

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

Chapters 1-4

WHAT IS A QUEST?

CHARACTERISTICS OF A TRADITIONAL QUEST

- ❑ A Quester
 - ❑ The Wart
- ❑ A Place to Go
 - ❑ The forest surrounding Sir Ector's castle
- ❑ A Reason to Go
 - ❑ To return Cully
- ❑ Challenges
 - ❑ The black arrows; losing Cully in the forest; becoming lost
- ❑ The Real Reason to Go
 - ❑ To meet Merlyn and begin his education, thus growing as a person

THE WART'S QUEST VS. ECTOR/GRUMMURSUM'S IDEA OF A QUEST

The Wart goes through several trials and tribulations, albeit minor, in order to return Cully. He does not “quest” for himself, but rather because it is the “right” thing to do in order for justice to be served. By the end of the quest he has not only successfully recaptured the hawk, but he has also met the man, Merlyn, who will ultimately aid him in becoming his best self.

As Sir Ector and Sir Grummursum sit around drinking port, they discuss the “questin’” recently completed by Grummursum. The man explains that on his “quest,” he came across a Sir Saunce Pite (sans pity) who was enjoying the company of a woman, and Grummursum chased him for some distance. This is no quest. This is simply a game played by Grummursum in order to maintain the appearance of chivalry and honor.

THE CHIVALRIC CODE OF HONOR

THE IDEAL KNIGHT

RESPECTED AND VIGOROUSLY DEFENDED HIS CHURCH,
HIS KING, HIS COUNTRY, AND VICTIMS OF
INJUSTICE.

The chivalric code is associated with the idea of courtly love and romance; therefore, knights found it their duty to protect and aid women, who were deemed incapable of helping themselves.

All Knights of the Round Table were required to maintain:

- Faith
 - Honor
 - Courtesy
 - Loyalty
 - Bravery
 - Modesty
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ACTS OF CHIVALRY IN CHAPTERS 1-4

- ❑ Sir Grummore Grummursum “found a chap called Sir Bruce Saunce Pite choppin’ off a maiden’s head” and broke up the situation by running Saunce Pite (sans pity) off for a distance of about 25 miles.
 - ❑ At first glance, the phrasing of this “quest” makes it appear that Grummursum is in fact rescuing a **damsel in distress** from having her head cut off; however, he is using a euphemism, and what he really accomplished was breaking up a romantic situation between two consenting adults. This is NOT chivalry.
 - ❑ As we read, watch out for puns, sarcasm, and euphemisms!

ACTS OF CHIVALRY IN CHAPTERS 1-4

- ❑ When Kay and the Wart lose Cully, the Wart decides he must find the bird before returning to the castle because it is the right and honorable thing to do.
 - ❑ Here, the Wart is acting chivalrously because he is
 - ❑ honorable: doing the “right” thing even though it isn’t the “easy” thing
 - ❑ courteous: righting others’ wrongs for the good of all
 - ❑ loyal: aids Hob, the falconer, because he is a good friend
 - ❑ brave: goes into the forest on his own at night despite the many dangers

THE WART VS. THE Highborn Knights and Kay

The Wart

- ❑ The irony of this situation is that the Wart is supposed to be Kay's squire (helper), yet he is the only one acting valiantly and honorably. He is acting with extreme bravery and empathy, proving that he is morally above those around him. This hints at the Wart's destiny: to rule over Britain (Gramarye) as a generous, loyal, beloved king.

Sir Ector, Sir Grummursum, King Pellinore, and Kay

- ❑ The highborn men of the first few chapters seem bumbling and foolish in comparison to the young Wart. They are meant to uphold the code of chivalry, but they ultimately end up as mere caricatures of what a knight should be.

SATIRE

WHAT IS SATIRE?

- ❑ the use of humor, irony, exaggeration, or ridicule to expose and criticize people's stupidity or vices, particularly in the context of contemporary politics and other topical issues.

- ❑ Where have you seen satire before?
 - ❑ The Colbert Report (Colbert is not actually a Republican)
 - ❑ The Onion (online satirical news)
 - ❑ Shrek (satire of traditional fairy tales)

INSTANCES OF SATIRE IN CHAPTERS 1-4

When reading, look for the following satirical devices. Remember to always consider *what* is being satirized and *why*.

