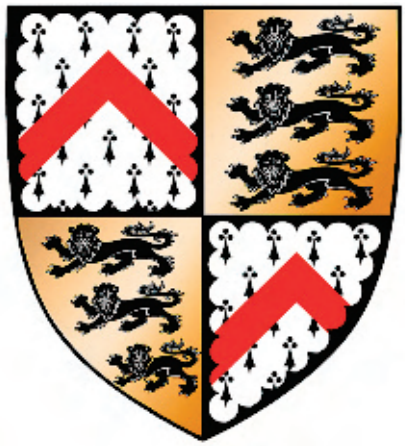
from Le Morte d'Arthur

Romance by Sir Thomas Malory Retold by Keith Baines

READING 5A Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **5B** Analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

Meet the Author

Sir Thomas Malory early 1400s–1471



The legend of King Arthur is one of the most popular and enduring legends in Western culture. Most English-speaking readers have been introduced to the Arthurian legend through *Le Morte d'Arthur,* a work consisting of a number of interwoven tales that chronicle the rise and fall of King Arthur and his court.

Adventurous Life Although his identity is not certain, most scholars believe that the author of *Le Morte d'Arthur* was born into a fairly prosperous family in Warwickshire, England. As a young man, Thomas Malory fought in the Hundred Years' War. He was knighted in about 1442 and was later elected to Parliament. Malory then became embroiled in the violent political conflicts that preceded the outbreak of the Wars of the Roses.

A staunch supporter of the house of Lancaster and its claim to the throne, Malory was imprisoned repeatedly by the Yorkist government on a variety of charges, including rape, robbery, cattle rustling, bribery, and attempted murder. He pleaded innocent to all the charges, and his guilt was never proven. It is possible that his outspoken opposition to the ruling family provoked enemies to accuse him falsely in some instances.

Writing from Behind Bars Malory wrote *Le Morte d'Arthur* while serving a series of prison terms that began in 1451. He finished the work in prison in 1469. At the end of the book, he asks that readers "pray . . . that God send me good deliverance. And when I am dead, I pray you all pray for my soul."

The Arthurian Legends The first edition of *Le Morte d'Arthur* was published in 1485, fourteen years after Malory's death. *Le Morte d'Arthur* remains the most complete English version of the Arthurian legends, which are believed to have existed since the sixth century as part of the oral tradition in France and England. Some historians believe that the fictional Arthur was modeled on a real fifth- or sixth-century Celtic military leader, although the historical Arthur was undoubtedly very different from Malory's Arthur, who ruled an idealized world of romance, chivalry, and magic.

As the first prose epic written in English, *Le Morte d'Arthur* is an important milestone in English literature. It has proved to be an astonishingly popular work, having not once gone out of print since it was first published in 1485—a testament to Malory's singular talent as a writer.

DID YOU KNOW?

Sir Thomas Malory . . .

- completed *Le Morte d'Arthur* while in Newgate Prison in London.
- spent more than ten years in prison, accused of violent acts.

Author Online

THINK central

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-246

LITERARY ANALYSIS: CONFLICT

The plot of a medieval romance is typically driven by **conflict,** a struggle between opposing forces. The conflict can be **external,** between a character and an outside force, or it can be **internal,** taking place within the mind of a character. Sometimes a single event contains both types of conflict; for example, in a battle, a knight may externally struggle against an enemy warrior and internally struggle to be courageous and live up to the ideals of chivalry. In addition, conflicts often reveal a character's **motivations,** or reasons for acting in a certain way. As you read *Le Morte d'Arthur,* look for examples of both types of conflict faced by King Arthur, Sir Launcelot, and the other knights, and for how these conflicts shed light on each character's motivations.

Review: **Medieval Romance**

READING SKILL: SUMMARIZE

Summarizing can help you keep track of events in an action-filled narrative, such as a romance. When you **summarize** a narrative, you briefly describe its plot developments. An effective summary should describe events in the same order in which they appear in the narrative and leave out details that are not essential to the plot. As you read, use a chart like the one shown to help you summarize the main plot developments.

Passage	Summary
lines 1–6	Arthur sails to France, where Launcelot has settled, and attacks Launcelot's lands.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Knowing the following boldfaced words will help you read *Le Morte d'Arthur.* To show that you understand the terms, try to replace each one with a word or phrase that has the same meaning.

