

Arthurian Legends Printables Free Sample

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RETOLD IN OUR OWN WORDS

The sword in the anvil

From: Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur (finished 1469–70, printed by Caxton in 1485)

One Christmas, on Merlin's advice, the Archbishop calls all the lords of the land to London to pray for a sign showing who should be king.

In the churchyard of the greatest church in London (Malory admits his French book does not say whether it was St Paul's) a great square stone appears, with a steel anvil on it and a sword stuck through the anvil.

Lord after lord tries and fails. Ten knights are set to guard the sword, and a tournament is called for New Year's Day to keep the lords together.

On the way to the tournament Sir Kay finds he has left his sword at his father's lodging, and sends young Arthur, his foster brother, back for it.

The house is empty, because everyone has gone to watch the jousting. Not wanting Kay to be without a sword, Arthur rides to the churchyard and pulls the sword out of the stone 'lightly and fiercely'.

Kay knows the sword at once and tells his father, Sir Ector, that he must be king. Ector takes them both back to the church to find out the truth.

Many lords are angry that a boy 'of no high blood' might rule them, so the test is repeated at Candlemas, at Easter and at Pentecost. Each time only Arthur can draw the sword.

At Pentecost the common people cry out together, 'We will have Arthur unto our king', and Arthur is crowned.



Picture: King Arthur of Britain, 1903, by Howard Pyle (Public domain).

