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ABSTRACT

Based on characters in the Arthurian legend, this lesson plan presents activities designed to help students understand that many writers have told the tale of King Arthur and the people around him, including Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, and Mordred. The main activity of the lesson involves students writing a dramatic monologue supposedly composed at some point by one of the characters in the Arthurian legend. It includes objectives, materials, procedures, adaptations, discussion questions, evaluation methods, extension activities, annotations of suggested readings and web links, vocabulary, and related academic standards and benchmarks addressed in the lesson plan. The lesson plan also contains a description of a video clip related to the lesson, comprehension questions related to the video clip, and answers to those comprehension questions. (RS)

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TITLE OF LESSON PLAN:

The Legend of King Arthur

LENGTH OF LESSON: Two class periods

GRADE LEVEL: 9-12

SUBJECT AREA: Literature

CREDIT: Alisa Soderquist, English teacher, Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology, Alexandria, Virginia.

OBJECTIVE: Students will understand the following:

Many writers have told the tale of King Arthur and the people around him, including Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, and Mordred. The legends are part of our heritage.

MATERIALS:
For this lesson, you will need:

Texts of the dramatic monologues cited in the Procedures: Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"; T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock";

poems from Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology,* such as "Lucinda Matlock" and "Richard Bone"; Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses"

Access to reference materials that explain why the Kennedy era was referred to as Camelot

PROCEDURE:

1. After basic instruction on the tales surrounding the legendary medieval British monarch named King Arthur, invite your students to try their own hands at writing literature. Tell students that you will lead them through the steps necessary for each of them to create a dramatic monologue supposedly composed at some point by one of the following characters: Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, or Mordred. (You can hold off on using and defining the term *dramatic monologue* until later in this activity.)

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2. Ask students to brainstorm individually about each of the following characters: Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, and Mordred. To stimulate the brainstorming, suggest the students jot down thoughts that each character might have about his or her triumphs, failures, joys, and sorrows. Consider also asking students to imagine how each character might respond to the question, "What secret have you been keeping from readers?"

3. Based on the quantity and quality of their brainstorming notes for the characters, each student should select the one character he or she finds most intriguing. Direct students to freewrite about their character for at least 15 minutes.

4. Tell students to put their brainstorming and freewriting notes aside for a while so that you can familiarize them with the literary genre known as dramatic monologue. You might begin by defining the term: a dramatic monologue is a poem in which the only voice is that of a character who speaks to one or more listeners. Usually, the reader learns about the character's personality through the words of the poem. Sometimes the reader learns more than the character may think he or she is revealing. The reader may also infer the setting, the situation, and facts about the listeners—such as how the listeners may be reacting as they hear the speaker and how that reaction then affects the speaker.

Students are probably familiar with the term *monologue* from plays. Some scholars have said that a dramatic monologue is, in effect, a monologue without the rest of the play.

5. Ask students to name previously read poems that, they now realize, are dramatic monologues or that they recall as having been so described. Alternatively, if students are not familiar with any of the following exemplars of British and American dramatic monologues, interject one or more of them into this lesson now. They are part of many high school curricula:

- Robert Browning's "My Last Duchess"
- T.S. Eliot's "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" (sometimes described as a dramatic monologue, sometimes as an interior monologue)
- Poems from Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology,* such as "Lucinda Matlock" and "Richard Bone"
- Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses"

6. After discussing what the listener or reader learns about the speaker from the dramatic monologues you study or review, go on to analyze the verse lines so that students notice the following characteristics:

- "My Last Duchess": rhyming couplets in iambic pentameter
- "Ulysses": blank verse (iambic pentameter)
- "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock": varied rhythms and rhyme schemes
- *Spoon River* poems: free verse

7. Now ask your students to once again take up their brainstorming and freewriting notes about Arthur, Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, or Mordred and use the notes as the basis of an original dramatic monologue by one of these characters. Writers can use for their creation any of the verse styles discussed in the preceding step.

Remind students that their dramatic monologues can relate the character's triumphs, failures, joys, and sorrows—and can also include the character's response to the question, "What secret have you been keeping from readers?"

8. End this activity by asking all the students who selected the same Arthurian character to read their poems aloud to the class one after the other. Elicit responses from the rest of the students to the poems about one character before going on to the next batch of poems about another character.