1. The king established **dominion** over the nation.
2. It is **incumbent** upon the captain to try to save his ship.
3. Having been robbed and injured, we seek **redress.**
4. The leader of the rebellion was able to **usurp** the throne.
5. Some people are open and frank, while others use **guile.**

Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

What is your ultimate LOYALTY?

One of the most important components of the medieval code of chivalry was the requirement that a knight be loyal to his king and country. In *Le Morte d'Arthur,* Sir Launcelot, King Arthur's most exemplary knight, falls in love with the king's wife and faces a crisis of loyalty of epic proportions.

QUICKWRITE Loyalty is still a highly valued human quality, one that sometimes requires personal sacrifice. Make a list of individuals or groups to whom you owe some loyalty. Review your list, then write a paragraph to explain which person or group is the one you would not abandon under any circumstances.

Le Morte d'Arthur

Sir Thomas Malory

Play Audio

BACKGROUND King Arthur's favorite knight, Sir Launcelot, has fallen in love with the king's wife, Gwynevere. The secret love affair is exposed by Sir Modred, Arthur's son by another woman, and Gwynevere is sentenced to burn at the stake. While rescuing the imprisoned Gwynevere, Launcelot slays two knights who, unknown to him at the time, are the brothers of Sir Gawain, a favorite nephew of Arthur's. After a reconciliation, Launcelot returns Gwynevere to Arthur to be reinstated as queen. At the urging of Sir Gawain, who still wants revenge on Launcelot, the king banishes Launcelot to France, where the following excerpt begins.

Analyze Visuals ▶
What details in this image suggest the size and power of the opposing armies?

The Siege of Benwick

When Sir Launcelot had established **dominion** over France, he garrisoned the towns and settled with his army in the fortified city of Benwick, where his father King Ban had held court.

King Arthur, after appointing Sir Modred ruler in his absence, and instructing Queen Gwynevere to obey him, sailed to France with an army of sixty thousand men, and, on the advice of Sir Gawain, started laying waste[1] all before him. Ⓐ

News of the invasion reached Sir Launcelot, and his counselors advised him. Sir Bors[2] spoke first:

"My lord Sir Launcelot, is it wise to allow King Arthur to lay your lands waste when sooner or later he will oblige you to offer him battle?"

dominion (də-mĭn′yən) *n.* rule or power to rule; mastery

Ⓐ **CONFLICT**
Reread lines 1–6 and the background note. How have Launcelot's past actions set the stage for his current conflict with King Arthur?

1. **laying waste:** destroying.
2. **Sir Bors:** Sir Bors de Ganis, Launcelot's cousin and the son of King Bors.

Arthur Uses Excalibur, Arthur Rackham. Illustration from *The Romance of King Arthur.*

Sir Lyonel[3] spoke next: "My lord, I would recommend that we remain within the walls of our city until the invaders are weakened by cold and hunger, and then let us sally forth[4] and destroy them."

Next, King Bagdemagus: "Sir Launcelot, I understand that it is out of courtesy that you permit the king to ravage your lands, but where will this courtesy end? If you remain within the city, soon everything will be destroyed."

Then Sir Galyhud: "Sir, you command knights of royal blood; you cannot expect them to remain meekly within the city walls. I pray you, let us encounter the enemy on the open field, and they will soon repent of their expedition." B

B SUMMARIZE
Summarize in one sentence the advice Launcelot receives from his counselors in lines 9–19.

20 And to this the seven knights of West Britain all muttered their assent. Then Sir Launcelot spoke:

"My lords, I am reluctant to shed Christian blood in a war against my own liege;[5] and yet I do know that these lands have already suffered depredation [6] in the wars between King Claudas and my father and uncle, King Ban and King Bors. Therefore I will next send a messenger to King Arthur and sue[7] for peace, for peace is always preferable to war."

Accordingly a young noblewoman accompanied by a dwarf was sent to King Arthur. They were received by the gentle knight Sir Lucas the Butler.

"My lady, you bring a message from Sir Launcelot?" he asked.

30 "My lord, I do. It is for the king."

"Alas! King Arthur would readily be reconciled to Sir Launcelot, but Sir Gawain forbids it; and it is a shame, because Sir Launcelot is certainly the greatest knight living."

The young noblewoman was brought before the king, and when he had heard Sir Launcelot's entreaties for peace he wept, and would readily have accepted them had not Sir Gawain spoken up:

"My liege, if we retreat now we will become a laughingstock, in this land and in our own. Surely our honor demands that we pursue this war to its proper conclusion."

