

# Arthur Becomes King of Britain

from *The Once and Future King*

T. H. White

## BACKGROUND

T. H. White's novel of the King Arthur story, *The Once and Future King*, has four major sections that trace the legend of Arthur. This excerpt is taken from the novel's first section, "The Sword in the Stone." Kay is Sir Ector's son; the Wart (Arthur's childhood nickname) is Kay's squire. They were boyhood friends who shared Merlyn as tutor, but now, as young adults, their difference in rank is becoming more apparent.

## Arthur Becomes King of Britain

- 1 King Pellinore<sup>1</sup> arrived for the important weekend in a high state of flurry.
- 2 "I say," he exclaimed, "do you know? Have you heard? Is it a secret, what?"
- 3 "Is what a secret, what?" they asked him.

1. **King Pellinore** In Arthurian legends, he is king of "the isles."

## UNLOCK WORD MEANINGS

The pronunciation and part of speech for each of the vocabulary words appear in the side notes. In your notebook, write the meaning of each word.

- 4 “Why, the King,” cried his majesty. “You know, about the King?”
- 5 “What’s the matter with the King?” inquired Sir Ector. “You don’t say he’s comin’ down to hunt with those darned hounds of his or anythin’ like that?”
- 6 “He’s dead,” cried King Pellinore tragically. “He’s dead, poor fellah, and can’t hunt any more.”
- 7 Sir Grummore stood up respectfully and took off his cap of maintenance. “The King is dead,” he said. “Long live the King.”
- 8 Everybody else felt they ought to stand up too, and the boys’ nurse burst into tears. “There, there,” she sobbed. “His loyal highness dead and gone, and him such a respectful gentleman. Many’s the illuminated picture I’ve cut out of him, from the Illustrated Missals,<sup>2</sup> aye, and stuck up over the mantel. From the time when he was in swaddling bands,<sup>3</sup> right through them world towers till he was a-visiting the dispersed areas as the world’s Prince Charming, there wasn’t a picture of ‘im but I had it out, aye, and give ‘im a last thought o’ nights.”
- 9 “Compose yourself, Nannie,” said Sir Ector.
- 10 “It is solemn, isn’t it?” said King Pellinore, “what? Uther the Conqueror, 1066 to 1216.”
- 11 “A solemn moment,” said Sir Grummore. “The King is dead. Long live the King.”
- 12 “We ought to pull down the curtains,” said Kay, who was always a stickler for good form, “or half-mast<sup>4</sup> the banners.”
- 13 “That’s right,” said Sir Ector. “Somebody go and tell the sergeant-at-arms.”
- 14 It was obviously the Wart’s duty to execute this command, for he was now the junior nobleman present, so he ran out cheerfully to find the sergeant. Soon those who were left in the solar<sup>5</sup> could hear a voice crying out, “Nah then, one-two, special mourning fer ‘is lite majesty, lower awai on the command Two!” and then the flapping of all the standards, banners, pennons, pennoncells, banderolls, guidons, streamers and cognizances<sup>6</sup> which made gay the snowy turrets of the Forest Sauvage.
- 15 “How did you hear?” asked Sir Ector.
- 16 “I was pricking through the purlieus<sup>7</sup> of the forest after that Beast, you know, when I met with a solemn friar of orders gray, and he told me. It’s the very latest news.”
- 17 “Poor old Pendragon,” said Sir Ector.
- 18 “The King is dead,” said Sir Grummore solemnly. “Long live the King.”

2. **Missals** (MIHS uhlz) *n.* books used in Roman Catholic religious services.

3. **swaddling bands** *n.* strips of cloth used to wrap up a newborn baby.

4. **half-mast** *v.* lower a flag halfway down a pole as a sign of mourning; usually used as an adjective.

5. **solar** *n.* solarium, or sunroom.

6. **standards . . . cognizances** types of banners or flags.

7. **purlieus** (PUHR looz) *n.* outlying parts of a forest where forest laws were not enforced.