ADAPTATIONS:

Of the dramatic monologues cited in the Procedures, probably only the poems by Edgar Lee Masters will be sufficiently accessible to middle school students, so use only them as exemplars for this age group.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. How does the story of the sword in the anvil contribute to the mystique and power of King Arthur?

2. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a social system built on loyalty, honor, and trust.

3. What qualities did King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table possess that would still make them heroes today?

4. Explain what you think is the meaning of the statement that the Arthurian legend is "psychological archeology".

5. Discuss the ways in which Le Morte d'Arthur is a very moral tale.

6. What dimension does the Holy Grail story line add to the legend of King Arthur?

EVALUATION:

Given the difficulties of evaluating students' creative writing, use a pass/fail grading system for this assignment, passing those students who show effort during brainstorming and freewriting, who apply themselves to writing a poem, and who cooperate in performing their poem for classmates.

EXTENSION:

The Age of Camelot
Remind students of the name of King Arthur's palace and court—Camelot. Tell students that after the death of John F. Kennedy in 1963, the Kennedy's time in the White House was referred to as Camelot. Ask students to figure out why observers gave the Kennedy era that name. Students may conduct research as necessary.

A Medieval Day in the Life of . . .
Ask the class to do research on what daily life in a medieval castle was like. Students can tell their stories as "A Day in the Life of..."; some should write about a knight, some about a lady of the court, and some, a knave. Remind students that their reports should describe their subject's dress, food, responsibilities, luxuries, or hardships; the reports should also explain how their subject celebrated a festival or other occasion.

SUGGESTED READINGS:

The Search for King Arthur
David Day. Facts on File, 1995.
Who was King Arthur? Read this beautifully illustrated book and trace the earliest historical, mythical, and literary origins of Arthur as well as those of Guinevere, Lancelot, Merlin, Camelot, Excalibur, and the Holy Grail.

The Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Arthurian Legends
Ronan Coghlan. Element Books Limited, 1993.
This easy-to-use encyclopedia has information on all the themes, heroes, heroines, and myths of Arthurian legend. It also has descriptions, illustrations, and drawings of the Grail Quest, the Lady of the Lake, and Merlin, as well as the castles, forests, weapons, and horses associated with King Arthur.

WEB LINKS:

Le Morte d'Arthur by Project Gutenberg
A public domain copy of the e-text of Le Morte d'Arthur is available for downloading.
http://promo.net/pg/_titles/L.html

The Camelot Project
This site has Arthurian texts, images, bibliographies, and links for the study of King Arthur.
http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cphome.stm

ORB - On Line Reference Book
An online reference of all things medieval. Great resource for a complete Arthurian study.
http://orb.rhodes.edu

NetSerf - The Internet Connection to Medieval Studies
Everything for a serious unit on medieval studies, including culture of the times, drama, history, and even clip art!
http://netserf.cua.edu/

Medieval Love Songs
A study guide of medieval love songs that will enhance all medieval studies.
http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~brians/love-in-the-arts/medieval.html

The Middle Ages - ART
Middle Ages unit using art as the focus. Great site for incorporating art into the language arts classroom. Includes an online town with interesting characters for students to meet.
http://www.primenet.com/~arted/pages/celticknot.html

VOCABULARY:

barbarian
An alien culture usually believed to be inferior to another culture or people.
Context:
The Romans considered the Celts to be barbarians.

chivalry
The system, spirit, or customs of medieval knighthood, which included bravery, skill, and honor.
Context:
The code of chivalry dictated how knights were to behave.

imperious
Dominant; often domineering.
Context:
King Arthur never assumed an imperious manner.

legitimize
Justify.
Context:
English rulers claimed kinship with King Arthur to legitimize their authority.

motif
A dominant idea or central theme.
Context:
A common motif in medieval stories is the quest theme.

scoundrel
A disreputable person.
Context:
The worst scoundrel in the Arthurian legend is Mordred.

succor
Aid; help.
Context:
Knights were expected to give succor to those in distress.

ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

Grade Level: 6-8, 9-12

Subject Area: language arts

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:
(6-8) Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, fantasies, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, tall tales, supernatural tales).

(9-12) Applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of literary texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature).