40 "Sir Gawain, I will do as you advise, although reluctantly, for Sir Launcelot's terms are generous and he is still dear to me. I beg you make a reply to him on my behalf." C

C CONFLICT
What **internal conflict** does Arthur reveal in lines 34–42? How does it motivate his decision?

Sir Gawain addressed the young noblewoman:

"Tell Sir Launcelot that we will not bandy words with him, and it is too late now to sue for peace. Further that I, Sir Gawain, shall not cease to strive against him until one of us is killed."

The young noblewoman was escorted back to Sir Launcelot, and when she had delivered Sir Gawain's message they both wept. Then Sir Bors spoke:

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3. **Sir Lyonel** (lī′ən-əl): another of Launcelot's cousins.
4. **sally forth:** rush out suddenly in an attack.
5. **liege** (lēj): a lord or ruler to whom one owes loyalty and service.
6. **depredation** (dĕp′rĭ-dā′shən) n. destruction caused by robbery or looting
7. **sue:** appeal; beg.

"My lord, we beseech you, do not look so dismayed! You have many trustworthy knights behind you; lead us onto the field and we will put an end to this quarrel."

"My lords, I do not doubt you, but I pray you, be ruled by me: I will not lead you against our liege until we ourselves are endangered; only then can we honorably sally forth and defeat him."

Sir Launcelot's nobles submitted; but the next day it was seen that King Arthur had laid siege to the city of Benwick. Then Sir Gawain rode before the city walls and shouted a challenge:

"My lord Sir Launcelot: have you no knight who will dare to ride forth and break spears with me? It is I, Sir Gawain."

Sir Bors accepted the challenge. He rode out of the castle gate, they encountered, and he was wounded and flung from his horse. His comrades helped him back to the castle, and then Sir Lyonel offered to joust. He too was overthrown and helped back to the castle.

Thereafter, every day for six months Sir Gawain rode before the city and overthrew whoever accepted his challenge. Meanwhile, as a result of skirmishes, numbers on both sides were beginning to dwindle. Then one day Sir Gawain challenged Sir Launcelot:

"My lord Sir Launcelot: traitor to the king and to me, come forth if you dare and meet your mortal foe, instead of lurking like a coward in your castle!"

Sir Launcelot heard the challenge, and one of his kinsmen spoke to him:

"My lord, you must accept the challenge, or be shamed forever."

"Alas, that I should have to fight Sir Gawain!" said Sir Launcelot. "But now I am obliged to."

Sir Launcelot gave orders for his most powerful courser[8] to be harnessed, and when he had armed, rode to the tower and addressed King Arthur:

"My lord King Arthur, it is with a heavy heart that I set forth to do battle with one of your own blood; but now it is **incumbent** upon my honor to do so. For six months I have suffered your majesty to lay my lands waste and to besiege me in my own city. My courtesy is repaid with insults, so deadly and shameful that now I must by force of arms seek **redress.**"

"Have done, Sir Launcelot, and let us to battle!" shouted Sir Gawain.

Sir Launcelot rode from the city at the head of his entire army. King Arthur was astonished at his strength and realized that Sir Launcelot had not been boasting when he claimed to have acted with forbearance[9]**.** "Alas, that I should ever have come to war with him!" he said to himself.

It was agreed that the two combatants should fight to the death, with interference from none. Sir Launcelot and Sir Gawain then drew apart and

Language Coach

Etymology A word's **etymology,** or origin, can help you understand its **connotations.** In line 61, *encountered* means "met in battle." It comes from the Old French *encontre* ("against"). How does the etymology help you understand the more current meaning of *encountered*?

incumbent (ĭn-kŭm′bənt) *adj.* required as a duty or an obligation

redress (rĭ-drĕs′) *n.* repayment for a wrong or an injury

8. **courser:** a horse trained for battle.

9. **forbearance** (fôr-bâr′əns) n. self-control; patient restraint

galloped furiously together, and so great was their strength that their horses crashed to the ground and both riders were overthrown.

90 A terrible sword fight commenced, and each felt the might of the other as fresh wounds were inflicted with every blow. For three hours they fought with scarcely a pause, and the blood seeped out from their armor and trickled to the ground. Sir Launcelot found to his dismay that Sir Gawain, instead of weakening, seemed to increase in strength as they proceeded, and he began to fear that he was battling not with a knight but with a fiend incarnate.[10] He decided to fight defensively and to conserve his strength.