- 19 “It is all very well for you to keep on mentioning that, my dear Grummore,” exclaimed King Pellinore petulantly, “but who is this King, what, that is to live so long, what, accordin’ to you?”
- 20 “Well, his heir,” said Sir Grummore, rather taken aback.
- 21 “Our blessed monarch,” said the Nurse tearfully, “never had no hair. Anybody that studied the loyal family knowed that.”
- 22 “Good gracious!” exclaimed Sir Ector. “But he must have had a next-of-kin?”
- 23 “That’s just it,” cried King Pellinore in high excitement. “That’s the excitin’ part of it, what? No hair and no next of skin, and who’s to succeed to the throne? That’s what my friar was so excited about, what, and why he was asking who could succeed to what, what? What?”
- 24 “Do you mean to tell me,” exclaimed Sir Grummore indignantly, “that there ain’t no King of Gramarye?”<sup>8</sup>
- 25 “Not a scrap of one,” cried King Pellinore, feeling important. “And there have been signs and wonders of no mean might.”
- 26 “I think it’s a scandal,” said Sir Grummore. “God knows what the dear old country is comin’ to. Due to these lollards and communists, no doubt.”
- 27 “What sort of signs and wonders?” asked Sir Ector.
- 28 “Well, there has appeared a sort of sword in a stone, what, in a sort of a church. Not in the church, if you see what I mean, and not in the stone, but that sort of thing, what, like you might say.”
- 29 “I don’t know what the Church is coming to,” said Sir Grummore.
- 30 “It’s in an anvil,”<sup>9</sup> explained the King.
- 31 “The Church?”
- 32 “No, the sword.”
- 33 “But I thought you said the sword was in the stone?”
- 34 “No,” said King Pellinore. “The stone is outside the church.”
- 35 “Look here, Pellinore,” said Sir Ector. “You have a bit of a rest, old boy, and start again.
- 36 Here, drink up this horn of mead<sup>10</sup> and take it easy.”
- 37 “The sword,” said King Pellinore, “is stuck through an anvil which stands on a stone. It goes right through the anvil and into the stone. The anvil is stuck to the stone. The stone stands outside a church. Give me some more mead.”
- 38 “I don’t think that’s much of a wonder,” remarked Sir Grummore. “What I wonder at is that they should allow such things to happen. But you can’t tell nowadays, what with all these Saxon agitators.”<sup>11</sup>
- 39 “My dear fellah,” cried Pellinore, getting excited again, “it’s not where the stone is, what, that I’m trying to tell you, but what is written on it, what, where it is.”

8. **Gramarye** (GRAM uhr ee) in this novel, England.

9. **anvil** *n.* iron block on which a blacksmith hammers metal into shape.

10. **horn of mead** drink similar to beer, made of fermented honey and water, served in a cup shaped like a horn.

11. **Saxon agitators** The Saxons were a Germanic people who conquered parts of England during the early Middle Ages. Agitators are people who stir up trouble.

40 "What?"

41 "Why, on its pommel."<sup>12</sup>

42 "Come on, Pellinore," said Sir Ector. "You just sit quite still with your face to the wall for a minute, and then tell us what you are talkin' about. Take it easy, old boy. No need for hurryin'. You sit still and look at the wall, there's a good chap, and talk as slow as you can."

43 "There are words written on this sword in this stone outside this church," cried King Pellinore piteously, "and these words are as follows. Oh, do try to listen to me, you two, instead of interruptin' all the time about nothin', for it makes a man's head go ever so."

44 "What are these words?" asked Kay.

45 "These words say this," said King Pellinore, "so far as I can understand from that old friar of orders gray."

46 "Go on, do," said Kay, for the King had come to a halt.

47 "Go on," said Sir Ector, "what do these words on this sword in this anvil in this stone outside this church say?"

48 "Some red propaganda, no doubt," remarked Sir Grummore.

49 King Pellinore closed his eyes tight, extended his arms in both directions, and announced in capital letters, "Whoso Pulleth Out This Sword of this Stone and Anvil, is Rightwise King Born of All England."

50 "Who said that?" asked Sir Grummore.

51 "But the sword said it, like I tell you."

52 "Talkative weapon," remarked Sir Grummore skeptically.

53 "It was written on it," cried the King angrily. "Written on it in letters of gold."

54 "Why didn't you pull it out then?" asked Sir Grummore.

55 "But I tell you that I wasn't there. All this that I am telling you was told to me by that friar I was telling you of, like I tell you."