- ❑ Irony
- ❑ Hyperbole
- ❑ Understatement
- ❑ Juxtaposition
- ❑ Sarcasm
- ❑ Anachronism*

- ❑ White undermines the notion of chivalry through satirizing the knight and portraying him as a clown.
 - ❑ When Wart meets King Pellinore, he is in awe of the stately figure. However, White then goes on to portray Pellinore as a clumsy idiot on a pointless quest.
 - ❑ Sir Ector and Sir Grummore are drunkards who speak in an uneducated dialect. They discuss typical knightly ideals, yet they do not uphold these ideals personally.
 - ❑ Kay, a knight in training, is hot tempered and foolish, upholding none of the standards laid out in the code of chivalry.

ANACHRONISM

- ❑ Anachronism is derived from a Greek word anachronous which means “against time.” Therefore, an anachronism is an error of chronology or timeline in a literary piece. In other words, anything that is out of time and out of place is an anachronism.
- ❑ Some examples from the reading selection
 - ❑ Merlyn says “why can’t they get us the electric light and company’s water?”
 - ❑ Merlyn’s cottage contains many items from the future such as a gun case, a medal from Winchester college, and bunsen burners
 - ❑ Merlyn smokes tobacco, which hasn’t yet been introduced to Europe

CHARACTERS

THE WART (ARTHUR)

From chapters 1-4, we learn that the Wart is kind, courteous, and sensitive. When discussing falconry, he appears to be wiser than his years would suggest. The Wart is reliable and interested in the world around him. These qualities all suggest that he is a “good” and moral young boy, which, in turn, hints that he is the only knightly figure to be introduced in the novel thus far.

- ❑ About 12 years old
 - ❑ An orphan (no known mother or father; Sir Ector is his guardian)
 - ❑ Hard worker
 - ❑ Brave
 - ❑ Loyal to his adoptive family
 - ❑ Looks up to Kay
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CHARACTERS IN CHAPTERS 1-4

❑ Sir Ector

- ❑ Nobleman who is the father of Kay and the guardian of the Wart. He is a kind-hearted man who wants the best for his son and charge. Sir Ector speaks with a distinct dialect, which suggests that he is uneducated.

❑ Sir Grummore Grummursum

- ❑ Nobleman who is good friends with Sir Ector. Again, he is kind and speaks with the same distinct dialect.

❑ King Pellinore

- ❑ The first knight the Wart meets in the forest. He is bumbling and clumsy, not like the typical knight we imagine. He has been searching for the Questing Beast (fruitlessly) for the past 17 years. He seems, at times, to be lonely and slightly depressed about his lot in life.

CHARACTERS IN CHAPTERS 1-4

❑ Kay

- ❑ Sir Ector's son and the Wart's companion. He is arrogant, stubborn, and hot-tempered. Kay often does as he wishes, regardless of consequence. It is also apparent that Kay thinks himself superior to others as he is destined to be a knight.

❑ Merlyn

- ❑ A wizard who resides in the woods outside of Sir Ector's castle. He lives backward in time, meaning he knows the future of things. He is a wise old man who, at times, finds it difficult to live in medieval England. Merlyn is kind and considerate, though he takes the Wart's education very seriously.

❑ Archimedes

- ❑ Merlyn's tawny owl. At first he is not a fan of the Wart, but he

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND ANALYSES

CHAPTER 1

- ❑ Arthur is given the nickname Wart. Kay does not have a nickname.
 - ❑ Sir Ector and Sir Grummore decide that there should be a quest to find Wart and Kay a tutor.
 - ❑ The two boys help with the hay-making in the heat of July.
 - ❑ Wart and Kay take Cully, the goshawk, out hunting, though they know they should not.
 - ❑ After Cully unsuccessfully goes after a rabbit, he flies away from the boys angrily.
- ❑ Kay has given Arthur a derogatory nickname, though he will not stand one himself. It becomes apparent that Kay is well-aware of his superior social status, and, thus, he tends to patronize the Wart who only worships Kay.
 - ❑ Ector and Grummore are ridiculous characters who act like a quest is a commonplace game. Their “quest” to find a tutor is nothing like a traditional quest, which is rather about seeking a higher truth.
 - ❑ We expect these established knights to be chivalrous and glorious, but they are actually idiots, satirizing the traditional notions of chivalry and knighthood.
 - ❑ The Wart shows much integrity and morality, traits of a traditional knight, when he wishes to leave Cully in the Mews. Kay, on the other hand, refuses to defer to an inferior (Wart) because he believes himself inherently superior.

