

LEGEND

A story passed
down through time

Readers Theater Play

The **Sword** in the **Stone**

A story
of murder,
magic, and
destiny

ADAPTED FROM
ARTHURIAN LEGENDS
BY THE SCOPE EDITORS

ILLUSTRATIONS
BY GARY HANNA

TURN THE PAGE
to perform this play. →

CHARACTERS

Circle the character you will play.

***NARRATORS 1, 2, 3 (N1, N2, N3)**

IGRAINE, wife of King Uther Pendragon

DOCTOR

UTHER PENDRAGON, King of Britain

***MERLIN**, a great sorcerer

SIR RAWLINS, SIR BELDON, and SIR WALLACE, knights in Uther's castle

ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY, a church leader

***SIR KAY**, a young knight

***SIR ECTOR**, Kay's father

***ARTHUR**, Kay's 16-year-old brother

CROWD, to be read by the entire class

HERALD, an announcer

LADY GWYN, LADY SAFFIR, citizens of London

*Starred characters are major roles.



AS YOU READ, THINK ABOUT:

What qualities make a good leader?

SCENE 1

England, 495 A.D.

N1: Igraine sits at the bedside of her husband, King Uther Pendragon. A doctor stands nearby.

IGRAINE: We know that the servant who poisoned my husband was working for the Saxons. Those wretched invaders have long tried to kill him and steal our lands. Doctor, surely you can save him?

DOCTOR: I am sorry. The poison is too strong.

N2: Just then, the door swings open to reveal a tall man with a long white beard, dressed in a dark robe.

UTHER (weakly): Merlin. I knew you would come.

N3: Merlin looks at Uther, then at Igraine.

MERLIN (gently): I'm afraid even I cannot loosen the grip of Death's spindly fingers, my lady.

N1: Igraine begins to weep. Merlin approaches the King.

UTHER (whispering): Merlin, is our secret safe?

MERLIN: Yes, dear King. And worry not. When the time comes, I will see that all happens as planned.

N2: Uther smiles faintly, closes his eyes, and exhales his final breath.

N3: Meanwhile, a group of knights whisper in a quiet corner at the other end of the castle.

RAWLINS: What now?

BELDON: Uther has no heir.

WALLACE: Soon every nobleman in the kingdom will be

vying for the throne.

BELDON: Perhaps even the noblemen in this room.

WALLACE: I hope you are not referring to yourself.

BELDON: Why not? Do you know someone better suited to the role? Not you, certainly.

IGRAINE (bursting in): Good sirs!

RAWLINS, WALLACE, BELDON: My lady!

IGRAINE: The King is not yet cold, and already you fight over his crown? Your bickering will destroy us all.

N1: The men look sheepish.

RAWLINS: The lady is right. We must unite!

N2: But they cannot. Across Britain, knights declare themselves King. Britain is made weak and vulnerable.

N3: Soon, the Saxons are invading in greater and greater numbers. Villages are burned. Thieves roam the countryside.

SCENE 2

London, 14 years later



Does Merlin
remind you
of anyone?

N1: On a gray December day, Merlin travels to London to visit the Archbishop of Canterbury.

ARCHBISHOP: Merlin, you are a burst of light in these dark times. But had I known you were coming, I would have feared for your safety on the road.

MERLIN: I was quite safe. I find that I am treated with a certain . . . respect.

ARCHBISHOP: Ah, of course. Who would attack such a powerful sorcerer? If only you could cast a spell to help Britain. Can you **conjure** a King?

MERLIN: I do not need to conjure a King; Fate has already chosen one.

ARCHBISHOP: Why has this King not come forward?

MERLIN: He does not yet know his **destiny**. That is why I have come—to help him learn it.

ARCHBISHOP: There has been such fighting over the throne, for so long. How will you convince the people to accept this King?

MERLIN: Listen carefully. You must arrange a tournament . . .

SCENE 3

A few weeks later

N2: Sir Ector and his sons, Sir Kay and Arthur, travel to London.

N3: They have seen nothing but **decimated** villages for miles.

N1: Sir Kay, however, is smiling.

KAY: Imagine! Every knight in the realm has been summoned.