56 "Has this sword with this inscription been pulled out?" inquired Sir Ector.

57 "No," whispered King Pellinore dramatically. "That's where the whole excitement comes in. They can't pull this sword out at all, although they have all been tryin' like fun, and so they have had to proclaim a tournament all over England, for New Year's Day, so that the man who comes to the tournament and pulls out the sword can be King of all England forever, what, I say?"

58 "Oh, father," cried Kay. "The man who pulls the sword out of the stone will be the King of England. Can't we go to the tournament, father, and have a shot?"

59 "Couldn't think of it," said Sir Ector.

60 "Long way to London," said Sir Grummore, shaking his head.

61 "My father went there once," said King Pellinore.

62 Kay said, "Oh, surely we could go? When I am knighted I shall have to go to a tournament somewhere, and this one happens at just

12. **pommel** (PAH muhl) *n.* knob at the end of the hilt of some swords; also, knob at the front of some horse saddles.

the right date. All the best people will be there, and we should see the famous knights and great kings. It does not matter about the sword, of course, but think of the tournament, probably the greatest there has ever been in Gramarye, and all the things we should see and do. Dear father, let me go to this tourney, if you love me, so that I may bear away the prize of all, in my maiden fight."

63 "But, Kay," said Sir Ector, "I have never been to London."

64 "All the more reason to go. I believe that anybody who does not go for a tournament like this will be proving that he has no noble blood in his veins. Think what people will say about us, if we do not go and have a shot at that sword. They will say that Sir Ector's family was too vulgar and knew it had no chance."

65 "We all know the family has no chance," said Sir Ector, "that is, for the sword." "Lot of people in London," remarked Sir Grummore, with a wild surmise. "So they say." He took a deep breath and goggled at his host with eyes like marbles.

66 "And shops," added King Pellinore suddenly, also beginning to breathe heavily.

67 "Dang it!" cried Sir Ector, bumping his horn mug on the table so that it spilled. "Let's all go to London, then, and see the new King!" They rose up as one man.

68 "Why shouldn't I be as good a man as my father?" exclaimed King Pellinore.

69 "Dash it all," cried Sir Grummore. "After all, it is the capital!"

70 "Hurray!" shouted Kay.

71 "Lord have mercy," said the nurse.

72 At this moment the Wart came in with Merlyn, and everybody was too excited to notice that, if he had not been grown up now, he would have been on the verge of tears.

73 "Oh, Wart," cried Kay, forgetting for the moment that he was only addressing his squire, and slipping back into the familiarity of their boyhood. "What do you think? We are all going to London for a great tournament on New Year's Day!"

74 "Are we?"

75 "Yes, and you will carry my shield and spears for the jousts, and I shall win the palm<sup>13</sup> of everybody and be a great knight!"

76 "Well, I am glad we are going," said the Wart, "for Merlyn is leaving us too."

77 "Oh, we shan't need Merlyn."

78 "He is leaving us," repeated the Wart.

79 "Leavin' us?" asked Sir Ector. "I thought it was we that were leavin'?"

80 "He is going away from the Forest Sauvage."

81 Sir Ector said, "Come now, Merlyn, what's all this about? I don't understand all this a bit."

82 "I have come to say Goodbye, Sir Ector," said the old magician. "Tomorrow my pupil Kay will be knighted, and the next week my

13. **win the palm** receive a medal with a palm leaf (a symbol for victory) for winning.

other pupil will go away as his squire. I have outlived my usefulness here, and it is time to go."

83 "Now, now, don't say that," said Sir Ector. "I think you're a jolly useful chap whatever happens. You just stay and teach me, or be the librarian or something. Don't you leave an old man alone, after the children have flown."

84 "We shall all meet again," said Merlyn. "There is no cause to be sad."

85 "Don't go," said Kay.

86 "I must go," replied their tutor. "We have had a good time while we were young, but it is in the nature of Time to fly. There are many things in other parts of the kingdom which I ought to be attending to just now, and it is a specially busy time for me. Come, Archimedes,<sup>14</sup> say Goodbye to the company."

87 "Goodbye," said Archimedes tenderly to the Wart.