CHAPTER 1, CONT'D

❑ Narrative Point of View

❑ 2nd person (You)

- ❑ The narrator is self-aware, meaning he knows he is telling a story. He includes and changes information in order to make his tale more relatable to his audience.

❑ Birds of Prey

- ❑ Falconry was of vital importance to medieval England, especially to the upper classes. It was one of the most regal sporting events of the day.
 - ❑ Typically, birds of prey represent fierce independence and unbridled passion.
 - ❑ The Warts knowledge on the subject and the compassion he shows towards Cully ultimately relates to his ability to effectively

CHAPTER 2

- ❑ Kay goes home and leaves Wart to track Cully deep into the forest that night.
- ❑ In the dangerous woods, Wart curls up for the night under a tree, but it soon startled by black arrows shot at him by a mysterious figure.
- ❑ He eventually gets away, but loses Cully in doing so.
- ❑ Wart comes across a clearing with a ghostly knight standing in it.
- ❑ The knight is revealed to be King Pellinore, who is out searching for the Questing Beast.
- ❑ Pellinore is an idiotic knight on an idiotic quest. He appears very lonely, as he has been looking for the Beast for 17 years to no avail. He wishes he didn't have to do this quest any longer.
- ❑ The Wart asks for help in getting back to Ector's castle, and Pellinore agrees when he is told he may have a feather bed for the night.
- ❑ Before they set off together, Pellinore hears the Questing Beast and is off, leaving Wart alone yet again.

CHAPTER 2, CONT'D

- ❑ Wart acts valiantly and chivalrously when he stays with Cully despite the apparent dangers. His actions are in stark contrast with Kay's, though we know that Kay is the one who is destined to be the knight.
 - ❑ The emphasis on these discrepancies illustrates the superficiality of knighthood.
- ❑ The initial appearance of King Pellinore is romanticized, as he is described as unearthly, almost magical. This quickly falls apart when we realize that Pellinore is a clumsy parody of the traditional knight.
 - ❑ Pellinore's actual personality begins to subvert our expectations of the knightly ideal.

CHAPTER 2, CONT'D

- ❑ The Questing Beast is representative of the entire questing genre: White conflates the journey component of the quest with the goal itself. In addition, the Questing Beast itself is an amalgamation of many different beasts. Pellinore will never catch the beast, suggesting that the quest is nothing more than game.
- ❑ Knights are typically religiously devoted to their quests, so when Pellinore waivers in his commitment, the knightly ideal is lessened, and we are left to question the allegiance to the chivalric code of knighthood.

CHAPTER 3

- ❑ Wart sleeps in the forest after Pellinore leaves. He hears a sound, and upon checking it out, he comes across a cottage and a man (Merlyn) drawing water from a well.
- ❑ Merlyn is an older man with a disheveled appearance.
- ❑ The Wart and Merlyn enter the magical cottage (filled with many fascinating items) for breakfast. Merlyn knew the Wart would be showing up because Merlyn lives backward in time.
- ❑ The Wart meets Archimedes, Merlyn's owl companion. Archimedes initially doesn't like the Wart, but he eventually warms up to the boy.
- ❑ Merlyn explains that the two will be returning to Sir Ector's castle, as Merlyn is to be the Wart's new tutor.

CHAPTER 3, CONT'D

- ❑ This chapter draws immediate attention to Merlyn's magical powers and his notions of time.
 - ❑ Merlyn has already lived in the future, so he is fully aware of what is to come. This is confusing to everyone involved, including the reader. It's okay. It's supposed to be confusing.
- ❑ After being scolded by Merlyn and Archimedes about calling the owl "Archie," Arthur learns his first lesson: to treat others with the respect they deserve.
- ❑ By the end of the chapter, Wart realizes that he has completed his own quest without even knowing he was on one. This, again, allows us to see that the truly knightly character is the small boy who is only supposed to be a squire.

