Merlin and the Lost King of England

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Teaching Notes author: Gillian Howell

Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis
This story is a retelling of the legend of King Arthur and describes how young Arthur pulls the sword from the stone to become King of England. It features two new characters, Gwen, Merlin’s niece, who can also perform magic, and Sir Grum, a grumpy knight who doesn’t believe Arthur is the rightful king.

Background information
- No one knows for certain whether Arthur actually existed. Geoffrey of Monmouth, a Welsh cleric, set down the foundations of the Arthurian legends in AD1133. Subsequently, other writers expanded his story and added new strands.
- In 1485 William Caxton published Le Morte D’Arthur, one of the first printed books. Written by Sir Thomas Malory in 1470, this was a collection of eight stories which drew the whole saga together and gave us the legend we know today.
- No one knows for certain where in England or Wales the legend is set. References to Camelot and Arthur vary in the locations they mention.
- The legend continues to be embellished and rewritten and has been made into several films.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book
- (Clarifying) Look at the front cover and read the title. Ask the children if they have read any stories or seen any films featuring Merlin.
- (Predicting, Imagining) Ask the children what they think the story will be about. Invite them to look briefly through the illustrations to familiarise themselves with the book and to confirm their predictions.

Strategy check
- Remind the children to use the sounds of letters to work out new and unfamiliar words. Point to the words ‘exploded’ on page 4 and ‘dignity’ on page 5. Ask volunteers to read the words and to suggest strategies for working them out if children are unsure.
- When the children meet words that are not phonically decodable, remind them to use the context of the sentence to work them out.

During reading
- (Clarifying) Invite the children to read the first two chapters. Explain that you want them to find out what Arthur thought Merlin’s test might be.
As the children read independently, listen to them in turn and prompt as necessary. Note the strategies used to decode words.

Independent reading

**Objective:** Empathise with characters and debate moral dilemmas portrayed in texts.

*Summary, Deduction*

- When the children have read the first two chapters, ask them to summarise the story so far in their own words.
- Ask the children to pair up and discuss the character of Merlin. What sort of person is he? Ask them to find evidence in the text.
- Ask the children to discuss how Arthur feels when he is told that he cannot take Merlin’s test. What did Arthur think the test might be?
- Ask them what sort of story this is. Is it serious, funny, sad or exciting? Ask them to find examples of language the author uses to set the tone.
- Invite the children to read to the end of the story.

**Assessment:**

- Can the children find words and phrases to illustrate the author’s use of humour?

Returning and responding to the text

**Objective:** Identify features that writers use to provoke readers’ reactions.

*Questioning, Deduction*

- Ask the children to say why Arthur pulled the sword out of the stone. Ask them why Arthur took a quick look around. Do they think he should have taken it, or gone and found Sir Ector’s own sword? Why?
- Ask the children to describe any images that they think are humorous in Chapters 3 and 4.
- Turn to page 33. Ask the children to read the last paragraph. Ask them why the author wrote that the fight was awarded to Sir Ector.
- Turn to page 41. Ask the children to find another example of the author’s use of humour.
- Invite the children to give an opinion about the ending of the story. Is it a good way to end? Why?

**Assessment:** Check that the children:

- can use appropriate strategies to work out new words.
- can find evidence in the text to support their ideas about each story.
- can understand that the story is set in an earlier period of history.

Speaking and listening activities

**Objective:** Use some drama strategies to explore stories or issues.

- Arrange the children into small groups of four or five. Ask them to choose a moment from the story and freeze-frame it as the characters. Allow them sufficient time to practise, then invite them, in role, to describe what they are each thinking at the moment of the freeze-frames.
Assessment:
- Can the children work in role to explore stories?

Objective: Present events and characters through dialogue to engage the interest of an audience.
- Invite the groups to take the roles of Arthur, Merlin, Sir Ector and Sir Kay (and one other character if it’s a group of five). Ask them to work out a dialogue to portray the event when Arthur pulls the sword from the stone. Invite them to present their dialogue for the rest of the class.

