



You've Come a Long Way Since the Round Table, Baby

Donna Shafer, WVPT

Overview

Topic: Arthurian legend. Students will research the characters of Arthurian legend and compare/contrast them to characters in Beowulf. They will analyze literature dealing with the legends and hypothesize how the characters would fare in modern American society. The unit ends with an optional medieval banquet.

Time Allotment

Ten 90-minute classes

Media Components

- Computer lab with Internet access for each student
- Projection device for teacher computer
- Diskettes or network folder
- Microsoft Word resume wizard or directions for creating a resume
- www.portaportal.com Website which allows you to bookmark sites. Students access using a teacher-supplied password. Other option is to individually bookmark all computers or hand out URLs to be typed in by students.
- www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/cphome.stm *The Camelot Project* Excellent source for Arthurian texts, images, bibliographies, and basic information.
- www.arthuriana.co.uk/ *Arthuriana* Another excellent source for texts, images, bibliographies, and basic information.
- www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/learning/lr1kwlh.htm KWHL chart for use with the literature.
- www.selfknowledge.com/280au.htm *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Thomas Malory
- poetrygarden.freesevers.com/Page3.html *Guenevere* by Sara Teasdale

- www.theotherpages.org/poems/morris01.html *The Defense of Guenevere* by William Morris
- www.luminarium.org/medlit/gawain.htm *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
- http://hosting.uaa.alaska.edu/afdtk/ect_wbath.htm *The Electronic Canterbury Tales: The Wife of Bath's Tale*
- www.mysticrealms.org.uk/tennyson/ *Mystic Realms Illustrated Tennyson Idylls of the King* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, online
- www.washingtonpost.com/wl/jobs/home?nav=gl *obetop* Washington, D.C., Virginia, Maryland Employers. Students can search for potential jobs for their characters at this site.

Optional Video Suggestions:

- *Excalibur*. Dir. John Boorman. Nigel Terry, Helen Mirren. VHS. Warner Studios, 1981.
- *Merlin*. Dir. Steve Barron. Sam Neill, Helena Bonham Carter. VHS. Hallmark Home Entertainment, 1998.
- *The Mists of Avalon*. Dir. Uli Edel. Anjelica Huston, Julianna Margulies, Joan Allen. VHS. Warner Home Video, 2001.
- *First Knight*. Dir. Jerry Zucker. Sean Connery, Richard Gere. VHS. Columbia/Tristar Studios, 1995.
- *Camelot*. Dir. Josh Logan. Richard Harris, Vanessa Redgrave. VHS. Warner Studios, 1967.
- *Monty Python's The Holy Grail*. Dir. Terry Gilliam, Terry Jones. VHS. Columbia/Tristar Studios, 1975.



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- *The Sword in the Stone*. Dir. Wolfgang Reitherman. Karl Swenson, Rickie Sorenson. Walt Disney Home Video. 1963.

Sites for optional banquet:

- Medieval cooking links. *Jacinth's Info Mine: Medieval Cooking* ftp.ev1.net/~jacinth/cooking.
- Quick and easy instructions for making a medieval gown www.iceprincess.net/gown.html
- Kids Domain Crafts—Knight Costume www.kidsdomain.com/craft/hallknight.html
- Kids Domain Crafts—Knight Costume and Shield www.kidsdomain.com/craft/hall-knight2.html
- Renaissance, Medieval, and Elizabethan Costumes: How to Make and Wear Them www.knowledgehound.com/topics/renaissa.htm

Learning Objectives

The student will be able to:

- compare/contrast Arthurian characters to characters in *Beowulf*
- compare/contrast Arthurian characters to modern Americans
- critically analyze and discuss literature about Arthurian legends
- complete a Virginia State Employment Application and resume

(This lesson addresses Va. SOL English 12.3, 12.4, 12.5, 12.6; Computer/Technology 8.1, 8.3, 8.4)

