

THE FALL OF CAMELOT

King Arthur's kingdom thrives for many years, and its champions of justice, the Knight of the Round Table, bring a golden age to Britain. Camelot, Arthur's ruling city, becomes a symbol of the perfect society built on the concepts of justice, equality, and mercy. In the end though, Camelot is doomed to fall. As the years pass, cracks begin to appear in Arthur's seemingly invulnerable utopia. Although Camelot could never be destroyed by any external enemy, it is brought down by the treachery of its own subjects. A new generation of base and greedy knights grows up that does not value the virtues that Camelot was built upon. Exacerbating this problem is the arrival of Arthur's long-lost son, Mordred, who seeks to take revenge on his father by poisoning his knights against him. Also troubling is the fact that Arthur's queen, Guinevere, begins a secret affair with Arthur's best knight, Lancelot. When Mordred chooses to reveal Guinevere's adultery to the whole kingdom, Arthur is forced to choose—will he sentence his wife and his best knight to execution for betraying him? Or will he break the rules of Camelot by showing favoritism to those he loves best? In the end his decision causes a civil war, and Mordred leads an army of rebellious knights against Arthur. In the battle almost all of Camelot's knights are slain. Arthur slays Mordred, but not before he is mortally wounded by the evil knight.



As Arthur lies dying, he remembers his promise to the Lady of the Lake—that he would return Excalibur to her when his death came. He summons one of his knights to bear the sword to the nearby lake and return it to the Lady of the Lake. Once the knight does so, he returns only to find the dying Arthur to be missing. Then he spies a magical ship floating upon the lake. Upon it is Arthur. The Lady of the Lake says that she is bearing Arthur to Avalon, the magical island of the faeries, where he will be healed from his wounds and fall into a deep sleep. Then one day, when Britain needs him the most, he will return. Merlin will return from the cave where he was magically trapped as well, and a new golden age will come to Britain. For this reason King Arthur will forever be called “The Once and Future King.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What causes Arthur's kingdom to fall? Explain.
2. Arthur refuses to compromise the ideals Camelot was founded upon. How does this show that Arthur is a good leader? Should leaders be held accountable to their own laws? Explain.
3. Many leaders in the Middle Ages claimed to be descendants of King Arthur and modeled their kingdoms after his ideas of justice. Even in modern times, political leaders, such as John F. Kennedy, were compared to King Arthur. Why is King Arthur such an enduring symbol?
4. Why is it important that Arthur does not actually die at the end of his story?
5. Are the ideals of justice, equality, and mercy still important to us today? Explain.