Summary

The year is 984 AD. The place is somewhere in Europe. For thousands of years, dragons have lived with humans and helped them. But now the humans have turned against them and are hunting them down. Only a few are left. In happier days, humans and dragons lived by the ‘Old Code’. This set of rules taught kings and knights (men who fought on horses for the king) to treat their people well and to rule justly. This was the Golden Age, an age that is over as the story of Dragonheart begins.

Chapters 1–3: In Chapter 1, Sir Bowen, a knight of King Freyne, teaches Prince Einon how to fight with his sword, but above all, he teaches him the how to live by the ‘Old Code’. Brok, one of the king’s Knights, who does not live by the Old Code, comes to fetch the Prince since his evil father commands that he has to watch how the peasants are being killed. In Chapter 2, Sir Bowen and Prince Einon watch the fight between the king’s men and the peasants. The king is wounded by Redbeard and a group of peasants. Einon tries to save his father, but the king dies. Despite being injured by Redbeard’s daughter, Kara, Einon is crowned King. In Chapter 3, Queen Aislinn is told that her husband is dead and that her son has been wounded. She decides to take her son to the Great Dragon’s lair in the Cold Mountain to ask him for help. The Great Dragon agrees to help him, by giving her son half his heart, on condition that he promises he will not be a cruel king, kill peasants or fail to rule by the Old Code.

Chapters 4–5: In Chapter 4, Einon does not keep his word. He soon becomes a very cruel king and hates peasants. He orders his knights to hurt Redbeard, but Sir Bowen arrives just in time to save him. Then Sir Bowen and the peasants have to run for their lives, since the king’s men are fierce. Sir Bowen is furious to find that Einon is not respecting the Old Code at all. Sir Bowen realises that he needs to kill the Dragon if he wants to both weaken and defeat the King. In Chapter 5, on his way up to the Cold Mountain where the Great Dragon dwells, Sir Bowen meets Brother Gilbert, a monk and storyteller. They decide to ride together. Sir Bowen meets the Great Dragon he is actually looking for, but he does not recognise him. When he learns that the dragon is the last one left, he tells him that he merely kills dragons to make a living. Indeed, neither of them wants to kill the other. So the dragon comes up with an idea.

Chapters 6–8: In Chapter 6, The Great Dragon and Sir Bowen put the dragon’s ideas into practice by means of make-believe. The Dragon pretends to attack Sir Felton’s fields and Sir Bowen pretends to kill the dragon in exchange for money. They both get away with it. Sir Bowen and the dragon feel very sad that nobody lives by the Old Code any more. The Great Dragon learns that Sir Bowen is searching for the dragon who gave half his heart to cruel King Einon, but he does not own up. In Chapter 7, King Einon and Sir Felton watch the peasants work hard on the king’s new castle. The king recognises Redbeard and orders for him to be killed. His daughter Kara is devastated and swears to take revenge. In Chapter 8, Kara secretly enters the castle to kill King Einon but she is caught by his knights. Einon notices she is the girl that wounded him when he was a child and thinks of a way to get even. The Queen helps Kara escape and she runs away to her village. As she is trying to persuade her fellow villagers to fight the king, Sir Bowen and Draco play their act but the villagers refuse to give them money and hand them Kara in exchange.

Chapters 9–10: In Chapter 9, King Einon and his knights find Kara and Sir Bowen, and as they are about to fight them, Draco comes to their rescue. The king soon realises that Draco is the Great Dragon who gave him half of his heart and runs away. Sir Bowen, Kara and Draco decide to join forces to fight the cruel King and the villagers get ready for the great battle. They give Sir Bowen a special sword with Draco’s face on it. In Chapter 10, Sir Bowen leads the villagers into the castle. Draco burns the king’s castle and knights while Sir Bowen and his men start fighting. Sir Bowen tries to kill Einon with his sword but it is Draco who gets hurt, since his own half is wounded. Draco asks Sir Bowen to kill him so that the cruel king will die. The Queen tries to kill Draco
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with a knife but Einon prevents her from doing so. Finally, Sir Bowen pushes his sword into the two halves of Einon’s heart and both the cruel king and the last dragon die. Draco turns into starlight and a new star is born in the sky.

About the film

The main star of the film Dragonheart is Draco, an animatronic dragon, six metres high and 14 metres long. He flies through the air, breathes out great flames of fire and carries off people and horses into the sky. The film was made on location in Eastern Europe, among the dramatic mountains and forests of Slovakia.

Background and themes

The idea of the Old Code at the heart of this story is taken from the English medieval ‘code of chivalry’ and the legendary court of King Arthur and the Round Table. It was a strict code (set of rules to live by) that imposed order on the chaotic and unpredictable world of the Middle Ages (5th century to 14th century). King Arthur appears briefly in the film of Dragonheart (but not in this adaptation) and recites the Old Code to Sir Bowen. This is the full version:

A knight is sworn to valour
His heart knows only virtue
His blade defends the helpless
His might upholds the weak
His word speaks only truth
His wrath undoes the wicked.

1 a man who fought for the king on horses
2 courage
3 goodness
4 sword
5 strength
6 anger
7 ruins

In the medieval world the king had complete power over his land and people. He had castles across the land and would travel from one to another to show everybody who was in charge. He gave land to his lords if they were loyal to him. The king and the lords had knights who enforced their power. The knights would rush all over the king’s land to fight anyone who challenged the royal authority. The peasants lived in villages and worked the land for the lord or the king. In return for their work and their loyalty, they got a small piece of land for their family. They also did other labouring work – in this story they build King Einon’s great castle for him. Fields were divided into strips for the peasant families, where they grew their own vegetables and kept a few animals – perhaps a cow and one or two pigs. The peasants were usually allowed to fatten up their pigs on acorns and nuts in the king’s or lord’s forests in the autumn. They then killed and salted them to last through the winter. Life was hard, though, especially when the winters were long and food ran out long before the spring.

