

# CONTENTS

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How To Use This Study Guide With The Text .....	iv
Notes & Instructions to Student .....	v
Taking With Us What Matters.....	vii
Four Stages to the Central One Idea .....	ix
How to Mark a Book.....	xi
Student Notes.....	xii
Introduction.....	1
<b>FIT I</b>	<b>5</b>
Pre-Grammar   Preparation .....	6
Grammar   Presentation .....	7
Logic   Dialectic .....	13
Rhetoric   Expression .....	15
<b>FIT II</b>	<b>21</b>
Pre-Grammar   Preparation .....	22
Grammar   Presentation .....	23
Logic   Dialectic .....	29
Rhetoric   Expression .....	32
<b>FIT III</b>	<b>37</b>
Pre-Grammar   Preparation .....	38
Grammar   Presentation .....	39
Logic   Dialectic .....	44
Rhetoric   Expression .....	46
<b>FIT IV</b>	<b>51</b>
Pre-Grammar   Preparation .....	52
Grammar   Presentation .....	53
Logic   Dialectic .....	58
Rhetoric   Expression .....	61
<b>APPENDIX</b>	<b>67</b>
Childe Rowland .....	68

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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*Central Quote:*

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## PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

*Prepare to think about the poem and its Central One Idea  
by drawing upon my prior knowledge, experience, or interests.*

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1. Imagine being challenged to go on an arduous adventure. Where would you go if you had the opportunity?

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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.

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# GRAMMAR | Presentation

*Discover essential facts, elements, and features of the poem through the reading notes, defining words, and comprehension questions.*

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## READING NOTES

- (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.
  - **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)
- 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* (8th cent.), was mainly responsible for making Arthur a historical figure. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his mostly fictitious *Historia Regum Britanniae* (12th cent.), was responsible for creating the legendary Arthur and other national king-heroes.<sup>4</sup>
- 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.
- 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.
- Guinevere** – King Arthur’s beautiful wife and Queen
- lay** (2.11) – a short lyric or narrative poem intended to be recited or sung by a minstrel
- Christmastide** (3.1) – the feasting and celebration of Christmas
- lords and liegemen** (3.2) – men of rank and high position; noblemen
- largesse** (4.7) – A New Year gift meant to express good wishes or bring good luck.
- blazon** (6.11) – coat of arms; insignia

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

2 *Ibid.*, 164.

3 *Ibid.*, 153.

4 *Ibid.*, 163.

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. **cavalier** (12.10) – a mounted soldier; a knight
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>

## WORDS TO BE DEFINED

<b>Definitions Bank</b>			
accessories	curt; snippy	full of spirit	distinguished
boasts	delightful	gleaming	raised platform
ceased	demeanor	made widely known	respite; delay of sentence
to condescend; to lower oneself	denying; contradicting	merriment	sharply
courageous	excelled	outer garment	splendid; stately
discouraged	following	polished	train of attendants
	food and drink	prominent;	

1. A happening **eminent** among Arthur’s adventures (2.10) \_\_\_\_\_
2. Jousted in **jollity** these gentle knights (3.6) \_\_\_\_\_
3. For lords and their ladies, **delectable** joy (3.13) \_\_\_\_\_
4. That day double on the **dais** were the diners served (4.2) \_\_\_\_\_
5. At every fine feast among his free **retinue** (5.17) \_\_\_\_\_
6. Erect stood the strong King, stately of **mien** (6.1) \_\_\_\_\_
7. For barely had the blast of trump **abated** one minute (7.5) \_\_\_\_\_

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 169.

8. Who in height **outstripped** all earthly men (7.8) \_\_\_\_\_
9. And verily his **vesture** was all vivid green (8.11) \_\_\_\_\_
10. In ravishing array on the rich **accoutrements** (8.13) \_\_\_\_\_
11. **Mettlesome** in might (8.26) \_\_\_\_\_
12. And **brusque** with bit and reign (8.27) \_\_\_\_\_
13. Yes, garbed all in green was the **gallant** rider (9.1) \_\_\_\_\_
14. Many bright golden bells, **burnished** and ringing (9.17) \_\_\_\_\_
15. **Acutely** honed for cutting, as keenest razors are (10.11) \_\_\_\_\_
16. So even the **doughty** were daunted and dared not reply (11.10) \_\_\_\_\_
17. Please **deign** to dismount and dwell with us (12.5) \_\_\_\_\_
18. Acquiring clear possession of it, no claim from me **ensuing** (13.15) \_\_\_\_\_
19. And a day's **reprieve**, I direct (13.20) \_\_\_\_\_
20. What, is this Arthur's house, the honour of which/Is **bruted** abroad so abundantly? (14.10)  
\_\_\_\_\_
21. Your victories, your valour, your **vaunts**, where are they? (14.12) \_\_\_\_\_
22. Less unmanned and **dismayed** by the mighty strokes (15.14) \_\_\_\_\_
23. And the **scintillating** steel struck the ground (19.10) \_\_\_\_\_
24. Go to the Green Chapel without **gainsaying** to get/Such a stroke as you have struck (20.8)  
\_\_\_\_\_
25. However, I am now able to eat the **repast** (21.8) \_\_\_\_\_



*Now that you have completed the Pre-Grammar questions, read the Reading Notes, and answered as many Words to be Defined as you can, read Fit I in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, marking the text in key places.*



5. *“Saving Christ’s self, the most celebrated knights,  
The loveliest ladies to live in all time,  
And the comeliest king ever to keep court.  
For this fine fellowship was in its fair prime  
Far famed” (3.15-19)*

**Summarize** what the poet says about King Arthur’s court.

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6. How is Guinevere described? Include a phrase or line from the text in your answer.

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7. What important announcement did Arthur make that initiates the **plot**?

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8. Was this unusual for Arthur to make this announcement?

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9. Describe the Green Knight physically (but not what he was wearing because that is the next question). Include in your description at least seven details.

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10. Describe some of the Green Knight's attire. Include in your description at least five items.

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11. What does the Green Knight say about Arthur's court? Include a phrase or line from the text in your answer.

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12. The fact that he had no hauberk, helmet, or combat armor reveals what about his **purpose**?

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13. What challenge does the Green Knight present to Arthur's court?

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14. What are the two reasons that Arthur responded to the Green Knight's challenge himself?

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# LOGIC | Dialectic

*Reason with the facts, elements, and features of the poem; sort, arrange, compare, and connect ideas – and begin to uncover and determine the Central One Idea.*

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## SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What features or aspects of the Green Knight suggest that he is an enchanter or something supernatural?

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2. Did members of King Arthur's court also perceive him as something supernatural? Quote a line or two from the text which reveals their perception of him.

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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**?

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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.

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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?

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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?

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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?

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