

Year 4 General Studies

Legends of King Arthur



Origins and History

Some scholars believe that the legend of Arthur was based on a real person. This Arthur lived in Britain in the ad 400s or 500s. He became a famous leader of the Celts who had settled there. During this time the Saxons, a people from the mainland of Europe, were invading Britain. Arthur led the Celts in wars against the Saxons, but he was defeated and killed in battle. His people fled to the mountains of Wales and to north western France. (This part of France became known as Brittany, a form of the name Britain.) These Celts then told stories of Arthur's bravery and goodness.

Generations of storytellers continued to pass along the stories about Arthur. As the stories were told and retold, the status of Arthur grew. He became known as a heroic, wise, and all-powerful king. Other old stories also were combined with the tales of Arthur. These included magical stories and myths about Celtic gods.

By the 1100s and 1200s, storytellers described King Arthur and his men as knights. Knights were warriors in Europe during the Middle Ages. They rode horses, carried swords, and wore heavy armour. Knights also followed a code of behaviour called chivalry. This code required knights to be brave, honourable, generous, and courteous, especially to ladies. If he did exist, the real Arthur lived long before the age of chivalry. Nevertheless, storytellers in the Middle Ages believed that Arthur would have been like the ideal man of their own time—a knight.

The Round Table

King Arthur married Guinevere and held court at a place called Camelot. Many knights swore loyalty to him. Arthur's knights were known as the Order of the Round Table because they sat around a large round table. No knight could claim to have a better seat than the others, so the knights were seen as equals. The knights went on many adventures. Their adventures often involved heroic battles, tests of chivalry, beautiful ladies, and magical figures.

The stories of the Arthurian legend name many different knights of the Round Table. Sir Lancelot was considered the most chivalrous of the knights. His son, Sir Galahad, was the most noble. Perceval was the most innocent. Mordred was the traitor. (In some stories Mordred was Arthur's nephew, and in others he was Arthur's son.) Among the other knights were Bedivere, Bors, Gaheris, Gareth, Gawain, Geraint, Kay, Lamorat, Tristan, and Yvain.



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Questions

1. What years do some scholars believe King Arthur lived?

2. Which of these three knights was the noblest? (Circle the answer)

- Perceval

- Sir Galahad

- Gareth

3. Sir Lancelot was considered the most chivalrous of the knights.

True / False

4. Who invaded Britain during the 5th and 6th centuries?

5. Why was the knights table round?

6. Knights followed a code of behaviour to be brave, honourable, generous, and courteous. What was this code called?

7. How did the legend of King Arthur grow over time?