14. **Archimedes** (ahr kihm EE deez) Merlyn's owl, who is able to talk.



88 "Goodbye," said the Wart without looking up at all.  
89 "But you can't go," cried Sir Ector, "not without a month's notice."  
90 "Can't I?" replied Merlyn, taking up the position always used by  
philosophers who propose to dematerialize. He stood on his toes,  
while Archimedes held tight to his shoulder—began to spin on them  
slowly like a top—spun faster and faster till he was only a blur of  
grayish light—and in a few seconds there was no one there at all.  
91 "Goodbye, Wart," cried two faint voices outside the solar window.  
92 "Goodbye," said the Wart for the last time—and the poor fellow  
went quickly out of the room.

93 The knighting took place in a whirl of preparations. Kay's  
sumptuous bath had to be set up in the box room, between two  
towel-horses and an old box of selected games which contained a  
wornout straw dart-board—it was called *fléchette* in those days—  
because all the other rooms were full of packing. The nurse spent the  
whole time constructing new warm pants for everybody, on the  
principle that the climate of any place outside the Forest Sauvage  
must be treacherous to the extreme, and, as for the sergeant, he  
polished all the armor till it was quite brittle and sharpened the  
swords till they were almost worn away. At last it was time to set out.

94 Perhaps, if you happen not to have lived in the Old England of the  
twelfth century, or whenever it was, and in a remote castle on the  
borders of the Marches at that, you will find it difficult to imagine the  
wonders of their journey.

95 The road, or track, ran most of the time along the high ridges of the  
hills or downs, and they could look down on either side of them  
upon the desolate marshes where the snowy reeds sighed, and the ice  
crackled, and the duck in the red sunsets quacked loud on the winter  
air. The whole country was like that. Perhaps there would be a moory  
marsh on one side of the ridge, and a forest of a hundred thousand  
acres on the other, with all the great branches weighted in white.  
They could sometimes see a wisp of smoke among the trees, or a  
huddle of buildings far out among the impassable reeds, and twice  
they came to quite respectable towns which had several inns to boast  
of, but on the whole it was an England without civilization. The  
better roads were cleared of cover for a bow-shot on either side of  
them, lest the traveler should be slain by hidden thieves.

96 They slept where they could, sometimes in the hut of some  
cottager who was prepared to welcome them, sometimes in the  
castle of a brother knight who invited them to refresh themselves,  
sometimes in the firelight and fleas of a dirty little hovel with a bush  
tied to a pole outside it—this was the signboard used at that time by  
inns—and once or twice on the open ground, all huddled together for  
warmth between their grazing chargers. Wherever they went and  
wherever they slept, the east wind whistled in the reeds, and the  
geese went over high in the starlight, honking at the stars.

97 London was full to the brim. If Sir Ector had not been lucky  
enough to own a little land in Pie Street, on which there stood a

Use a digital dictionary or apply  
another strategy to help you  
determine the meanings of concept  
vocabulary.

**fléchette** (flehsh EHT) *n.*

Use a digital dictionary or apply another strategy to help you determine the meanings of concept vocabulary.

**jousts** (JOWSTS) *n.*

respectable inn, they would have been hard put to it to find a lodging. But he did own it, and as a matter of fact drew most of his dividends from that source, so they were able to get three beds between the five of them. They thought themselves fortunate.

98 On the first day of the tournament, Sir Kay managed to get them on the way to the lists at least an hour before the jousts could possibly begin. He had lain awake all night, imagining how he was going to beat the best barons in England, and he had not been able to eat his breakfast. Now he rode at the front of the cavalcade, with pale cheeks, and Wart wished there was something he could do to calm him down.

99 For country people, who only knew the dismantled tilting ground<sup>15</sup> of Sir Ector's castle, the scene which met their eyes was ravishing. It was a huge green pit in the earth, about as big as the arena at a football match. It lay ten feet lower than the surrounding country, with sloping banks, and the snow had been swept off it. It had been kept warm with straw, which had been cleared off that morning, and now the close-worn grass sparkled green in the white landscape. Round the arena there was a world of color so dazzling and moving and twinkling as to make one blink one's eyes. The wooden grandstands were painted in scarlet and white. The silk pavilions of famous people, pitched on every side, were azure and green and saffron and checkered. The pennons and pennoncells which floated everywhere in the sharp wind were flapping with every color of the rainbow, as they strained and slapped at their flagpoles, and the barrier down the middle of the arena itself was done in chessboard squares of black and white. Most of the combatants and their friends had not yet arrived, but one could see from those few who had come how the very people would turn the scene into a bank of flowers, and how the armor would flash, and the scalloped sleeves of the heralds jig in the wind, as they raised their brazen trumpets to their lips to shake the fleecy clouds of winter with joyances and fanfares.

