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# ❁ FIT I ❁

## PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

*Prepare the student for understanding the Central One Idea by drawing upon his or her prior knowledge or experience.*

1. Imagine being challenged to go on an arduous adventure. Where would you go if you had the opportunity?
2. Now imagine that your adventure has an important moral purpose, such as putting your own life at risk in place of a friend or a relative. Describe how this might change your adventure or what it might entail.

## GRAMMAR | Presentation

*The student is presented with and discovers essential facts, elements, and features of the poem.*

### READING NOTES

1. (**Stanzas 1-2**) - The first two stanzas feature a traditional medieval literary device of placing the story to come in actual history. However, the "history" is more a collection of legends, developed gradually since the classical period, which traces English origins to heroic classical times.<sup>1</sup>
  - **Troy** (1.1) - the classical city in Macedonia, and site of the Trojan War with Greece
  - **Aeneas** (1.3-5) - The Trojan hero in Virgil's *Aeneid*. Referred to here as the "treacherous trickster," which is based on a story from pseudo-classical writings in the early medieval period that tells of the treachery of Antenor and Aeneas at the fall of Troy.

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[1] Brian Stone, trans. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, second edition (London: Penguin Books, 1974), 163.

- **Romulus, Ticius, and Longbeard** (1.8, 11, 12) – legendary ancestors who gave their names to Rome, Tuscany, and Lombardy
- **Brutus** (1.13-15) – According to medieval historians Geoffrey of Monmouth and Nennius, Brutus was the grandson or great-grandson of Aeneas. Brutus landed at Totnes and then named the island Britain from his own name, and his fellow travelers he called Britons.<sup>2</sup>

"And far over the French flood Felix Brutus  
On many spacious slopes set Britain with joy  
And grace" (1.13-15)

2. **Arthur** – The legendary king of the Knights of the Round Table at Camelot in Arthurian romance. Historically, he was possibly a fifth- or sixth-century British general who fought against the Saxons and became a hero – and then during the Middle Ages gradually attracted a range of mythical and magical exploits appropriate to a national hero.<sup>3</sup> Nennius, in his *Historia Britonum* (eighth century), was mainly responsible for making Arthur a historical figure. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his mostly fictitious *Historia Regum Britanniae* (twelfth century), was responsible for creating the legendary Arthur and other national king-heroes.<sup>4</sup>
3. **Camelot** – The location of King Arthur's court. Many parts of England and Wales claim to be the original location of Camelot, which suggests that it is more legend than factual.
4. **Round Table** – A large round table created for the knights of King Arthur's court, designed to avoid seating according to rank. In some accounts, Merlin is credited with making the Round Table.
5. **Guinevere** – King Arthur's beautiful wife and queen
6. **lay** (2.11) – a short lyric or narrative poem intended to be recited or sung by a minstrel
7. **Christmastide** (3.1) – the feasting and celebration of Christmas

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[2] *Ibid.*, 164.

[3] *Ibid.*, 153.

[4] *Ibid.*, 163.

8. **lords** and **liegemen** (3.2) – men of rank and high position; noblemen
9. **largesse** (4.7) – a New Year gift meant to express good wishes or bring good luck
10. **blazon** (6.11) – coat of arms; insignia
11. **loth** (6.21) – loath
12. **crupper** (8.18) – strap attached to a saddle
13. **hauberk** (10.1) – coat of chain mail for armor
14. **plastron** (10.2) – steel breastplate worn under the hauberk
15. **ell** (10.8) – 45 inches
16. **cavaliers** (12.10) – mounted soldiers; knights
17. **chivalry** (12.14) – the spirit and character of knighthood: honor, courtesy, and generosity
18. **quail** (14.21) – to lose heart; to cower
19. **What place he departed to no person there knew** (20.17) – This description of the exit of the Green Knight is a fairy formula conventionally applied to supernatural beings.<sup>5</sup>

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[5] *Ibid.*, 169.

3. When the Green Knight heaved into the hall, he held an axe in one hand and a holly cluster in the other. The holly cluster was a **symbol** of Christmas good luck – its green leaves a reminder that spring will come after the dead of winter. What does the juxtaposition of the axe and the holly cluster suggest about the Green Knight's **purpose**?
4. When Gawain asks to accept the challenge, some important facets of his **character** become apparent. What virtues do you notice in his character at this point? Support your answer with a quote from the text.
5. When King Arthur let Gawain have the challenge, he "*gave him \_\_\_\_, gladly urging him/To be \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_.*" What do these three things **foreshadow** about Gawain's upcoming challenge and adventure?
6. "*And you have gladly gone over, in good discourse, The covenant I requested of the King in full, Except that you shall assent, swearing in truth, To seek me yourself, in such place as you think To find me under the firmament, and fetch your payment For what you deal me today before this dignified gathering.*" (18.3-8) Notice here in the covenant that the Green Knight insists that Gawain seek for him himself to fetch his payment. Why do you suppose that going alone is an important and necessary component of the test? Secondly, does this hint or **foreshadow** anything about the return "payment" in a year's time?
7. By accepting the challenge, we see Gawain's humility. We also see his faithfulness – his commitment to fulfill the terms of the contract (to search for the Green Knight and receive the same blow). But ultimately, what is the most virtuous action of Gawain and likely the **Central One Idea** of Fit I?