(9-12) Knows the defining characteristics of a variety of literary forms and genres (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature, the Bible).

(9-12) Identifies the simple and complex actions (e.g., internal/external conflicts) between main and subordinate characters in texts containing complex character structures.

(9-12) Makes abstract connections between his or her own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.

(9-12) Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates a familiarity with selected literary works of enduring quality.

Benchmark:
Demonstrates an understanding of why certain literary works may be considered classics or works of enduring quality and substance.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: literature

Standard: Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of literary texts.

Benchmarks:

Benchmark: Applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of literary texts (e.g., fiction, nonfiction, myths, poems, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, supernatural tales, satires, parodies, plays, American literature, British literature, world and ancient literature).

Benchmark: Analyzes the effectiveness of complex elements of a plot (e.g., time frame, cause-and-effect relationships, conflicts, resolutions).

Benchmark: Identifies the simple and complex actions (e.g., internal/external conflicts) between main and subordinate characters in texts containing complex character structures.

Benchmark: Recognizes archetypes and symbols across literary texts (e.g., heroes, beneficence of nature, "dawn").

Benchmark: Understands the effects of complex literary devices and techniques on the overall quality of a work (e.g., tone, irony, mood, figurative language, allusion, diction, dialogue, symbolism, point of view, style).

Benchmark: Understands historical and cultural influences on literary works.

Benchmark: Makes abstract connections between his or her own life and the characters, events, motives, and causes of conflict in texts.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: historical understanding

Standard: Understands the historical perspective.

Benchmarks:
Benchmark: Analyzes the values held by specific people who influenced history and the role that these values played.

Benchmark: Knows how to evaluate the credibility and authenticity of historical sources.

Grade Level: 9-12

Subject Area: behavioral studies

Standard: Understands conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions.

Benchmarks: Understands that conflict between people or groups may arise from competition over ideas, resources, power, and/or status.

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Video Information and Comprehension Questions

Video Description
The tale of Arthur has been told in many forms. Now take a closer look at this cornerstone of British mythology with noted Arthurian scholar Geoffrey Ashe, who examines evidence of a historical figure underlying the legend.

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Download Comprehension Questions & Answers

The Comprehension Questions are available to download as an RTF file. You can save the file to your desktop and open it in a word processing program.

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TITLE OF VIDEO:
Le Morte d'Arthur: The Legend of the King

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the major themes of Le Morte d'Arthur?

2. Why is Sir Thomas Malory's masterpiece Le Morte d'Arthur of major importance to literary history?

3. Who might the original King Arthur have been?

4. For what political purpose have English rulers used the Arthurian legend?

5. What were the requirements of the Arthurian warrior?

6. What was the dual nature of the men and women in Malory's tale?

7. What theme does the character of Merlin embody?

8. How does the ending of Le Morte d'Arthur keep hope alive?

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Le Morte d'Arthur: The Legend of the King

VIDEO COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS:

1. What are the major themes of Le Morte d'Arthur?
Le Morte d'Arthur deals with the themes of power, love, and betrayal. It is a political story of a hero who saves the world and then loses it.

2. Why is Sir Thomas Malory's masterpiece Le Morte d'Arthur of major importance to literary history?
In Le Morte d'Arthur, Sir Thomas Malory compiled all the stories of King Arthur and shaped the legend as we know it today.

3. Who might the original King Arthur have been?
The original King Arthur might have been an English ruler during the Dark Ages who restored the order of the earlier Roman rule and fought back the barbarians for a period of time.

4. For what political purpose have English rulers used the Arthurian legend?
English rulers have used the Arthurian legend to legitimize their authority by claiming kinship to King Arthur.

5. What were the requirements of the Arthurian warrior?
The Arthurian warrior was expected to exhibit courage, skill, loyalty, and self-control.

6. What was the dual nature of the men and women in Malory's tale?
The men and women in Malory's Le Morte d'Arthur have a dual nature in that they are both saints and sinners.

7. What theme does the character of Merlin embody?
The figure of Merlin embodies the belief in mystery and magic.

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8. How does the ending of Le Morte d'Arthur keep hope alive?
Le Morte d'Arthur ends with hope because it implies that Arthur is not dead but is on the island of Avalon and will return some day to rule England.

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