It was a secret known only to King Arthur and to Sir Gawain himself that his strength increased for three hours in the morning, reaching its zenith[11] at noon, and waning again. This was due to an enchantment that had been cast over him 100 by a hermit[12] when he was still a youth. Often in the past, as now, he had taken advantage of this.

Thus when the hour of noon had passed, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain's strength return to normal, and knew that he could defeat him.

"Sir Gawain, I have endured many hard blows from you these last three hours, but now beware, for I see that you have weakened, and it is I who am the stronger."

Thereupon Sir Launcelot redoubled his blows, and with one, catching Sir Gawain sidelong on the helmet, sent him reeling to the ground. Then he courteously stood back. D

110 "Sir Launcelot, I still defy you!" said Sir Gawain from the ground. "Why do you not kill me now? for I warn you that if ever I recover I shall challenge you again."

"Sir Gawain, by the grace of God I shall endure you again," Sir Launcelot replied, and then turned to the king:

"My liege, your expedition can find no honorable conclusion at these walls, so I pray you withdraw and spare your noble knights. Remember me with kindness and be guided, as ever, by the love of God."

"Alas!" said the king, "Sir Launcelot scruples[13] to fight against me or those of my blood, and once more I am beholden to him."

120 Sir Launcelot withdrew to the city and Sir Gawain was taken to his pavilion, where his wounds were dressed. King Arthur was doubly grieved, by his quarrel with Sir Launcelot and by the seriousness of Sir Gawain's wounds.

For three weeks, while Sir Gawain was recovering, the siege was relaxed and both sides skirmished only halfheartedly. But once recovered, Sir Gawain rode up to the castle walls and challenged Sir Launcelot again:

"Sir Launcelot, traitor! Come forth, it is Sir Gawain who challenges you."

D SUMMARIZE
Describe the battle between Launcelot and Gawain. What tactic does Launcelot use to overcome Gawain's secret advantage?

10. **fiend incarnate:** devil in human form.
11. **zenith:** highest point; peak.
12. **hermit:** a person living in solitude for religious reasons.
13. **scruples:** hesitates for reasons of principle.

"Sir Gawain, why these insults? I have the measure of your strength and you can do me but little harm."

"Come forth, traitor, and this time I shall make good my revenge!" Sir Gawain shouted.

"Sir Gawain, I have once spared your life; should you not beware of meddling with me again?"

Sir Launcelot armed and rode out to meet him. They jousted and Sir Gawain broke his spear and was flung from his horse. He leaped up immediately, and putting his shield before him, called on Sir Launcelot to fight on foot.

"The issue[14] of a mare has failed me; but I am the issue of a king and a queen and I shall not fail!" he exclaimed.

As before, Sir Launcelot felt Sir Gawain's strength increase until noon, during which period he defended himself, and then weaken again.

"Sir Gawain, you are a proved knight, and with the increase of your strength until noon you must have overcome many of your opponents, but now your strength has gone, and once more you are at my mercy."

Sir Launcelot struck out lustily and by chance reopened the wound he had made before. Sir Gawain fell to the ground in a faint, but when he came to he said weakly:

"Sir Launcelot, I still defy you. Make an end of me, or I shall fight you again!"

"Sir Gawain, while you stand on your two feet I will not gainsay[15] you; but I will never strike a knight who has fallen. God defend me from such dishonor!" E

Sir Launcelot walked away and Sir Gawain continued to call after him: "Traitor! Until one of us is dead I shall never give in!"

For a month Sir Gawain lay recovering from his wounds, and the siege remained; but then, as Sir Gawain was preparing to fight Sir Launcelot once more, King Arthur received news which caused him to strike camp and lead his army on a forced march to the coast, and thence to embark for Britain.

E MEDIEVAL ROMANCE
In what ways does Launcelot exemplify the ideals of chivalry in lines 138–148?