100 "Good heavens!" cried Sir Kay. "I have left my sword at home."

101 "Can't joust without a sword," said Sir Grummore. "Quite irregular."

102 "Better go and fetch it," said Sir Ector. "You have time."

103 "My squire will do," said Sir Kay. "What an awful mistake to make! Here, squire, ride hard back to the inn and fetch my sword. You shall have a shilling<sup>16</sup> if you fetch it in time." The Wart went as pale as Sir Kay was, and looked as if he were going to strike him. Then he said, "It shall be done, master," and turned his ambling palfrey<sup>17</sup> against the stream of newcomers. He began to push his way toward their hostelry<sup>18</sup> as best he might.

104 "To offer me money!" cried the Wart to himself. "To look down at this beastly little donkey-affair off his great charger and to call me

15. **tilting ground** area where a joust takes place.

16. **shilling** British silver coin similar in value to a U.S. quarter.

17. **palfrey** (PAWL free) *n.* mild horse used for ordinary riding.

18. **hostelry** (HOS tuhl ree) *n.* inn.



Squire! Oh, Merlyn, give me patience with the brute, and stop me from throwing his filthy shilling in his face.”

105 When he got to the inn it was closed. Everybody had thronged to see the famous tournament, and the entire household had followed after the mob. Those were lawless days and it was not safe to leave your house—or even to go to sleep in it—unless you were certain that it was impregnable.<sup>19</sup> The wooden shutters bolted over the downstairs windows were two inches thick, and the doors were double-barred.

106 “Now what do I do,” asked the Wart, “to earn my shilling?”

107 He looked ruefully at the blind little inn, and began to laugh.

108 “Poor Kay,” he said. “All that shilling stuff was only because he was scared and miserable, and now he has good cause to be. Well, he shall have a sword of some sort if I have to break into the Tower of London.

109 “How does one get hold of a sword?” he continued. “Where can I steal one? Could I waylay some knight, even if I am mounted on an ambling pad, and take his weapons by force? There must be some swordsmith or armorer in a great town like this, whose shop would be still open.”

110 He turned his mount and cantered off along the street. There was a quiet churchyard at the end of it, with a kind of square in front of the church door. In the middle of the square there was a heavy stone with an anvil on it, and a fine new sword was stuck through the anvil.

111 “Well,” said the Wart, “I suppose it is some sort of war memorial, but it will have to do. I am sure nobody would grudge Kay a war memorial, if they knew his desperate straits.” He tied his reins round a post of the lych gate,<sup>20</sup> strode up the gravel path, and took hold of the sword.

112 “Come, sword,” he said. “I must cry your mercy and take you for a better cause.

113 “This is extraordinary,” said the Wart. “I feel strange when I have hold of this sword, and I notice everything much more clearly. Look at the beautiful gargoyles<sup>21</sup> of the church, and of the monastery which it belongs to. See how splendidly all the famous banners in the aisle are waving. How nobly that yew<sup>22</sup> holds up the red flakes of its timbers to worship God. How clean the snow is. I can smell something like fetherfew and sweet briar—and is it music that I hear?”

114 It was music, whether of pan-pipes or of recorders, and the light in the churchyard was so clear, without being dazzling, that one could have picked a pin out twenty yards away.

115 “There is something in this place,” said the Wart. “There are people. Oh, people, what do you want?”

19. **impregnable** (ihm PREHG nuh buhl) *adj.* not capable of being captured or entered by force.

20. **lych gate** roofed gate at the entrance to a churchyard.

21. **gargoyles** (GAHR goylz) *n.* grotesque sculptures of animals, faces, or fantastic creatures decorating a building.

22. **yew** *n.* type of evergreen tree with red berrylike fruits.

