paraphrase**, or restate in your own words, the first paragraph. What sources does Caxton suggest Malory used?
- ② Refer to your paraphrase of the second paragraph. What was Caxton's purpose in publishing *Le Morte d'Arthur*? What virtues does it portray? Who does Caxton expect will be his audience?
- ③ Look at your paraphrase of "that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same." What is Caxton hoping his readers will do?

Summarizing With a partner, summarize Caxton's main points. How has reading Caxton's words affected your understanding of *Le Morte d'Arthur*. In what ways, if any, has your reaction to characters such as Sir Gawain changed?

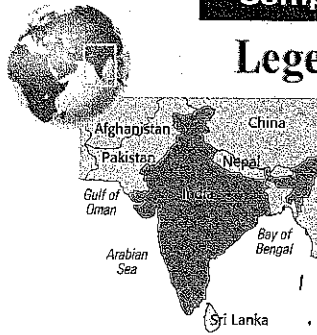
from the *Ramayana*

Epic by VALMIKI

Translated and adapted by R. K. NARAYAN

Comparing Literature of the World

Legendary Deeds Across Cultures



Le Morte d'Arthur* and the *Ramayana The *Ramayana* was written hundreds of centuries before *Le Morte d'Arthur*. However, both tales contain chivalric heroes who clash with their adversaries during **epic battles**. In both cases, the combatants are aided by supernatural elements that enhance their power.

Points of Comparison As you read the *Ramayana*, compare its **characters**, battles, and turn of events with those you recall from *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

Build Background

Epic Proportions The great Indian **epic** *Ramayana* was composed in verse by the poet Valmiki, probably between 300 and 200 B.C. Like epics of other cultures, the *Ramayana* celebrates the achievements of both human heroes and divine beings. It is the story of Rama (rā'mə), a royal prince who is the seventh incarnation, or embodiment, of the god Vishnu (vīsh'nō). The epic describes Rama's life, love, battles, and hardships. At the point of the story where this excerpt begins, Rama's wife Sita (sē'tā) has been kidnapped by Ravana (rā'və-nə), the 10-headed, 20-armed demon-king of the island of Lanka (ləng'kä). Hanuman (hə'nōō-mān), a flying monkey in Rama's army, has located Sita and helped build a bridge to Lanka so that all of Rama's forces can cross over and rescue her.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

esoteric	incarnation
formidable	invincibility
impervious	parrying
imprecation	primordial
incantation	rampart

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS SUPERNATURAL ELEMENTS

Epics often journey into the realm of the supernatural. Supernatural elements include any beings, powers, or events that are unexplainable by the known forces or laws of nature. In the *Ramayana*, for example, Ravana's son Indrajit is a supernatural being, as this passage suggests.

He also created a figure resembling Sita, carried her in his chariot, took her before Rama's army and killed her within their sight.

Be aware of other supernatural elements as you read this excerpt from the *Ramayana*.

ACTIVE READING CLASSIFYING CHARACTERS

In this selection, the hero Rama and his followers engage in a major battle with the demon-king Ravana and his allies. As the battle progresses, it will be important for you to keep track of characters by **classifying** them as belonging on either Rama's or Ravana's side of the **conflict**.

READER'S NOTEBOOK As you read, list the participants in groups according to their loyalty to Rama or to Ravana. Beside each name, write down something that will help you remember the **character**—a physical description, a personality trait, or his or her role in the **epic**.