QUESTIONS

The sword in the anvil

Read the story again, then answer in full sentences

WORD BANK

Archbishop: a senior bishop of the Church

anvil: a heavy iron block that a smith hammers metal on

tournament: a contest where knights fight for sport

foster brother: a boy brought up in the same family, but not born to it

Pentecost: a Christian feast held in late spring

1. Why did the Archbishop call all the lords to London?

2. Where did the sword appear, and what was it stuck through?

3. Why did Arthur go back to look for a sword?

4. At which three feasts was the test repeated?

5. What did the common people cry out at Pentecost?

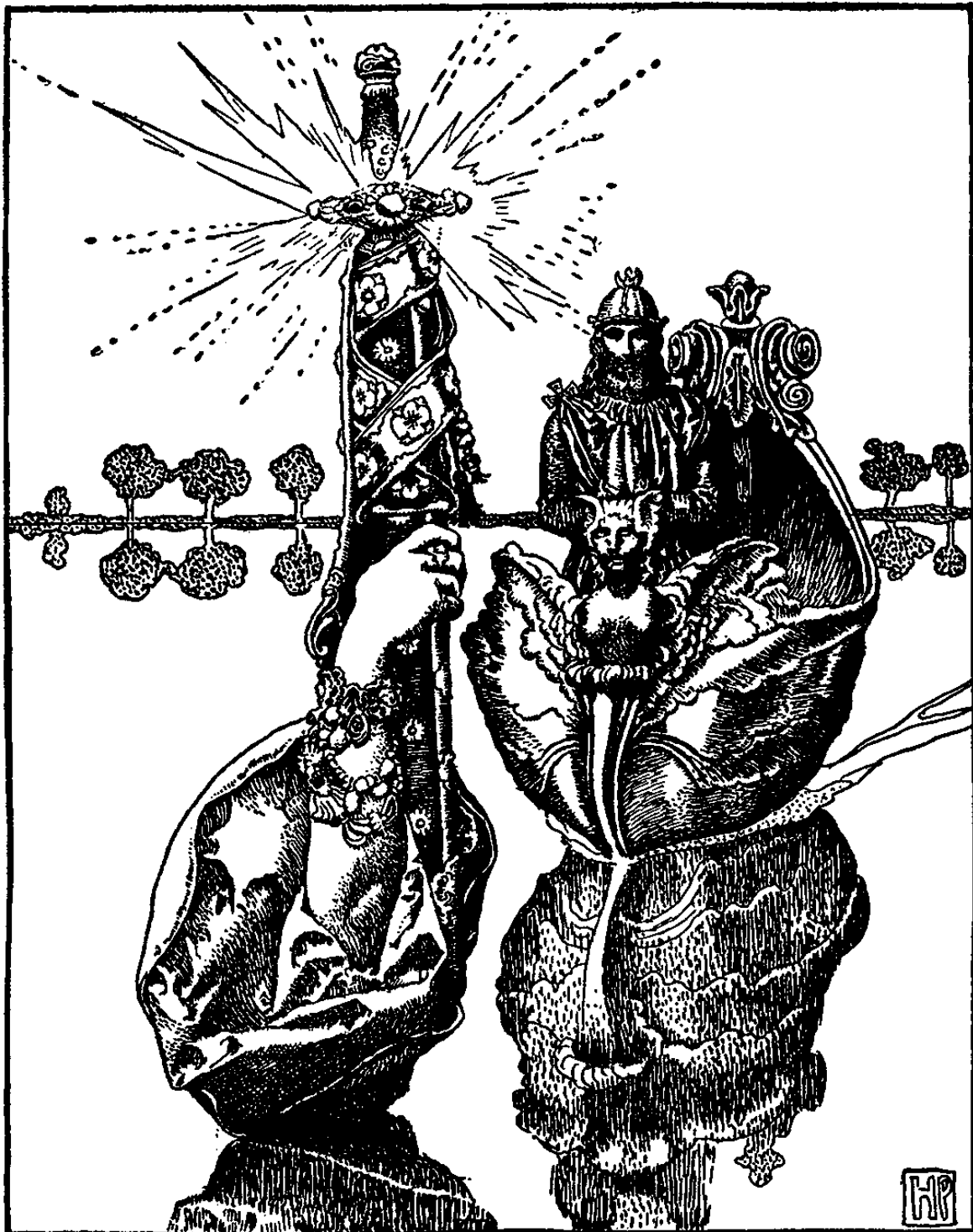
LABEL IT

Is this story **History**, **Literature** or **Tradition**? How do you know?

COLOUR ME

The sword from the lake

Colour Howard Pyle's 1903 drawing



LITERATURE In Malory, Arthur first sees the sword held up by 'an arm clothed in white samite' in the middle of a lake, and Merlin tells him the damsel walking on the water is the Lady of the Lake.

Drawing: An arm rises from the lake holding the sword as Arthur and Merlin come by boat, from *The Story of King Arthur and His Knights*, 1903, by Howard Pyle (public domain), turned to black and white.

Sort it

Legend, literature or history?

Read each statement. Tick the right label.

History: what historians and archaeologists say. **Literature:** what a named book or poem says. **Tradition:** a local belief about a place.

1. Gildas, a British monk of the 500s, mentions a great British victory at Mons Badonicus (the 'siege of Bath-hill') but does not connect it with Arthur.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition
2. In Malory, the sword stands in an anvil on a stone, with gold letters: 'Whoso pulleth out this sword of this stone and anvil, is rightwise king born of all England'.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition
3. One tradition says Arthur and his knights lie sleeping in a cave below Craig y Ddinas, near Pontneddfechan in south Wales.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition
4. Historic England says there is no evidence that Cadbury Castle was linked with the name Camelot before the 16th century, when the tradition was probably invented.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition
5. Geoffrey calls Arthur's sword Caliburn, 'an excellent sword made in the isle of Avallon'.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition
6. The capstone of Maen Ceti, a prehistoric burial chamber on Gower, is known as Arthur's Stone, and some say the king's ghost comes out from under it.	☐ History ☐ Literature ☐ Tradition

ANSWER KEY · FOR ADULTS

The sword in the anvil

1. To pray for a sign showing who should be king.
2. In the churchyard of the greatest church in London; it was stuck through a steel anvil on a great square stone.
3. Sir Kay had left his sword at his father's lodging and sent Arthur back for it.
4. Candlemas, Easter and Pentecost.
5. 'We will have Arthur unto our king.'

Label it: Literature. It comes from Malory's book, and the idea of a sword drawn from a stone is first found in Robert de Boron's Merlin, in the very early 1200s.

Sort it

1. History
2. Literature
3. Tradition
4. History
5. Literature
6. Tradition

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The small print, kept short

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PICTURES

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King Arthur of Britain, 1903	Howard Pyle	Public domain	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur-Pyle_King_Arthur_of_Britain.JPG
An arm rises from the lake holding the sword as Arthur and Merlin come by boat, from The Story of King Arthur and His Knights, 1903	Howard Pyle	Public domain	commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Arthur-Pyle_Excalibur_the_Sword.JPG

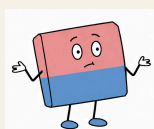
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WHERE THE FACTS COME FROM

Every labelled fact in this pack was checked against the sources below on 30 Oct 2026. **History** means what historians, archaeologists or heritage bodies say. **Literature** means what a named medieval or Victorian book or poem says. **Tradition** means a local belief recorded by a named collector. Retellings are in our own words and follow the events in the named text.

Sir Thomas Malory, Le Morte d'Arthur, vol. 1 (Caxton's text), Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1251
 Britannica: Arthurian legend: www.britannica.com/topic/Arthurian-legend
 Britannica (Students): Arthur: kids.britannica.com/students/article/Arthur/316583
 Museum Wales: Who was King Arthur?: museum.wales/blog/1352/Who-was-King-Arthur/

Arthur/
 Historic England: Cadbury Castle, list entry 1011980: historicengland.org.uk/listing/the-list/list-entry/1011980
 Geoffrey of Monmouth, History of the Kings of Britain, in Six Old English Chronicles (ed. J. A. Giles), Project Gutenberg: www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/37848



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