Assessment:
- Can each member of the group contribute to the dialogue?

Writing activities

Objective: Use beginning, middle and end to write narratives in which events are sequenced logically and conflicts resolved.
- Discuss what happened a) when Arthur was a baby, b) when Arthur was preparing Sir Ector’s equipment for the tournament, and c) when Arthur went to find Sir Ector’s sword.
- Invite the children to write three short paragraphs for a), b) and c) to describe what happened.

Assessment:
- Can the children use adventurous vocabulary of their own in their sentences?

Cross-curricular links

ICT
- Use the Internet and books to find out information about medieval castles. Draw a labelled diagram to show what you have discovered.

History
- Explore the custom of holding tournaments and jousting in the Middle Ages.
Merlin and the Lost King of England (Oxford Level 11) curriculum coverage chart

### Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

**Reading**
- Can read independently using a range of strategies to decode unfamiliar words and to establish meaning (e.g. self-correcting, widening knowledge of vocabulary). (READ) [ORCS Standard 4, 1]
- Can explore some straightforward underlying themes and ideas (those that are not clearly signalled at a literal level). (D) [ORCS Standard 4, 4]
- Can identify language the author has chosen to use to capture the reader's interest and imagination. (E) [ORCS Standard 4, 9]
- Is able to quote directly from the text to answer questions. (R) [ORCS Standard 4, 12]
- Can explore potential meanings of ambitious vocabulary read in context using knowledge of etymology (the word origin), morphology (the form and structure of a word, i.e. the 'root' word plus prefix and/or suffix), or the context of the word. (D) [ORCS Standard 4, 17]

### Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they read, in books they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught: Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing

### ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 3–4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spoken language</th>
<th>Pupils should be taught to use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas (SpokLang.7)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pupils should be taught to gain, maintain and monitor the interest of the listener(s) (SpokLang.10)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Reading: Comprehension**
- Pupils should be taught to understand what they read, in books they can read independently, by [...] inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iii)
- discussing words and phrases that capture the reader's interest and imagination (Y3/4 ReadComp.1vii)

**Writing: Composition**
- Pupils should be taught to draft and write by composing and rehearsing sentences orally (including dialogue), progressively building a varied and rich vocabulary and an increasing range of sentence structures (Y3/4 WritComp.2i)

### SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes – First level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening and talking</th>
<th>I am exploring how pace, gesture, expression, emphasis and choice of words are used to engage others, and I can use what I learn (ENG 1-03a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can exchange […] ideas and opinions (LIT 1-09a)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Reading**
- I can share my thoughts about characters (ENG 1-19a)
- I can […] recognise the writer's message and relate it to my own experiences, and comment on the effective choice of words and other features (ENG 1-19a)

**Writing**
- By considering the type of text I am creating, I can […] use words which will be interesting and/or useful for others (LIT 1-26a)

### WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oracy</th>
<th>Learners are able to use talk purposefully to complete a task in a group (Y3_OracColl.3)</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Learners are able to organise what they say so that listeners can understand, e.g. emphasising key points, sequencing an explanation (Y3_OracSpea.2)</td>
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</table>

**Reading**
- Learners are able to make links between what they read and what they already know and believe (Y3_ReadResp.5)
- Learners are able to accurately identify the topic and main ideas of a text, e.g. by highlighting, using key words of the text (Y3_ReadComp.1)

**Writing**
- Learners are able to write for different purposes and readers choosing words for variety and interest (Y3_WritMean.1)

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### Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 2

| **Talking and listening** | Pupils can take part in role-play, interacting with others (L2_com_talk.1ii)  
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Pupils can talk about events in sequence with supporting detail (L2_com_talk.4)</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Reading**              | Pupils can understand, recount and sequence events and information (L2_com_read.1)  
|                          | Pupils can recognise some forms and features of texts (L2_com_read.4)  
|                          | Pupils can express opinions and make predictions (L2_com_read.5ii) |
| **Writing**              | Pupils can express thoughts, feelings and ideas, from within their experience, using a general vocabulary (L2_com_writ.2i) |