116 Nobody answered him, but the music was loud and the light beautiful. "People," cried the Wart, "I must take this sword. It is not for me, but for Kay. I will bring it back."

117 There was still no answer, and Wart turned back to the anvil. He saw the golden letters, which he did not read, and the jewels on the pommel, flashing in the lovely light.

118 "Come, sword," said the Wart.

119 He took hold of the handles with both hands, and strained against the stone. There was a melodious consort<sup>23</sup> on the recorders, but nothing moved.

120 The Wart let go of the handles, when they were beginning to bite into the palms of his hands, and stepped back, seeing stars.

121 "It is well fixed," he said.

122 He took hold of it again and pulled with all his might. The music played more strongly, and the light all about the churchyard glowed like amethysts; but the sword still stuck.

123 "Oh, Merlyn," cried the Wart, "help me to get this weapon."

124 There was a kind of rushing noise, and a long chord played along with it. All round the churchyard there were hundreds of old friends. They rose over the church wall all together, like the Punch-and-Judy<sup>24</sup> ghosts of remembered days, and there were badgers and nightingales and vulgar crows and hares and wild geese and falcons and fishes and dogs and dainty unicorns and solitary wasps and corkindrills and hedgehogs and griffins and the thousand other animals he had met. They loomed round the church wall, the lovers and helpers of the Wart, and they all spoke solemnly in turn. Some of them had come from the banners in the church, where they were painted in heraldry, some from the waters and the sky and the fields about—but all, down to the smallest shrew mouse, had come to help on account of love. Wart felt his power grow.

125 "Put your back into it," said a Luce (or pike) off one of the heraldic banners, "as you once did when I was going to snap you up. Remember that power springs from the nape of the neck."

126 "What about those forearms," asked a Badger gravely, "that are held together by a chest? Come along, my dear embryo,<sup>25</sup> and find your tool."

127 A Merlin sitting at the top of the yew tree cried out, "Now then, Captain Wart, what is the first law of the foot? I thought I once heard something about never letting go."

128 "Don't work like a stalling woodpecker," urged a Tawny Owl affectionately. "Keep up a steady effort, my duck, and you will have it yet."

129 A White-Front said. "Now, Wart, if you were once able to fly the great North Sea, surely you can coordinate a few little wing-muscles here and there? Fold your powers together, with the spirit of your

23. **consort** (KON sawrt) *n.* piece of music composed for a small group.

24. **Punch-and-Judy** puppets of a married couple who constantly fight in a humorous way.

25. **embryo** (EHM bree oh) *n.* anything in an early stage of development.

mind, and it will come out like butter. Come along, *Homo sapiens*,<sup>26</sup> for all we humble friends of yours are waiting here to cheer."

130 The Wart walked up to the great sword for the third time. He put out his right hand softly and drew it out as gently as from a scabbard.

131 There was a lot of cheering, a noise like a hurdy-gurdy<sup>27</sup> which went on and on. In the middle of this noise, after a long time, he saw Kay and gave him the sword. The people at the tournament were making a frightful row.

132 "But this is not my sword," said Sir Kay.

133 "It was the only one I could get," said the Wart. "The inn was locked."

134 "It is a nice-looking sword. Where did you get it?"

135 "I found it stuck in a stone, outside a church."

136 Sir Kay had been watching the tilting nervously, waiting for his turn. He had not paid much attention to his squire.

137 "That is a funny place to find one," he said.

138 "Yes, it was stuck through an anvil."

139 "What?" cried Sir Kay, suddenly rounding upon him. "Did you just say this sword was stuck in a stone?"

140 "It was," said the Wart. "It was a sort of war memorial."

141 Sir Kay stared at him for several seconds in amazement, opened his mouth, shut it again, licked his lips, then turned his back and plunged through the crowd. He was looking for Sir Ector, and the Wart followed after him.

142 "Father," cried Sir Kay, "come here a moment."

143 "Yes, my boy," said Sir Ector. "Splendid falls these professional chaps do manage. Why, what's the matter, Kay? You look as white as a sheet."

144 "Do you remember that sword which the King of England would pull out?"

145 "Yes."

146 "Well, here it is. I have it. It is in my hand. I pulled it out."