The Day of Destiny

During the absence of King Arthur from Britain, Sir Modred, already vested with sovereign powers,[16] had decided to **usurp** the throne. Accordingly, he had false letters written—announcing the death of King Arthur in battle—and delivered to himself. Then, calling a parliament, he ordered the letters to be read and persuaded the nobility to elect him king. The coronation took place at Canterbury and was celebrated with a fifteen-day feast.

usurp (yōō-sûrp′) *v.* to seize unlawfully by force

Sir Modred then settled in Camelot and made overtures to Queen Gwynevere to marry him. The queen seemingly acquiesced, but as soon as she had won his confidence, begged leave to make a journey to London in order to prepare her

14. **issue:** offspring.
15. **gainsay:** deny.
16. **vested with sovereign powers:** given the authority of a king.

trousseau.[17] Sir Modred consented, and the queen rode straight to the Tower which, with the aid of her loyal nobles, she manned and provisioned for her defense. F

Sir Modred, outraged, at once marched against her, and laid siege to the Tower, but despite his large army, siege engines, and guns, was unable to effect a breach. He then tried to entice the queen from the Tower, first by **guile** and then by threats, but she would listen to neither. Finally the Archbishop of Canterbury came forward to protest:

"Sir Modred, do you not fear God's displeasure? First you have falsely made yourself king; now you, who were begotten by King Arthur on his aunt,[18] try to marry your father's wife! If you do not revoke your evil deeds I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle."[19]

"Fie on you! Do your worst!" Sir Modred replied.

"Sir Modred, I warn you take heed! or the wrath of the Lord will descend upon you."

"Away, false priest, or I shall behead you!" G

The Archbishop withdrew, and after excommunicating Sir Modred, abandoned his office and fled to Glastonbury. There he took up his abode as a simple hermit, and by fasting and prayer sought divine intercession[20] in the troubled affairs of his country.

Sir Modred tried to assassinate the Archbishop, but was too late. He continued to assail the queen with entreaties and threats, both of which failed, and then the news reached him that King Arthur was returning with his army from France in order to seek revenge.

Sir Modred now appealed to the barony to support him, and it has to be told that they came forward in large numbers to do so. Why? it will be asked. Was not King Arthur, the noblest sovereign Christendom had seen, now leading his armies in a righteous cause? The answer lies in the people of Britain, who, then as now, were fickle. Those who so readily transferred their allegiance to Sir Modred did so with the excuse that whereas King Arthur's reign had led them into war and strife, Sir Modred promised them peace and festivity. H

Hence it was with an army of a hundred thousand that Sir Modred marched to Dover to battle against his own father, and to withhold from him his rightful crown.

As King Arthur with his fleet drew into the harbor, Sir Modred and his army launched forth in every available craft, and a bloody battle ensued in the ships and on the beach. If King Arthur's army were the smaller, their courage was the higher, confident as they were of the righteousness of their cause. Without stint[21] they battled through the burning ships, the screaming wounded, and the corpses

F SUMMARIZE
Reread lines 155–165 and summarize the events that open this section of the selection.

guile (gīl) *n.* clever trickery; deceit

G CONFLICT
Describe the **external conflict** in lines 166–178. What motivates Mordred's behavior?

Analyze Visuals ▶
William Morris was a designer and artist who was heavily influenced by medieval arts and crafts. What details in this image suggest Gwynevere's emotional state?

H SUMMARIZE
Summarize lines 187–193. Why do many people in Britain support Modred?

17. **trousseau** (tro̅o̅′so̅): clothes and linens that a bride brings to her marriage.
18. **begotten . . . aunt:** Modred is the son of Arthur and Queen Margawse, the sister of Arthur's mother, Queen Igraine.
19. **I shall curse you with bell, book, and candle:** The archbishop is threatening to excommunicate Modred—that is, to deny him participation in the rites of the church. In the medieval ritual of excommunication, a bell was rung, a book was shut, and a candle was extinguished.
20. **divine intercession:** assistance from God.
21. **stint:** holding back.

Guinevere (1858), William Morris. Watercolor and drawing on paper, 1,264 mm × 552 mm. Tate Gallery, London.

floating on the bloodstained waters. Once ashore they put Sir Modred's entire army to flight.

The battle over, King Arthur began a search for his casualties, and on peering into one of the ships found Sir Gawain, mortally wounded. Sir Gawain fainted when King Arthur lifted him in his arms; and when he came to, the king spoke:

"Alas! dear nephew, that you lie here thus, mortally wounded! What joy is now left to me on this earth? You must know it was you and Sir Launcelot I loved above all others, and it seems that I have lost you both."

210 "My good uncle, it was my pride and my stubbornness that brought all this about, for had I not urged you to war with Sir Launcelot your subjects would not now be in revolt. Alas, that Sir Launcelot is not here, for he would soon drive them out! And it is at Sir Launcelot's hands that I suffer my own death: the wound which he dealt me has reopened. I would not wish it otherwise, because is he not the greatest and gentlest of knights?