CHAPTER 4

- ❑ The Wart, Merlyn, and Archimedes arrive back at Sir Ector's castle.
 - ❑ The Wart announces that he has completed his quest to find a new tutor.
 - ❑ Sir Ector, being skeptical of magic, asks for references and examples of Merlyn's abilities, to which Merlyn willingly obliges.
 - ❑ It is decided that Merlyn will, in fact, be a great teacher for the two boys.
- ❑ Wart is praised by all the adults upon his return to Sir Ector's castle for his perseverance and dedication to the retrieval of Cully. Hob is especially gracious.
 - ❑ This approval marks the first time that the Wart is deemed morally superior to Kay, alluding to the hierarchical and superficial parameters of knighthood.
 - ❑ Because knights lived by the code of chivalry, it was assumed that they were inherently more moral than the lesser-born. This is obviously not the case here, as the Wart is far more knight-like than the arrogant Kay. We learn now that knights are made simply by their birth, not their personality.

ANSWERS TO CHAPTERS 1-4
STUDY QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1

1. How does the disjointed structure of Sir Grummore and Sir Ector's conversation help to establish their characteristics?

Sir Ector and Sir Grummore have a very distinctive way of speaking in this opening chapter. They occasionally seem to have trouble following the thread of the conversation, instead commenting on the point they are drinking or repeating an earlier part of the conversation. In addition, they mispronounce words, such as "eddication," and have a tendency to drop beginning or ending consonants from words, such as "mornin'" and "thinkin'."

From this rather light-hearted conversation, the reader can infer that the two men are not terribly well-educated or overly serious or solemn. This conversation serves to establish the two men as good-natured, if slightly comical, characters.

CHAPTER 1

2. In the middle of Sir Grummore and Sir Ector's conversation, the narrator employs an aside to the reader: "It was not really Eton that he mentioned, for the College of Blessed Mary was not founded until 1440, but it was a place of the same sort. Also they were drinking Metheglyn, not port, but by mentioning the modern wine it is easier to give you the feel." What does this aside accomplish?

This aside is the first of many in *The Once and Future King*, and is an important element of T.H. White's style throughout the book. This particular aside helps to draw the reader into the story, and makes it apparent that the narrator is attempting to make an ancient story accessible to the modern reader. Technically, mentioning Eton is an anachronism within the story, since Eton does not yet exist, but the narrator uses the anachronism to aid the reader's understanding. This makes it clear that the story is set far in the past—in a time the reader may have difficulty understanding—and simultaneously attempts to make the story universal and relatable.

CHAPTER 1

3. What techniques are used in this chapter to help establish the setting for the novel?

The narrator employs a long, detailed description of the castle in which the characters live, firmly establishing the setting of the novel in medieval times. The imagery describing the thatched houses and the stone bridge of the castle helps to establish setting. Additionally, the list of the weekly program that the characters follow helps to establish setting. Tilting, horsemanship, hawking, fencing, archery, and chivalry are all activities that a reader would expect to find during a medieval setting.

CHAPTER 1

4. How are Kay and the Wart different? Describe their relationship.

Kay is the legitimate son of Sir Ector, and receives better treatment as a result. The Wart, on the other hand, is an orphan, and Kay often teases him about it. Kay has a more forceful personality than the Wart, and he seems more confident and less concerned with arbitrary rules than the Wart is. Although the Wart is a hard worker with talent, he is eager to follow Kay's lead. The narrator calls the Wart a "born follower" and "a hero-worshiper."

CHAPTER 2

1. What does the Wart's desire to get Cully back reveal about his character?

Although the Wart is dominated by Kay, he is clearly a sensitive and thoughtful boy. When Cully escapes, the Wart recognizes how upset Hob (the falconer) will be over this turn of events. Kay, conversely, is entirely unconcerned with Hob's feelings and calls the hawk rotten and stupid. The Wart is clearly a more thoughtful person than Kay. Additionally, the Wart's decision to stay in the woods reveals the bravery at the core of his character. He may have a lower social status than Kay, but he has a "stout heart" and a strong sense of right and wrong.

CHAPTER 2

2. Discuss the contrast between the Wart's initial impression of King Pellinore and King Pellinore's behavior. What does this contrast accomplish?

Initially, the knight that the Wart sees in the woods is a beautiful, intimidating sight. He stands in a clearing, lit by the moon, an extremely impressive sight for the Wart. Indeed, the knight is described as “still and silent and unearthly.” In short, King Pellinore's initial appearance is too beautiful to describe. However, this extraordinary impression changes immediately when the Wart begins to address the knight. As King Pellinore looks around for the source of the Wart's voice, he becomes an extremely comic figure. He nearly falls off his horse, drops his glasses and his lance, and continually has to re-open his visor, as it keeps slamming shut unexpectedly.

