

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Knights of the Kitchen Table

by
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Book Information

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When Joe, Fred, and Sam are sent back in time by a magic book, they find themselves face to face with giants, dragons, wizards, King Arthur, and the Knights of the Round Table.

Award: SLJ Best Book; State Award

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Dragons; Horror/Thriller, Giants; Mysteries, Magic; READNOW - Demco Media Turtleback Books, Demco Media - Read Now Grades 1-3; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 3-5; Science Fiction, Time Travel; Series, Time Warp Trio

Main Characters

Bleob a filthy, dimwitted giant who attacks Camelot

Fred Joe's friend who often speaks before he thinks

Joseph Arthur (Joe) a young boy who loves the magic tricks his magician uncle gives him

King Arthur the king, who wishes to reward the boys for saving Camelot

Merlin a suspicious old wizard who does not believe the boys are true enchanters

Mom Joe's mother, who thinks Uncle Joe's magic gifts are inappropriate for a young boy

Queen Guenevere the queen of Camelot, who is known for her beauty; she is impressed by Joe's card trick

Sam Joe's quick-witted friend, who likes to talk his way out of bad situations

Sir Lancelot the famous Knight of the Round Table who believes the boys can help him defeat two enemies of Camelot

Smaug the Dragon a fierce dragon who comes to attack Camelot but fights Bleob instead

the Black Knight a belligerent knight who is an enemy of Camelot

the stableboys the boys who take care of the castle's horses and play baseball with Joe and his friends

Uncle Joe the Magnificent Joe's magician uncle, who often sends Joe gifts with magic powers

Vocabulary

besieged surrounded by enemies

court jester a person in a royal court whose job is to tell jokes and amuse the court

knave an untrustworthy person

lance a long pole-like weapon with a metal tip, often used by knights riding horses

slew killed

whence from what place

Synopsis

Joe, Fred, and Sam, three boys from the twentieth century, suddenly find themselves transported to the Middle Ages. Facing them at the other end of a small clearing is the Black Knight. The Black Knight is angry that the boys have invaded his territory and is prepared to attack them. According to Joe, the boys are in this situation because Joe's magician uncle had sent him a mysterious book as a birthday present. When Fred had opened *The Book* to an illustration of the Black Knight, Fred had expressed a wish to see real knights. A mist had then enveloped the boys and carried them to the clearing.

The Black Knight levels his lance and charges toward them on his horse. The nimble boys easily outmaneuver the heavily armored knight until the knight and horse are exhausted. Fred whacks the knight's helmet with a large stick, rendering the knight unconscious.

As Fred plants a sneaker on the Black Knight's chest in victory, three more knights arrive. The knights are impressed and grateful that Fred has defeated one of their enemies. Joe is excited to discover that the men are Knights of the Round Table, especially since one of them is Sir Lancelot.

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Sir Lancelot, believing that the boys are enchanters, invites them to Camelot to help fight Smaug the dragon and Bleob the giant, who are approaching the castle from opposite sides. The boys agree and ride back to the castle with the knights.

When the boys arrive at the Great Hall of Camelot, they meet King Arthur and ask him for directions to New York. The king does not know, so he consults Merlin the magician. Merlin implies that the boys are fraudulent enchanters if they cannot even find their way home. He demands that Joe perform a spell to prove that they really are magicians. Joe complies by doing a card trick for Queen Guenevere. Although Merlin is not impressed, everyone is distracted when a messenger arrives to warn them that the giant has arrived and the dragon is expected to appear within minutes. Merlin challenges the boys to demonstrate their magical power by fighting Smaug and Bleob.

When Sam outsmarts Bleob with a riddle, the giant becomes enraged and decides to stomp on the three boys with his huge foot. Just before he crushes Sam, however, Sam once again outwits Bleob by saying that Smaug had called him a sissy. Bleob attacks Smaug just as Smaug reaches the castle. Both monsters are killed in the battle, and the kingdom is saved. King Arthur shows his appreciation by offering them whatever they wish. They ask to go home, but the king does not know how to grant this wish.

Sometime later, the boys are playing baseball with the king's stableboys. The game comes to an abrupt halt when Joe hits a ball through the window of Merlin's tower; the ball smashes jars of chemicals, causing an explosion. The boys run as Merlin yells at them.

King Arthur is in the process of knighting the three boys in the Great Hall when Merlin appears with the baseball. Merlin says he has seen the ball in a very old work and presents *The Book*. As Merlin opens the pages, the boys are whisked back home, where Joe's mother is still complaining about Uncle Joe's inappropriate gifts. The boys wonder if they have

imagined their journey into the past but realize that it was real when they find the card Joe used to trick Queen Guenevere. Fred asks Joe to promise that he will not make any wishes. Joe agrees not to wish, at least until he has finished reading *The Book*.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What makes Joe decide that the trip was real?

First, the boys recall the names of characters they had met. Then Sam wipes away the mist on his glasses that came from the book. Finally, Joe looks in his pocket and finds the card that he found for Queen Guenevere when he was doing his card trick.

Literary Analysis

Sam has personality traits and interests that become useful during this adventure. What are these traits and interests and how does Sam use them to the boys' advantage?

Sam has a sarcastic wit that he uses to antagonize the Black Knight. His insults contribute to the Black Knight's defeat because they anger the knight so greatly that he lowers his guard. Sam's quick wit also allows him to trick Bleob with a riddle and to invent an insult that he attributes to Smaug, which leads to Bleob's destruction. In addition, Sam likes reading comic books about super heroes, which probably gives him a code of bravery when he is faced with dangerous situations.

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Inferential Comprehension

During their first meeting, one of the knights says to Joe, "Read? Thou reads the written word as Merlin does?" What can the reader conclude from the knight's reaction?

Since the knight seems surprised that the boys can read and implies that Merlin is the only person he knows who can read, the reader can assume that very few people can read during the Middle Ages. Furthermore, the implication is that reading is a highly valued skill, and that being able to read is almost equivalent to having magical powers.

Constructing Meaning

How can the reader tell that the Black Knight is a powerful fighter?

The Black Knight is very confident and does not hesitate to challenge strangers to fight him. He is very large and has intimidating weapons. He is also reported to have killed many other knights. In addition, the Black Knight's power must be awesome if it intimidates even Sir Lancelot.

challenges of explaining a game clearly and concisely.

Understanding Dialogue The people of King Arthur's time speak English very differently than Joe and his friends, so both groups have some difficulty understanding each other. In several places Joe explains to his friends what the people of Camelot are saying. Identify other examples of medieval dialogue that are not explained and have the students translate at least three of the passages into modern English.

Teachable Skills

Comparing and Contrasting Each of the three boys has a distinct personality. Have the students make a chart comparing and contrasting the three boys. Then initiate a discussion about how each boy's personality affected his actions in the story.

Responding to Literature Joe uses a card trick to convince King Arthur's court that he has magical powers. Ask each of the students to master a different magic trick. Then have the students put on a magic show for another classroom.

Recognizing Details The boys have to explain baseball to the stable boys before they can play ball with them. Have the students write the rules to a game without using a reference for help. Have the class attempt to play the games using only the guidelines set out by their classmates as their guide. Then have the students discuss the