"I know that by noon I shall be dead, and I repent bitterly that I may not be reconciled to Sir Launcelot; therefore I pray you, good uncle, give me pen, paper, and ink so that I may write to him."

A priest was summoned and Sir Gawain confessed; then a clerk brought ink,
220 pen, and paper, and Sir Gawain wrote to Sir Launcelot as follows:

"Sir Launcelot, flower of the knighthood: I, Sir Gawain, son of King Lot of Orkney and of King Arthur's sister, send you my greetings!

"I am about to die; the cause of my death is the wound I received from you outside the city of Benwick; and I would make it known that my death was of my own seeking, that I was moved by the spirit of revenge and spite to provoke you to battle.

"Therefore, Sir Launcelot, I beseech you to visit my tomb and offer what prayers you will on my behalf; and for myself, I am content to die at the hands of the noblest knight living.

230 "One more request: that you hasten with your armies across the sea and give succor[22] to our noble king. Sir Modred, his bastard son, has usurped the throne and now holds against him with an army of a hundred thousand. He would have won the queen, too, but she fled to the Tower of London and there charged her loyal supporters with her defense.

"Today is the tenth of May, and at noon I shall give up the ghost; this letter is written partly with my blood. This morning we fought our way ashore, against the armies of Sir Modred, and that is how my wound came to be reopened. We won the day, but my lord King Arthur needs you, and I too, that on my tomb you may bestow your blessing." I

240 Sir Gawain fainted when he had finished, and the king wept. When he came to he was given extreme unction,[23] and died, as he had anticipated, at the hour of noon. The king buried him in the chapel at Dover Castle, and there many came to see him, and all noticed the wound on his head which he had received from Sir Launcelot.

I **SUMMARIZE**
Reread lines 221–239. Briefly summarize Gawain's letter to Sir Launcelot.

22. **succor** (sŭk′ər) n. aid in a time of need; relief

23. **extreme unction:** a ritual in which a priest anoints and prays for a dying person.

Then the news reached Arthur that Sir Modred offered him battle on the field at Baron Down. Arthur hastened there with his army, they fought, and Sir Modred fled once more, this time to Canterbury.

When King Arthur had begun the search for his wounded and dead, many volunteers from all parts of the country came to fight under his flag, convinced now of the rightness of his cause. Arthur marched westward, and Sir Modred once more offered him battle. It was assigned for the Monday following Trinity Sunday, on Salisbury Down.

Sir Modred levied fresh troops from East Anglia and the places about London, and fresh volunteers came forward to help Arthur. Then, on the night of Trinity Sunday, Arthur was vouchsafed[24] a strange dream:

He was appareled in gold cloth and seated in a chair which stood on a pivoted scaffold. Below him, many fathoms deep, was a dark well, and in the water swam serpents, dragons, and wild beasts. Suddenly the scaffold tilted and Arthur was flung into the water, where all the creatures struggled toward him and began tearing him limb from limb.

Arthur cried out in his sleep and his squires hastened to waken him. Later, as he lay between waking and sleeping, he thought he saw Sir Gawain, and with him a host of beautiful noblewomen. Arthur spoke:

"My sister's son! I thought you had died; but now I see you live, and I thank the lord Jesu! I pray you, tell me, who are these ladies?"

"My lord, these are the ladies I championed[25] in righteous quarrels when I was on earth. Our lord God has vouchsafed that we visit you and plead with you not to give battle to Sir Modred tomorrow, for if you do, not only will you yourself be killed, but all your noble followers too. We beg you to be warned, and to make a treaty with Sir Modred, calling a truce for a month, and granting him whatever terms he may demand. In a month Sir Launcelot will be here, and he will defeat Sir Modred."

Thereupon Sir Gawain and the ladies vanished, and King Arthur once more summoned his squires and his counselors and told them his vision. Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere were commissioned to make a treaty with Sir Modred. They were to be accompanied by two bishops and to grant, within reason, whatever terms he demanded.

The ambassadors found Sir Modred in command of an army of a hundred thousand and unwilling to listen to overtures of peace. However, the ambassadors eventually prevailed on him, and in return for the truce granted him suzerainty[26] of Cornwall and Kent, and succession to the British throne when King Arthur died. The treaty was to be signed by King Arthur and Sir Modred the next day. They were to meet between the two armies, and each was to be accompanied by no more than fourteen knights.

