The original text

The legends of King Arthur belong to the oral tradition. They were put in writing by Geoffrey of Monmouth in 1136. In the Middle Ages, French writers like Chrétien de Troyes also wrote about them. In 1470, Sir Thomas Malory wrote a long book in English called *The Death of Arthur*.

Summary

King Arthur and his knights are Britain’s greatest legendary figures.

Chapter 1: With the help of Merlin’s magic, King Uther marries the beautiful Igraine on condition that Uther gives him their firstborn. When Arthur is born, Merlin hides him. On Uther’s death, civil war breaks out. One day young Arthur travels to London, with his step father, Sir Ector, and Arthur pulls a sword out of a stone. The stone has words on it: ONLY THE KING CAN TAKE THE SWORD FROM THE STONE, so Arthur becomes the next king.

Chapter 2: Arthur quickly gathers around him the bravest and best knights in the kingdom and marries Guinevere, the most beautiful woman in Britain. Merlin makes a round table for the knights at Camelot, the most important city in Britain.

Chapter 3: Arthur comes across Queen Annoure’s castle on a journey. Annoure wants him to marry her. As Arthur escapes, she orders Sir Pellinore to kill him. Unaware that he is fighting Arthur, Pellinore wounds him lightly but then realises who he is. Since Arthur’s sword breaks in the fight, Merlin takes Arthur to the Lady of the Lake, who hands Arthur a magic sword called Excalibur.

Chapter 4: Morgan le Fay hates Arthur and tricks him and one of his knights into a fight in which neither knows the other’s identity. This time Arthur is severely wounded and goes to a nunnerly to be healed. Morgan follows him, steals his magic scabbard and throws it into a lake.

Chapter 5: Lady Vivien wants to be the greatest magician in the world and tricks Merlin into getting into a cave he cannot get out of. Legend says Merlin is still trapped in this cave.

Chapter 6: When Sir Meligrance kidnaps Guinevere, Sir Lancelot rescues her. Meligrance is forgiven by Guinevere but he locks Lancelot into a room and tells Arthur that Guinevere has run away with him because she loves him. When Lancelot escapes, he kills Meligrance for being a liar.

Chapter 7: Tristram gets poisoned in his fight against the King of Ireland’s son and travels to Ireland to get cured. Without knowing Tristram is his son’s murderer, the king asks him to teach his daughter, Isolt, to play the harp. Tristram and Isolt fall in love but Isolt has to marry King Mark, Tristram’s uncle, and Tristram becomes a Knight of the Round Table. When Sir Tristram learns Isolt has been kidnapped, he fights Sir Palamides, her captor, and takes her to King Mark who suspects Tristram and Isolt are in love and kills Tristram. Isolt dies of sadness and King Mark is killed by one of Arthur’s knights.

Chapter 8: An old man sits Galahad, Sir Lancelot’s son, at the only vacant place on the Round Table, reserved for the best knight. Once dubbed a knight, Galahad takes a long journey in search of the Grail which, according to an apparition, is in the country. As many knights accompany him, the brotherhood of the Round Table is practically dissolved. They finally find the Grail on a ship at sea which takes them to a city. In the city, the old man makes Galahad king and foretells the latter’s imminent death. When the other knights return, Arthur can sense the end of the Round Table is near.

Chapter 9: In Arthur’s absence, Sir Mordred attempts to kidnap Guinevere. Arthur returns and one of Mordred’s men kills Sir Gawain, Arthur’s knight. In Arthur’s sleep, the dead Gawain advises him to wait for Sir Lancelot’s help. The fight against Mordred’s men starts by accident. As many knights die, an enraged Arthur kills Mordred and gets a deadly wound. Arthur asks Sir Bedivere to throw Excalibur into the lake. When Bedivere finally does so, the Lady of the Lake takes it. Arthur’s last wish is to be taken to the lake. A boat with five ladies in black is waiting for him. Before leaving, Arthur promises to return whenever his country needs him and asks Bedivere to tell his story.
King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

Background and themes

Knights, chivalry and male bonding: What do knights fight for? Who are the ‘Knights of the Round Table’? What dangerous things do they do?

Courtly love: Do knights fight for their ladies? Why?

Gender roles: What do the Knights of the Round Table do all the time? What do ladies like Guinevere do? How many evil people are men and how many are women?

Quest: Why do knights go on journeys all the time? How do their journeys end?

Magic: Who uses magic? Is magic used for evil or good?

Disguise: How many knights fight against King Arthur without knowing who he is? Why do they fight?

Swords: Why are swords so important in the story?

Water: How many times do we find water in the story? What does water mean?

Discussion activities

Chapters 1–2

Before reading
1 Discuss: King Arthur
   What do you know about King Arthur? Was he a real person? Are there films about him? Who wrote the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table?