4. Gawain is very humble. First he politely asks Arthur if he can leave his seat and stand beside him. Then he proceeds to say how brave the other knights are in comparison to himself, and how his only value comes from being Arthur's nephew: "*Under heaven, I hold, the highest-mettled,/There being no braver knights when battle is joined./I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom, I know,/And my life, if lost, would be least missed, truly./Only through your being my uncle, am I to be valued;/No bounty but your blood in my body do I know.*" (16.10-15) In his humility, he also believes the challenge is too foolish to fall to King Arthur, but not to himself. (16.16) Gawain is also courteous, respectful, and brave.
5. God's blessing; strong in spirit; stout of sinew (17.5-6) They seem to suggest that the challenge has a spiritual cause and purpose (God's blessing), and that it will require fortitude in mind, heart, and will (strong in spirit), and strength in body (stout of sinew).
6. It is necessary because the difficulty of going on the journey alone in faith and honor is part of the test— for it reveals that the test has a number of challenging obstacles or trials within it. The test is also meant for one person, possibly for Gawain in particular. Yes, it seems to foreshadow that there might be more to the return payment— which is of course the castle and its temptations—and which also necessitates that he be alone.
7. By asking to accept the challenge in place of Arthur, Gawain nobly puts his own life at risk in place of his uncle's.

14. • Nobody else in the court stood up to accept the challenge.
  - To defend the honor and renown of his court

### SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Essentially everything about him—his green color, his size, and his outlandish dress
2. Yes. "*For astonishing sights they had seen, but such a one never;/ Therefore a phantom from Fairyland the folk there deemed him.*" (11.8-9)
3. That his purpose for coming to Arthur's court is specific—to test one of Arthur's knights (hence the axe), and that he comes in peace: "*By this branch that I bear, you may be certain/That I proceed in peace, no peril seeking*" (12.16-17). The holly cluster might also suggest that the test itself, should it be passed, will bring new life and spiritual renewal.

## RHETORICAL EXPRESSION

1. During the Christmastide celebration at King Arthur's court, a large green knight on a green horse rides in and challenges any knight to strike a blow at his neck with his axe—so long as he can deliver the same blow a year and a day later. Because nobody volunteers, Arthur accepts the challenge—until Gawain courageously asks to accept the test in his place. Gawain cuts off the Green Knight's head, but the Green Knight simply picks up his head and reminds Gawain of his oath to search for him at the Green Chapel in a year to receive his return blow, and then rides away.
2. Answers will vary.
3. Answers will vary. Support for the Teacher's Central One Idea:
  - Gawain asks to accept the challenge in place of his uncle, revealing his courage and willingness to sacrifice.
  - Gawain's humility is revealed through comments such as, "I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom." (16.12)
  - Gawain shows his love, faithfulness, and service to Arthur when he says, "Only through your being my uncle, am I to be valued;/No bounty but your blood in my body do I know" and especially by his desire to accept the dangerous contract in place of Arthur. (16.14-15)
4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary.

## RHETORIC | Expression

*The student expresses in his or her own words the Central One Idea with supporting details.*

### RHETORICAL EXPRESSION:

**To be answered in your Literature Notebook in preparation for your essay.**

1. In a few sentences, briefly **summarize** the **plot** of Fit I.
2. Write the **Central One Idea** of Fit I in a precise, eloquent sentence.
3. List three or four points that **support** your determination of the Central One Idea.
4. Write a **lead** (1-2 sentences) that grabs the reader's attention—such as a *quote, question, startling fact or statistic, scenario, piece of dialogue, etc.*
5. Write an **amplification/importance** (1-2 sentences) that explains why your thesis is important in a larger or more universal sense.

◆ **Central Quote:** Choose a quote from anywhere in Fit I that you think best embodies the Central One Idea and copy it down.

❶ **Write the Central One Idea as expressed by the teacher.**

### ESSAY OPTION

Choose a topic below and respond with a 3-5 paragraph essay that includes an Introduction with a clear thesis; a Body with organized, logical, and specific support of the thesis; and a Conclusion with an amplification of the thesis/support.

The essay should feature appropriate tone, voice, and point of view; correct grammar, usage, and mechanics; a variety of sentence structures enhanced by subordination and parallelism; a balance of general and specific detail; and enhanced rhetorical effect through transition words, appropriate diction, strong verbs, descriptive adjectives, and other rhetorical devices.

1. Write an essay in which you analyze Sir Gawain. Your essay should have a clear thesis that lists the two, three, or four aspects of Gawain that will comprise the body of your essay.
2. [Central One Idea] Use the Central One Idea of Fit I as the thesis, and support it with some evidence from your reading of the poem and/or your work in the Literature Notebook.
3. [Open] Write an essay in which you analyze an aspect of Fit I that is of import to you, such as a particular theme, character, setting, element of plot, dialogue, symbol, or other literary or rhetorical motif.
4. [Teacher] Essay prompt.

◆ **Central Quote:** Answers will vary. There are several possible quotes that students could argue for as the Central Quote. This is good; students should be encouraged to put the quote they believe to be central to Fit I. Encourage them and allow some freedom.

Here is a Central Quote I suggest, because it reveals the essence of Gawain's humility and willingness to sacrifice his life for his uncle:

*"I am the weakest, the most wanting in wisdom, I know,/And my life, if lost, would be least missed, truly./ Only through your being my uncle, am I to be valued;/No bounty but your blood in my body do I know./ And since this affair is too foolish to fall to you,/And I first asked it of you, make it over to me" – Sir Gawain (16.12-17)*

① **Particular:** By asking to accept the challenge in place of Arthur, Gawain nobly puts his own life at risk in place of his uncle's.

**Abstract:** "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends." – John 15:13