ECTOR: What a spectacular beginning to your life as a knight, Kay.

KAY: Just think what fun you'll have shining my armor and grooming my horse, little Arthur.

ARTHUR: I am happy to help.

N2: They see a burning field.

ARTHUR: Curse the Saxons!

ECTOR: Things will soon change. Our new King is to be revealed at this tournament.

ARTHUR: How can a tournament give us a King? It takes more than skill on a horse to be a true leader.

KAY: There is more to jousting than skill on a horse!

ARTHUR: That is not what I meant. I know—

KAY: You know nothing, **lowly squire**.

ECTOR: Hush! These roads are treacherous. We must remain alert.

SCENE 4

London, the following evening

N3: A large crowd has gathered in the churchyard

of a magnificent cathedral. Atop a block of marble sits an iron anvil, and thrust deep into the anvil is the blade of a great sword. Its handle glitters with jewels.

N1: The Archbishop addresses the crowd.

ARCHBISHOP: A spell has been cast on this sword. Only our true King will be able to pull it from the anvil.

RAWLINS: Then I shall go first, for I am the true King.

N2: Rawlins pulls on the sword with one hand, then two. Sweat pours from his face.

BELDON: Get out of the way.

N3: Beldon does a few leg squats, grasps the sword, and pulls. His neck veins bulge with the strain.

WALLACE: Let me show you how it's done, weakling.

N1: Wallace plants his feet on the stone and yanks the sword with both hands.

WALLACE: Grrrrrr!!!!

N2: His hands slip. He falls on his behind.

CROWD: Ha! Ha! Ha!

N3: Ector, Kay, and Arthur arrive.



At medieval tournaments, knights fought for glory and honor. These events began in 11th-century France. What does this tell you about Arthur's legend?

A full suit of steel armor could weigh more than 100 pounds.

ARTHUR: Why is everyone gathered round that sword?

ECTOR: We shall look tomorrow. Right now we need to make haste to the inn. The horses are tired, and I, for one, am hungry.

SCENE 5

Dawn, the next day

N1: All of London gathers to watch the tournament.

Arthur sits near two women, Gwyn and Saffir.

HERALD: Let the melee begin!

N2: A fanfare of trumpets sounds. Knights on horseback charge at each other.

GWYN: Do you think we shall find our King?

N3: Kay knocks an opponent to the ground.

SAFFIR: Sir Kay looks kingly.

ARTHUR (*interjecting*): Sir Kay is my brother.

SAFFIR: Well, young man, your brother is quite the champion.

N1: When the fighting ends, Kay strides up.

KAY: Bring me my sword, Arthur!

ARTHUR: Right away!

N2: Arthur returns a few minutes later.

ARTHUR: I cannot find it.

KAY: You fool, it's . . . oh. Oh no. I left it on my bed.

ARTHUR: I will fetch it for you.

KAY: Hurry! If I miss the next battle, I'll be disqualified.

N3: When Arthur arrives at the inn, he finds the door locked.

ARTHUR: Now what? Oh!

N1: Arthur races to the cathedral.

Strangely, no one is around. He takes the mighty sword from the stone.

N2: Back at the tournament, Sir Kay chats with Gwyn and Saffir.

KAY: My stupid brother forgot my sword.

SAFFIR: Don't be so hard on him. He seems like a nice young man.

GWYN: Indeed, he has an honest face.

N3: Arthur runs up.

ARTHUR (*breathless*): The inn was locked, so I brought you this sword instead.

FACT VS. FICTION

Did King Arthur Really Exist?

"The Sword in the Stone" is one of many tales about heroic King Arthur. He is said to have fought epic battles, slain a giant, and discovered precious treasures.

The stories of his adventures have been told for centuries. Sometimes he is even portrayed with superhuman abilities and immortality.

Did he actually exist? Maybe.

A military leader named Arthur was first mentioned in the 800s. Over time, details were added to his story. Eventually, he was portrayed as a King. One of the best-known accounts, by Sir Thomas Malory, was printed in 1485—1,000 years after Arthur supposedly lived.