CHAPTER 2

3. How is King Pellinore's attitude toward the Questing Beast unexpected?

The King seems to dislike questing after the Beast Glatisant. He describes his hunt for the beast as boring and pointless. Traditional notions of knightly quests indicate that quests are undertaken for glory and honor, or perhaps to rid the world of violent, dangerous beasts. King Pellinore, however, is hunting the Questing Beast simply because it is his duty to do so as a Pellinore. He is resigned to his task of hunting the beast, but he would prefer a comfortable life with a feather bed.

CHAPTER 3

1. How does the long description of Merlyn's house illuminate his character?

Merlyn is a very whimsical, capricious character, and the fanciful nature of his home reflects this aspect of his personality. His home is filled with unexpected items, including living creatures like field mice, badgers, and an owl. The list of items in Merlyn's house reads like a laundry list of surprising things. It is significant that he owns thousands of books, as he is a learned magician; it is also significant that these books are personified. They are "propped against each other as if they had had too much to drink and did not really trust themselves." This description is significant because even ordinary objects like books take on a certain whimsical quality when Merlyn owns them. Another item of significance in Merlyn's home is a guncase, filled with weapons that have not been invented yet. The presence of anachronistic weapons reveals that Merlyn's powers as a magician and as a time-traveler (of sorts) are genuine.

CHAPTER 3

2. What does Merlyn ask the Wart to do to illustrate his peculiar way of looking at time? How does this illuminate his confusion?

Merlyn asks the Wart to draw the letter W on a piece of paper without looking at the paper, but while looking in a mirror instead. Merlyn uses this to illustrate the way in which he lives his life. He was born backwards in time, meaning he must live his life opposite from the way most people live it. He finds this rather confusing, much like attempting to draw using a mirror.

CHAPTER 4

1. How does sir Ector respond to Merlyn's testimonials and demonstrations of his magic, and what does this reveal about his character?

Sir Ector is a comical character again in this chapter. Although Merlyn's demonstrations of his magical ability are nothing short of amazing, Sir Ector insists that it is merely trickery, not real magic. The idea that a full grown tree suddenly appearing in the courtyard could be caused by mirrors is ridiculous, but Sir Ector says it nonetheless. Sir Ector is trying to be skeptical, but only accomplishes appearing absurd. He also contradicts himself; although he expresses skepticism about Merlyn's abilities, he does not hesitate to hire Merlyn to tutor the boys.

CHAPTER 4

2. How does Merlyn treat Kay differently than he treats the Wart, and what might this foreshadow?

Merlyn is quick to chastise Kay, and he uses very formal language as he does so. This differs significantly from his interaction with the Wart, which has been largely friendly and informal thus far. This stands in contrast to how the other characters treat Kay and the Wart; Kay is usually favored over the Wart, but Merlyn turns this on its head. This might foreshadow Merlyn's careful tutelage of the Wart and an important destiny for the Wart.

QUOTE ID PRACTICE

IDENTIFY THE SPEAKER OF EACH OF THE FOLLOWING QUOTES:

1. “Do you think we ought to fly him? Deep in the moult like this?”
2. “Hob is only a villein anyway.”
3. “Gets a bit lonely without her, following the Beast about, and never knowing where one is. Makes a bit of company, you know.”
4. “Let him alone. Perhaps he does not want to be friends with you until he knows what you are like. With owls, it is never easy-come and easy-go.”
5. “You might as well call me Wol, or Olly, and have done with it.”

ANSWERS ON THE NEXT
SLIDE

QUOTE ID ANSWERS

1. Wart (Wart has more integrity and morality, and understands that sometimes you should listen to the advice of your elders)
2. Kay (Kay is arrogant and thinks himself better than the servants like Hob)
3. King Pellinore (Pellinore is often lonely without his dog. You also should have gotten this because of the mention of the Questing Beast)
4. Merlyn (This should be obvious because Merlyn knows the most about Owls since he has been with Archimedes for years)
5. Archimedes (Again, should be obvious because the nicknames are similar to the word “owl” itself. Also, remember that Archimedes is initially offended by the Wart’s mistake, but he soon forgives the boy as Wart meant no offense)