Materials

- Fiction Chart, 1 per student (attached)
- KWHL chart, 1 per student
- Question Frames for Developing Higher-Level Questions, 1 per student (Handout for students to create HOTS questions from the literature www.justreadnow.com/strategies/bloom.pdf)
- List of Arthurian characters (optional); see the *Camelot Project* and *Arthuriana* websites

Teacher Preparations

- Obtain projection device connected to computer to display PowerPoint.
- Reserve computer lab.
- Bookmark websites at www.portaportal.com, individually bookmark sites, or type URLs for students.
- Choose reading selections in your textbook or online.
- Choose scene from Arthurian video. (optional)
- Select and make copies of recipes and costume directions. (optional)
- Provide unit/lesson on *Beowulf* prior to this.
- Review the resume wizard in Microsoft Word or locate directions/template for student creation of resumes.

Introductory Activity

1. As the class enters the room, have a scene from an Arthurian movie playing on a television. Video suggestions: *Excalibur*, *Merlin*, *The Mists of Avalon*, *First Knight*, *Camelot*, *Monty Python's The Holy Grail*, *The Sword in the Stone*. Choose a scene, which is visually rich and/or key to the Arthurian legends (such as the wedding of Arthur and Guinevere in *Camelot* or *Excalibur*.)

2. Your class should have studied *Beowulf* before coming to the legends of King Arthur. Begin by reviewing: **FOCUS:** When was *Beowulf* first written down? (Around the year 1000.) The story had been around for quite some time before it was written down. It was retold in the great halls by scop for entertainment. Why wasn't it written down until it had been around for several hundred years? (Most people were illiterate.) The Scandinavian and Germanic tribes ruled England after the fall of Rome. Who then invaded England in 1066? (William the Conqueror) He came from Normandy, which is in what country? (France) So, what will the influence in literature in Britain now be? (French) What kind of changes do you anticipate will take place in society and literature?

3. Either show the website www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/mainmenu.htm with its list of characters or pass out a printed copy of the page. **FOCUS:** Choose one character for research. I would like each of you to choose a different character so we can cover as many as possible. Arthurian tales developed over hundreds of years, so you may find quite different information in different places. (If you choose to do the optional banquet at the end, at this point tell them that they will be this character at the banquet. You should also go to the optional banquet directions to pass out recipes/food assignments and costume directions so they can be thinking and preparing as they go through this lesson.)

4. **Start the Activity:** We will be going to the computer lab today and the next class so you can research your character and find the basic facts about your character. You should also try to find a picture of your character. Two of the best places to search for pictures are www.picsearch.com and www.altavista.com—choose the image search option above the search box. You will need to create a minimum of three slides. At the end of the class, I will combine your slides into one PowerPoint, so you should choose the blank presentation option. If you want to put a background picture on your slide, you should find that picture and save it. Then, go to Format—Background—click the down arrow on the color bar at the bottom and choose Fill Effects—Picture. Browse for the picture, then decide if you want to Apply or Apply to All. Have students complete their research and their short presentations, then prepare to show the results to the class. **Stop the Activity.**

Note to the Teacher

Write these directions on the board and ask the students to copy them. Depending on your circumstances, either ask the students to save their work to individual diskettes or ask them to save to a central folder on the network drive. To combine the slides into one PowerPoint, open a new blank presentation in PowerPoint. Go to Insert—Slides from Files—Browse. Find the students' files and choose Insert All.

Learning Activities

1. **FOLLOW-UP:** Using a projection device connected to a computer, show the final product to the class. Brainstorm on the board. **FOCUS:** What kind of occupations do the men in the Arthurian tales hold? What kind of occupations do the women hold? Did gender roles change from *Beowulf* to Arthurian tales? If so, in what ways? Why are stories and movies based on people in our time traveling to Arthur's time popular? Would you want to travel to that time? Why or why not? Depending on your gender and social status, what do you expect your experience would be like? Give each student a KWHL chart. **Start the Activity:** Take five minutes to fill out the "what I know" section and five minutes to fill out the "what I want to know" section. **Stop the Activity:** Then place it some place safe so we can finish the last column at the end of the Arthurian unit.