An important theme running through the story is losing one’s faith and then finding it again through acts of kindness and love. Sir Bowen, the hero of the story, is not perfect. He begins the story as a good knight, teaching Prince Einon to follow the Old Code and not his father’s evil ways. But when he believes that the Great Dragon has given the boy an evil heart, he forgets the Old Code and becomes a dragon hunter. He says he kills dragons for money. Really he blames them for the death of the Old Code and the old way of life and the terrible injustice he sees around him. But when he meets the young peasant girl, Kara, who is full of ideals and ready to fight Prince Einon to the death, he sees himself as a young knight. With her example and the love of the dragon, he returns to the Old Code and fights back.

Dragons have a long history as popular mythical creatures. They have appeared in literature since the oldest poems, and have continued to feature in children’s story books to this day.

Discussion activities

Before reading

1 Pair work: Ask students what they know about dragons: What are dragons like? Are they real? What do you know about them? Did you read a book or see a film about them?

2 Discuss: Copy the phrases below on the board. Ask students to do the following activity in pairs: What do you think dragons do? Tick the right sentences in the box:

| eat young women | kill kings | fight knights | help peasants | burn villages | sing songs | do good things | do bad things |

3 Predict: Ask students to look at the cover, title and content page of the book. Guide them with these instructions: Look at the title and book cover in pairs. What do they show and tell you about the story? Read the Contents page and imagine what the book will be about.
Teacher’s notes  LEVEL 2

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4  Read carefully and discuss: Ask students to read the Introduction in pairs. Guide them with these questions: Read the Introduction in pairs and (a) discuss with another student how Einon changes once he is king and (b) answer the questions that Draco and Sir Bowen ask themselves.

Chapters 1–3
While reading
5  Pair work: The king’s men
Tell students to work in pairs and fill out the following chart as they read pages 1 to 3: Work in twos and write down as much as you know about Sir Bowen, Einon and Brok as you read pages 1 to 3.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Einon</td>
<td>Sir Bowen</td>
<td>Brok</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6  Read and check: Tell your students to read Chapter 2 in groups and to do the following activity: Read Chapter 2 in groups. Decide who or what these words talk about and say why: a) two very strong but bad men; b) a very good and sad man; c) a lot of afraid and poor people; d) the worst day in the life of a child.

7  Read carefully, pair work and write: Ask students to do the following activity as they read page 6: Work in pairs. Read page 6 and then look at the picture. Who is there? What are they like? What are they thinking? Answer these questions in pairs and then read them to other students.

After reading
8  Role play: Tell students to do the following activity after reading page 9: Imagine you are two dragons, the Great Dragon and his best friend. Talk about what happened, the king’s son, the Queen, the Old Code, the future, etc.

9  Write: Ask students to imagine they are Redbeard’s daughter, Kara, and to do the following activity: Imagine you are Kara after the battle. This is the worst day of your life. You go home and you start writing everything that happened in your diary. What do you write about the peasants, your father, the king, his men and his son?

Chapters 4–5
While reading
10 Discuss: Ask students to discuss the following in groups after reading page 10: How much has Einon changed now that he is king? Why? Is he doing what the Great Dragon asked for? Is he very different from his father?

After reading
11 Pair work, write and check: Tell students to work in pairs and to write as much as they can about the characters in Chapters 4 and 5. After reading Chapters 4 and 5, write what you know about (a) Redbeard’s daughter (b) the Great Dragon (c) the peasants (d) the new king (e) Sir Bowen (f) Brok.

Chapters 6–8
While reading
12 Write: Ask students to re-read pages 18 to 21 and to work on the following activity: Chapter 5 ends with the dragon’s idea and Chapter 6 starts with it. But we don’t know what it is. Read pages 18 to 21 to find what it is. Then write a small paragraph about it.

13 Pair work: Tell students to work in pairs on the following activity as they read pages 23–25: Imagine you are Kara. Read what happens to her on pages 23 to 25 (until the end of Chapter 7). Chapter 7 ends with Kara’s words: “One day…” Write what she will do and say why.

14 Discuss: Ask students to work in groups and to do the following activity when they finish Chapter 8: In groups read pages 27 to 29 and find out what the peasants feel about Kara. Discuss why they want the dragon to take her away? Are they right? Why (not)?

After reading
15 Role play: Ask students to work in groups and to role play the following scene after reading Chapters 6 to 8: Work in groups. Imagine you are Einon, Brok, the king’s knights and the Queen at the castle. You know that Kara has left with the Great Dragon. Take turns to say what you think and feel about the dragon. Then discuss what you should do.

Chapters 9–10
While reading
16 Discuss: Ask students to work in groups on the following activity as they look at the pictures on pages 31 and 32: Look at pictures of the fight and the dragon on pages 31 and 32. Imagine they are looking at one another. What do they see? What do they learn about one another? What does each one think will happen next?

17 Pair work: A difficult decision
Tell students to work in pairs as they read page 39: In twos, read page 39 and imagine you are Sir Bowen. You see everything the king does and what the Queen does and you decide to do something. Write out what you are thinking as you see all this and what you decide to do.

After reading
18 Group work: Students work in groups and discuss the following: What happens at the end of the book to Sir Bowen, the king, Kara, Draco? Do you like this ending? What do you think will happen to each of them next?

Vocabulary activities
For the Word List and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.