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FIT I

Central Quote:

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

- (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.¹
 - **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.²

*“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.³ 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.⁴
- 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

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.⁵

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank			
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) _____ prominent; distinguished
2. Jousted in **jollity** these gentle knights (3.6) _____ merriment
3. For lords and their ladies, **delectable** joy (3.13) _____ delightful
4. That day double on the **dais** were the diners served (4.2) _____ raised platform
5. At every fine feast among his free **retinue** (5.17) _____ train of attendants
6. Erect stood the strong King, stately of **mien** (6.1) _____ demeanor
7. For barely had the blast of trump **abated** one minute (7.5) _____ ceased

⁵ Ibid., 169.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does the poet begin the poem with a discussion of classical figures and places such as Aeneas and Troy, Romulus and Rome, and Brutus and Britain?

This question reminds the student to use the Reading Notes section—as the answer is presented there: The poet uses a traditional medieval literary device of placing the story to come in actual history—and that “*history*” traces English origins to heroic classical times.¹

2. When the poet says, “*Listen to my lay but a little while:*” (2.11ff), he proceeds to tell the reader in the following five lines several things that his **narrative poem** will entail. List three things he mentions about his poem.

Note: If some students use Stone’s Notes in the back of the book to answer this question, that is fine; it will be beneficial either way.

- It is already authenticated by performance (“in city as I heard it” – 2.12) and the written word (“As scribes have set it duly” – 2.14).
- It will be spoken (“shall I speak it” / “With tongue” – 2.12-13).
- It is in alliterative verse (“with letters linking truly” – 2.16).
- It is a narrative (“In story bold and strong” – 2.17) of traditional subject matter (“In the lore of the land so long” – 2.15).

3. Once the poet begins his lay, where is the opening **setting** (time and place)?

Camelot at Christmastide (3.1)

4. Describe the mood of the inhabitants of Camelot at this time. Include a phrase or line from the text in your answer.

The mood is festive and celebratory. “*In splendid celebration, seemly and carefree*” (3.4ff, et al.)

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

LOGIC | Dialectic

The student reasons with the facts, elements, and features of the poem and begins to uncover and determine the Central One Idea.

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

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

Essentially everything about him—his green color, his size, and his outlandish dress

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.

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. 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**?

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.

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.

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.

RHETORIC | Expression

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

1 CENTRAL ONE IDEA

1. In a few sentences, briefly **summarize** the **plot** of Fit I.

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. Write the **Central One Idea** of Fit I in a complete sentence.

3. List three or four points that support your determination of the Central One Idea.

Note: This is the teacher answer for Question #4 below

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)

4. Choose a quote from Fit I that you think best embodies the Central One Idea – and with good penmanship, write it in the Central Quote section at the beginning of the Fit I section.