2. **FOCUS:** We will be reading several selections about the court of King Arthur. Some were written during the Anglo-Norman period, some during the Victorian era, and some today. As we read I want you to keep a comparison chart. Hand out the fiction chart and the higher level question handout. While we read, you will fill in this chart. I also want you to write down questions that occur to you. We will use this handout on how to create higher level questions as a basis for your questions. For each work, you are responsible for creating three questions of different types. When you turn your questions in, we will use them to discuss each work we have read.

Suggestions for reading:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Le Morte d'Arthur by Thomas Malory excerpts

The Wife of Bath's Tale in *The Canterbury Tales*

The Lady of Shalott by Alfred, Lord Tennyson, or other poems from *The Idylls of the King*

Guenevere by Sara Teasdale

The Defense of Guenevere by William Morris

3. Once students have completed their collection of questions for discussion and once their charts are completed, use class time to engage students in discussing the literature. While the student-centered approach is important to the learning process, you

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might need some teacher-led questions to get them started:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

- Would you have taken Arthur's place in the challenge? Would you have gone to meet the knight in a year and a day after seeing that he was immortal?
- Explain the oral contract Gawain had with the lord of the manor where Gawain was a guest. Was it unusual? Why did Gawain hide the sash? What would you have done in his place?
- What place did honor have in Gawain's life? In the Green Knight's?

Morte d'Arthur excerpts: (from the death of Arthur)

- With whom is Arthur at war?
- Was the downfall of Camelot inevitable?
- Was it a mistake for both Arthur and Mordred to tell their soldiers to fight at the first sign of a sword? Would you have given different commands?

The Wife of Bath's Tale

- How does this tale portray Queen Guinevere? How is the portrayal different than in most other Arthurian tales?
- How does Guinevere's role in the tale echo the moral the Wife of Bath is drawing?

The Lady of Shalott

- What is the curse on the Lady of Shalott? Why do you think she is cursed in this way?
- What would you do if you were cursed like the Lady? What does she finally do and why?
- What might Tennyson be saying about women in Arthurian legends?

Guenevere

- Can you tell this poem was written by an American rather than an English woman? Can you tell it was written by a woman rather than a man?
- How does your reaction differ since the poem is told from Guenevere's perspective?
- Should Guenevere have been punished for her sins? Why wasn't Arthur punished for fathering Mordred on his sister?

The Defense of Guenevere

- Compare this poem to Teasdale's poem.
- What is Guenevere's defense? Do you accept it or reject it?
- Forget traditional tales: what will happen after Guenevere leaves the courtroom and why?

Culminating Activities

1. FOLLOW-UP: I have enjoyed our discussions about the literature we've read. You've seen the works in ways I never considered. One idea that kept coming up in each one was honor. Can you define honor? Are you honorable? What characteristics does an honorable person have? Would you rather be around honorable people? Is honor an important ideal in our century? In our country? Do we elect honorable leaders?

2. FOCUS: Why would honor be a good characteristic if you were applying for a job? We're going back to the lab today. I'm going to show you where to locate a Virginia State Employment Application online and how to locate the resume wizard in Microsoft Word. **Start the Activity:** As your character, I want you to apply for a job. First, you will need to find at least three jobs for which your character could apply. You can use the local newspaper or The Washington Post website. Please print or Xerox a copy of the job advertisements because you will need to turn them in with your finished products. After locating potential jobs, open the Virginia State Employment Application and complete it as your character. Then, open the resume wizard in Word located under File—New—Other Documents—Resume Wizard and complete it as your character. If you need to research more online to prepare these documents, let me know that you will be going online. Assist students as needed.