Some scholars believe Arthur was based on a real person. Others say he was entirely made up. If Arthur did exist, he certainly wasn't a King in shining armor living in a grand castle, as he is often described, nor was he immortal—though his legend seems to be.

The story behind the legend.



KAY: Why, this is the most beautiful sword I have ever seen. Where did you find this?

ARTHUR: In the churchyard.

N1: Sir Ector walks up.

ECTOR: Why aren't you on the field, Kay? The fight is about to—

N2: Ector's eyes widen.

ECTOR: Where did you get that?

KAY: Uh, at the cathedral.

ECTOR: This morning, I discovered the purpose of this sword. Follow me. Both of you.

SCENE 6

The cathedral

N3: Ector leads them to the cathedral.

ECTOR: Read the inscription on the anvil.

KAY: "Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil is rightwise King born of

SCENE 7**Later that day**

all England." (pause) Well, it seems I am to be King.

N1: Ector gives Kay a stern look.

KAY: Oh, fine. I am not the one who pulled the sword from the stone. Arthur gave it to me.

ARTHUR: I . . . only meant to borrow it.

ECTOR: Did you free it yourself?

ARTHUR: Yes, but I was going to return it.

ECTOR: Then do it now.

N2: Kay hands Arthur the sword. Arthur slides it back into the anvil.

KAY: Let me try.

N3: Kay pulls at the sword with all his strength, but he cannot move it.

ECTOR: Now you try, Arthur.

N1: Arthur pulls out the sword effortlessly. Kay gasps, seeing his brother in a new way.

ARTHUR: Father? Kay? Why are you kneeling?

N2: Suddenly, Merlin and the Archbishop step out from the shadows. Arthur returns the sword to the anvil.

MERLIN: Because you are their King.

ARTHUR: Who is this man, Father?

ECTOR: This is Merlin, a great sorcerer.

ARCHBISHOP: And his magic has proved that you, Squire Arthur, are the rightful heir to the throne.

ARTHUR: I don't understand.

MERLIN: Sir Ector, you have raised this boy well.

ARTHUR: Father, what is he talking about?

ECTOR: I have always loved you as a son, but I am not your true father.

MERLIN: Arthur, you are the son of King Uther Pendragon and the Lady Igraine. Your parents kept your birth a secret. They knew the Saxons would attempt to kill you, so for your own protection, I took you from the castle when you were a baby.

ARCHBISHOP: Come. It is time to tell the people.

N3: The people are summoned to the churchyard.

N1: The Archbishop, holding Uther's crown, steps out with Arthur.

BELDON (*yelling*): Is this some sort of joke?

RAWLINS: Do you expect us to believe this scrawny squire succeeded where we all failed?

WALLACE: He doesn't look strong enough to milk a goat, let alone **wield** a sword!

CROWD: Boo! Boo! Boo!

N2: An angry voice rings out.

MERLIN: QUIET!

N3: Everyone freezes at Merlin's command.

MERLIN: Arthur, if you would be so kind.

N1: With trembling hands, Arthur reaches for the sword. All eyes are on him as he pulls it from the anvil.

BELDON: So it is true!

MERLIN: Arthur is the rightful King of this land, the one and only son of King Uther Pendragon!

N2: No one moves a muscle. Then, one by one, the people fall to their knees.

N3: The Archbishop turns to Arthur.

ARCHBISHOP: I crown thee . . . King Arthur!

N1: Arthur faces the crowd, his eyes shining.

KAY: Long live the King!

BELDON, WALLACE, RAWLINS: Long live the King!

ARTHUR: Good people of Britain, I promise you: Together, we will drive the Saxons from our lands, once and for all. We will rebuild our villages—but we will not stop there. We will turn this country into a heaven on Earth!

CROWD: Long live the King!

N2: Arthur is true to his word.

N3: He becomes the greatest King that Britain has ever known. ●

CONTEST

Interpret a Legend Legends often reflect certain values or beliefs. *The Sword in the Stone* reflects beliefs about kings. According to this legend, what qualities make a good king? How does Arthur demonstrate those qualities? Send your entry to **KING ARTHUR CONTEST**. Five winners will each get Nils Johnson-Shelton's *The Invisible Tower*.

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