147 Sir Ector did not say anything silly. He looked at Kay and he looked at the Wart. Then he stared at Kay again, long and lovingly, and said, "We will go back to the church."

148 "Now then, Kay," he said, when they were at the church door. He looked at his firstborn kindly, but straight between the eyes. "Here is the stone, and you have the sword. It will make you the King of England. You are my son that I am proud of, and always will be, whatever you do. Will you promise me that you took it out by your own might?"

149 Kay looked at his father. He also looked at the Wart and at the sword. Then he handed the sword to the Wart quite quietly.

150 He said, "I am a liar. Wart pulled it out."

151 As far as the Wart was concerned, there was a time after this in which Sir Ector kept telling him to put the sword back into the

Use a digital dictionary or apply another strategy to help you determine the meanings of concept vocabulary.

**scabbard** (SKA buhrd) *n.*

26. *Homo sapiens* scientific name for human beings (Latin).

27. **hurdy-gurdy** *n.* music box played by turning a crank.

stone—which he did—and in which Sir Ector and Kay then vainly tried to take it out. The Wart took it out for them, and stuck it back again once or twice. After this, there was another time which was more painful.

152 He saw that his dear guardian was looking quite old and powerless, and that he was kneeling down with difficulty on a gouty<sup>28</sup> knee.

153 “Sir,” said Sir Ector, without looking up, although he was speaking to his own boy.

154 “Please do not do this, father,” said the Wart, kneeling down also. “Let me help you up, Sir Ector, because you are making me unhappy.”

155 “Nay, nay, my lord,” said Sir Ector, with some very feeble old tears. “I was never your father nor of your blood, but I wote<sup>29</sup> well ye are of an higher blood than I wend<sup>30</sup> ye were.”

156 “Plenty of people have told me you are not my father,” said the Wart, “but it does not matter a bit.”

157 “Sir,” said Sir Ector humbly, “will ye be my good and gracious lord when ye are King?”

158 “Don’t!” said the Wart.

159 “Sir,” said Sir Ector, “I will ask no more of you but that you will make my son, your foster-brother, Sir Kay, seneschal<sup>31</sup> of all your lands?”

160 Kay was kneeling down too, and it was more than the Wart could bear.

161 “Oh, do stop,” he cried. “Of course he can be seneschal, if I have got to be this King, and, oh, father, don’t kneel down like that, because it breaks my heart. Please get up, Sir Ector, and don’t make everything so horrible. Oh, dear, oh, dear, I wish I had never seen that filthy sword at all.”

162 And the Wart also burst into tears. ❧

28. **gouty** (GOW tee) *adj.* having gout, a disease causing swelling and severe pain in the joints.

29. **wote** *v.* know (first-person singular of the archaic verb *wit*).

30. **wend** *v.* thought (past tense of the archaic verb *wēn*, meaning “think”).

31. **seneschal** (SEHN uh shuhl) *n.* steward or manager in the house of a medieval nobleman.

 **NOTEBOOK**

Work on your own to answer the questions in your notebook. Cite text evidence to explain and justify your reasoning.

**WORKING AS A GROUP**

With your group, discuss your responses to the Analysis and Discussion questions.

- Listen actively to one another's ideas and be receptive to different views.
- Use clear, respectful language to respond appropriately.
- If necessary, modify your speaking style; for example, rephrase comments the group finds unclear.

**Response**

- 1. Personal Connections** Describe your reaction to Wart's pulling the sword from the stone. Was this what you expected? Why, or why not?

**Comprehension**

- 2. Reading Check** (a) Why is there no new king once the King is dead? (b) Why do Sir Ector, Wart, and Kay travel to London? (c) Where does Wart find the sword for Kay?
- 3. Strategy: Make Predictions** (a) Cite one prediction you made while reading the novel excerpt. (b) Were you able to confirm or correct your prediction? Explain. (c) Did making predictions help deepen your understanding of the story?