3. FOLLOW-UP: Collect the resumes and applications and check to make sure that students have completed them correctly. Then either post them around the classroom or pass them around to the rest of the class. Rather than grading them yourself, you could distribute the applications and resumes to the students and ask them to grade as potential employers: from what you see in front of you,

would you hire this person for a job? Ask students to assign a pass/fail grade and to write a few sentences explaining why they found the resume and application effective, or not.

Assessment

PowerPoint slides

- Minimum of three slides completed
- Information about character is thoroughly covered
- Some effort was put into enhancing the slides with sound, font variation, color, animation

KWHL chart

- Student has completed the chart thoroughly.

Fiction table

- Each work has been included and thoroughly answered

Questions and class discussion

- Student has turned in three questions of three different types based on the higher-level thinking chart.
- Each student has participated in the discussion.

Completed Virginia State Employment Application and resume for character

Decide how you want to weight the assignments.

Community Connections

1. Contact local employers to interview their students in character and videotape the interviews.
2. Poll community members about their knowledge and perception of the characters in the Arthurian legends.

Cross-Curricular Extensions

Music: Compose music for the banquet or set one of the poems to music (as Loreena McKennitt did with “The Lady of Shalott” on her CD *The Book of Secrets*, Warner Brothers, 1997).

Science: Investigate beliefs about science and the solar system during the Anglo-Norman period in England.

History: Research the period of Anglo-Saxon domination to the Norman invasion in Britain.

Government: Research forms of government during the period of Anglo-Saxon domination to the Norman invasion in Britain.

Art:

- Research costuming and crafts in Britain during this time period.
- Research art, especially during the pre-Raphaelite/Victorian period, based on Arthurian legends.

Optional Arthurian Banquet

This activity could substitute for the culminating activity.

1. At the beginning of the lesson, tell the students that you will be having an Arthurian banquet at the close. Tell them that they are the character they have chosen and they should come in character to the banquet. Using your computer, print seating cards for each student. (medieval clip art) If you pull the desks face to face in a row they work very well as your banquet table while food can be placed on another table.

2. Several sites in the Media Components section give direction for quick and easy costumes for the students to create. A visit to the thrift shop will yield robes, caftans, and belts that will pass as medieval garb. A scarf stapled to the top of a cone of posterboard or stiff construction paper and tied under the chin will pass as a princess hat. If you speak to your local thrift shop, they may donate the items if you explain your project.

3. Several sites in the Media Components list provide medieval recipes. You will probably want to go to the sites yourself and choose recipes that are easy and non-alcoholic. You will also need plates, napkins, utensils, and drinks, so not all students will need to cook. Some other options for non-cookers are bread, cheese, fruit, flavored butters or spreads for the bread, tart shells filled with canned or fresh fruit, nuts, dried fruit. Since the unit is also tied to the modern day another option would be to focus on some costuming elements and serve modern foods, such as “Ye Olde Pizza.” Ask your music department for medieval or Renaissance music CDs to set the mood.

As incentive to participate, I give extra credit for the different participation components: bringing a feast item, wearing a costume, staying in character.

About the Author

Donna Shafer

Donna Shafer currently teaches English to the the most brilliant students in the universe at Stonewall Jackson High School in Quicksburg, Virginia. This year, she agreed to sponsor the new school newspaper, the General Dispatch. She spent the last summer touring the UK and Paris with her daughter Ashley so that she could share her experiences with her students this year. She team-teaches AP Language and AP Literature with Mr. Beau Dickenson, who teaches AP U.S. History and AP Government. In November, the two of them dragged their students around Harpers Ferry, Antietam, and Gettysburg so they could experience the exhaustion of the Civil War firsthand. They hope to further fatigue them at Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg next fall. Donna uses technology in her classroom every day, and she constantly works to add to her technological resources for her students. In May 2003 she was awarded a grant to learn the craft of digital storytelling, a project her students greatly enjoyed. She hopes that she teaches her students as much as they teach her every day.

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FICTION CHART

Work of Fiction	Author	Written When	Characters	Character's Role in the Story