2 Group work:
   Have students sit in a circle. The first one tells an anecdote to the student sitting to his or her left. The next student repeats it to the following student but with a slight change of his or her choice. The following student does the same and so on. The last student tells it in a loud voice. The first student who told the anecdote will point out the differences.

3 Discuss: Oral tradition
   Have students discuss activity 2
   How much did the story change? What were the parts of the story that changed most?

While reading
4 Read carefully:
   Ask students to read page 1. Why is Uther a great king?

5 Guess:
   What did Merlin do to help King Uther marry Igraine?

6 Role play:
   Have students role play the scene in which Uther tells Igraine that he is giving their three-day-old child, Arthur, to Merlin.

7 Guess:
   The archbishop and the knights found ‘a large stone with a great sword in it’ (page 2). Who brought the stone and put the sword there?

8 Research:
   Using books and the Internet, have students find information on the Saxons. Who were the Saxons? Where did they come from? What did King Arthur do about them?

After reading
9 Newspaper article
   Have half of the class write a short article on the situation in Britain after Uther died and the other half one on the time Arthur manages to pull the sword out of the stone. They can use the following headlines: KING UTHER DEAD, WHO IS THE NEW KING? and YOUNG BOY PULLS SWORD OUT OF STONE.

10 Write:
   Have students write Arthur’s thoughts when he is told by Sir Ector that he is not his real father.

Chapter 3

Before reading
11 Discuss: Quest
   Have students discuss the following: Do you know stories of men and women that do brave things? Why do you think they do these things? Do they win or lose?

While reading
12 Predict:
   Have students discuss the following: Who is the evil woman that will take the scabbard and the sword away from Arthur? How will she try to kill him?

13 Discuss: Swords
   Get students to discuss the following: How many swords does King Arthur have? Why are swords important in this story? Why does this sword have a name?

After reading
14 Research and discussion:
   Queen Annoure says she is ‘the richest person in the world’ (page 7). Have students search on the Internet who the richest person in the world is today. Have them discuss the following: Can money buy love?

15 Artwork: ‘Wanted’ poster
   Have students design a wanted poster to catch Arthur after he escapes from Queen Annoure’s castle.

Chapter 4

Before reading
16 Discuss: Evil women
   Get students to discuss the following: Do you know any stories about an evil woman? Tell it to your friends. Why do you think there are so many stories about evil women?
King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

While reading
17 Guess:
Get students to discuss the possible answers to this question: Why does Morgan le Fay hate King Arthur?

18 Discuss: Disguise
Have students discuss the following: How many times does King Arthur have to fight people without knowing who they are? What makes these fights more interesting?

After reading
19 Write: Magic!
Have students re-read Chapter 4 and write the story from the point of view of the sword.

20 Artwork:
Have students re-read page 17 and draw the scene in which Morgan threw the scabbard into the lake.

Chapters 5–6
While reading
21 Check:
Get students to re-read the text carefully and discuss the answer to this question with evidence from the text:
Arthur finds magic in the woods. Is it the first time?

22 Discuss: Heroes
Explain to students what a hero is and then have them discuss the following: What makes a knight be a hero? Who is the better hero, Arthur or Lancelot?

After reading
23 Write: Merlin’s obituary
Explain to students what an obituary is. Have them write an obituary as if they were King Arthur and thought that Merlin was dead.

24 Role play:
Get students to imagine the following situation, write the dialogue and then act it out: Merlin gets out of the cave after many years. What does he say to Vivien? What does she answer?

Chapters 7–8
While reading
25 Discuss: Tragic lovers
Do you know another story of a man and a woman who die because of their love? Was King Mark right to kill Tristram?

26 Research:
Have students find information about the Grail. What is the Grail? Why is it so important?

27 Discussion: Quest
Have students discuss the following: How many knights took long journeys? Why did knights take long journeys?

After reading
28 Artwork and writing: Tristram and Isolt’s epitaph
Have students draw Tristram and Isolt’s tombstones and write their epitaphs.

29 Write: Job advertisement
Have students write a job advertisement starting with these words: WANTED: KNIGHT OF THE ROUND TABLE.

30 Artwork: Comic strip
Have students draw a comic strip of Sir Galahad and the grail. It should have five frames.

Chapter 9
Before reading
31 Research:
Using books or the Internet, have students spot London, Dover and France on a map.

While reading
32 Discuss: Third time lucky!
Have students discuss the following: Sir Bedivere goes to the lake three times. Do you know any other story where number three appears or where things happen three times?

33 Guess:
Get students to discuss the following: Where do the ladies on the boat take King Arthur?

After reading
34 Discuss:
Have students reread page 39 and discuss how they would film the scene in which King Arthur is taken away.

35 Group work:
Explain to students that the Code of Chivalry was a set of rules that a knight had to meet in order to be called a ‘knight.’ Make students guess what these rules were. In groups, have students list the characteristics of a knight. Would the characteristics be the same today?

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