

THE EDUCATION OF THE WART

FROM THE SWORD IN THE STONE

Merlyn comes to the castle of Sir Ector to become the tutor for the Wart. Merlyn uses magic to transform Wart into various types of animals. Each of the magical adventures that Merlyn gives the Wart seems designed to impart a carefully calculated lesson or set of lessons. Most of the lessons are ones about leadership and society, for Merlyn knows that the Wart will one day become the king of England. His goal is to give the Wart ideas for creating a better society.



A TRIP INTO THE MOAT

On a hot summer day in August, the Wart meets his new tutor, Merlyn, for his first lesson. They stand on a bridge above the castle's moat, and the Wart wishes aloud that he were a fish. Merlyn transforms the Wart into a fish and accompanies him in the moat in the form of a large, wise-looking tench or "doctor fish." Merlyn, who wants the Wart to learn about the dangers of absolute monarchy, brings him to visit the King of the Moat, an enormous pike. The pike, who looks a little like Uncle Sam, lazily answers some of the Wart's questions, saying that power and might are the only two things worth living by. To illustrate his point the King of the Moat displays his endless rows of razor-sharp teeth. The king then tries to eat the Wart, but the Wart swims away in the nick of time and is promptly changed back into a boy by Merlyn.

1. What lesson about leadership and power does the Wart learn from his encounter with the King of the Moat?
2. Why would the author of *The Sword in the Stone* say that the King of the Moat looked a little like Uncle Sam?

THE ANT COLONY

Growing bored one day, the Wart asks Merlyn to change him into an ant in one of the ant colonies Merlyn keeps in a glass tank. Merlyn agrees and tells the Wart to place a reed between the two nests. He then changes the Wart into an ant, and the Wart finds himself at the outskirts of one of the two nests. A sign above the entrance to the colony reads, EVERYTHING NOT FORBIDDEN IS COMPULSORY. The ants blindly perform whatever command they hear. They think that individuality is evil and work slave-like for the good of their colony. In his head, the Wart can hear repetitive broadcasts that alternate between giving orders and directions and playing repetitive, soothing gibberish. The ants believe that they live in a perfect society, but to the Wart it is cold and faceless. As the Wart works, he hears more and more broadcasts that report that the two ant colonies have come into contact. Then the broadcasts

report that the two colonies are going to go to war, and he is constantly bombarded with propaganda against the enemy colony. Just as the two ant colonies are about to go to war, Merlyn returns the Wart to human form.

3. What lesson does the Wart learn from the ant society?
4. What is a real-life society either from history or current times that might be similar to the ant society?

FLYING WITH THE GEESE

For another lesson Merlyn turns the Wart into a goose and transports him to a vast, wet plain. The Wart flies with other geese, looks for food, stands guard as they eat, and meets a female goose named Lyo-lyok. The Wart learns about the geese's society from Lyo-lyok. He asks if they are guarding their plain from other geese. Are they fighting a war? This confuses Lyo-lyok because she does not know what war is, and when the Wart explains it, the idea of it confuses her. Lyo-lyok says that the geese have no private property or laws, and their leaders are selected on the basis of their ability to navigate. Soon the time for migration comes, and on their first day of flight they travel to Norway. The geese fly so high into the sky that when they look down at the earth, they can no longer see any of the boundaries between kingdoms and property. The Wart feels completely free.

5. What lesson does the Wart learn from the society of the geese?
6. Merlyn asks the Wart to tell him what society he thinks is best, but the Wart does not answer immediately. What answer would you give?
7. What is another animal from which the Wart could have learned an important lesson? Explain the lesson and how the animal could teach it.