**Analysis and Discussion**

- 4. (a)** How is the new king of England to be chosen? (b) **Draw Conclusions** What does this method suggest about the reason men become kings in the world of the story?
- 5. Compare and Contrast** How does Kay's manner of speaking toward Wart change from the beginning of the excerpt to the end of the excerpt?
- 6. (a)** Who or what offers advice to Wart as he attempts to pull the sword from the stone? (b) **Interpret** How does this episode add to the sense of the importance of Wart's actions?
- 7. Get Ready for Close Reading** Choose a passage from the story that you find especially interesting or important. You'll discuss the passage with your group during Close-Read activities.

**EQ NOTES**

 **INTERACTIVITY**

**How important are heroes to the world?**

What idea about the importance of heroism is suggested by this novel excerpt? Go to your Essential Question Notes and record your observations and thoughts about the excerpt from *The Once and Future King*.

 **B.E.S.T.**

**K12.EE.1.1:** Cite evidence to explain and justify reasoning.

**K12.EE.2.1:** Read and comprehend grade-level complex texts proficiently.

**K12.EE.4.1:** Use appropriate collaborative techniques and active listening skills when engaging in discussions in a variety of situations.

**12.V.1.2:** Apply knowledge of etymology, derivations, and commonly used foreign phrases to determine meanings of words and phrases in grade-level content.



from THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

NOTEBOOK

INTERACTIVITY

## Literary / Text Elements

KEY CONCEPT

**Evaluating Literary Elements** To evaluate the ways in which the elements of a complex plot structure add meaning to a text, follow these steps:

- **Notice:** Identify the individual elements, such as the hero's hidden nature or the critical challenge that must be overcome.
- **Analyze:** Find connections among the elements; look for ways in which the elements reinforce or otherwise relate to one another.
- **Interpret:** Decide the deeper meaning the plot structure helps create.
- **Evaluate:** Consider whether the plot structure is effective. For example, does it help convey particular themes?

**B.E.S.T.**

**12.R.1.1:** Evaluate how key elements enhance or add layers of meaning and/or style in a literary text and explain the functional significance of those elements in interpreting the text.

**12.R.3.1:** Evaluate an author's use of figurative language.

**12.R.3.4:** Evaluate rhetorical choices across multiple texts.

**12.V.1.3:** Apply knowledge of context clues, figurative language, word relationships, reference materials, and/or background knowledge to determine the connotative and denotative meaning of words and phrases, appropriate to grade level.

**Plot Structures** Stories about heroes often feature complex plot structures, which advance the action of the story and enhance its meaning. Some of these plot structures are **archetypes**, which means they appear in literature of all cultures and eras. In his adaptation of the King Arthur legend, T. H. White makes use of the archetypal hero-in-disguise plot structure:

**Hero-in-Disguise Plot Structure:**

- The hero's true nature is hidden, both to the hero and to other characters. The hero may be living as a humble person—someone without status or authority.
- Often, the hidden hero is the object of disrespect or poor treatment.
- In many cases, one story character knows and secretly nurtures the hero's true identity.
- As part of the unveiling of the hero's true nature, he or she must overcome a critical challenge. Success in this challenge proves the hero's identity and confirms his or her destiny.

In addition, the plot structures of many works of heroic literature often feature **patterns of three**. For example, a hero might be tested three times or encounter three obstacles, before finding success or reward.

**PRACTICE** Work on your own to complete the activity and answer the questions. Then, discuss your responses with your group.

- 1. (a) Analyze** Use a chart like the one shown to analyze how this excerpt from *The Once and Future King* exemplifies the hero-in-disguise plot structure. **(b) Connect** In what specific ways does each plot element function to advance the action of the story and enhance its meaning? Explain.

PLOT STRUCTURE ELEMENT	SPECIFIC DETAILS FROM THE TEXT
Heroic character's true nature is hidden or secret.	
Hidden hero is poorly treated by others.	
At least one other has knowledge of the hero's true nature.	
Hero faces a critical challenge.	

- 2. (a) Assess** How is the "pattern-of-threes" plot structure important in this narrative? **(b) Evaluate** In what ways does the "pattern-of-threes" plot structure contribute to the portrayal of the hero, both before and after his true nature is revealed? In what ways does the "pattern-of-threes" plot structure advance the action of the story? Explain.
- 3. Evaluate** Do you think T. H. White's version of the hero-in-disguise plot structure is effective? Explain, citing specific ways in which White uses or modifies that plot structure.