Both King Arthur and Sir Modred suspected the other of treachery, and gave orders for their armies to attack at the sight of a naked sword. When they met at the appointed place the treaty was signed and both drank a glass of wine.

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes Two examples of **suffixes** (affixes at the end of a word) are *–ness* ("state of") and *–eous* ("full of"). Each suffix appears on this page, in lines 250 and 266. What is the base word in both cases? What does each word mean?

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24. **vouchsafed:** granted.
25. **championed:** defended or fought for.
26. **suzerainty** (sōō′zər-ən-tē): the position of feudal lord.

Then, by chance, one of the soldiers was bitten in the foot by an adder[27] which had lain concealed in the brush. The soldier unthinkingly drew his sword to kill it, and at once, as the sword flashed in the light, the alarums[28] were given, trumpets sounded, and both armies galloped into the attack. J

J SUMMARIZE
Summarize lines 277–290. What leads to the breaking of the treaty between King Arthur and Modred?

"Alas for this fateful day!" exclaimed King Arthur, as both he and Sir Modred hastily mounted and galloped back to their armies. There followed one of those rare and heartless battles in which both armies fought until they were destroyed. King Arthur, with his customary valor, led squadron after squadron of cavalry into the attack, and Sir Modred encountered him unflinchingly. As the number of dead and wounded mounted on both sides, the active combatants continued dauntless until nightfall, when four men alone survived.

King Arthur wept with dismay to see his beloved followers fallen; then, struggling toward him, unhorsed and badly wounded, he saw Sir Lucas the Butler and his brother, Sir Bedivere.[29]

"Alas!" said the king, "that the day should come when I see all my noble knights destroyed! I would prefer that I myself had fallen. But what has become of the traitor Sir Modred, whose evil ambition was responsible for this carnage?"

Looking about him King Arthur then noticed Sir Modred leaning with his sword on a heap of the dead.

"Sir Lucas, I pray you give me my spear, for I have seen Sir Modred."

"Sire, I entreat you, remember your vision—how Sir Gawain appeared with a heaven-sent message to dissuade you from fighting Sir Modred. Allow this fateful day to pass; it is ours, for we three hold the field, while the enemy is broken."

"My lords, I care nothing for my life now! And while Sir Modred is at large I must kill him: there may not be another chance." K

K CONFLICT
What **motivates** Arthur's decision to fight Modred despite Sir Bedivere's advice?

"God speed you, then!" said Sir Bedivere.

When Sir Modred saw King Arthur advance with his spear, he rushed to meet him with drawn sword. Arthur caught Sir Modred below the shield and drove his spear through his body; Sir Modred, knowing that the wound was mortal, thrust himself up to the handle of the spear, and then, brandishing his sword in both hands, struck Arthur on the side of the helmet, cutting through it and into the skull beneath; then he crashed to the ground, gruesome and dead.

King Arthur fainted many times as Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere struggled with him to a small chapel nearby, where they managed to ease his wounds a little. When Arthur came to, he thought he heard cries coming from the battlefield.

"Sir Lucas, I pray you, find out who cries on the battlefield," he said.

Wounded as he was, Sir Lucas hobbled painfully to the field, and there in the moonlight saw the camp followers stealing gold and jewels from the dead, and murdering the wounded. He returned to the king and reported to him what he had seen, and then added:

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27. **adder:** a poisonous snake.
28. **alarums:** calls to arms.
29. **Sir Lucas . . . Bedivere:** brothers who are members of King Arthur's court.

Arthur Versus Modred, Arthur Rakham. Illustration from *The Romance of King Arthur.*

"My lord, it surely would be better to move you to the nearest town?"

"My wounds forbid it. But alas for the good Sir Launcelot! How sadly I have missed him today! And now I must die—as Sir Gawain warned me I would—
330 repenting our quarrel with my last breath."

Sir Lucas and Sir Bedivere made one further attempt to lift the king. He fainted as they did so. Then Sir Lucas fainted as part of his intestines broke through a wound in the stomach. When the king came to, he saw Sir Lucas lying dead with foam at his mouth.

"Sweet Jesu, give him succor!" he said. "This noble knight has died trying to save my life—alas that this was so!"

▲ Analyze Visuals
What elements of this image help convey the ferocity of the battle between Arthur and Modred?

Sir Bedivere wept for his brother.

"Sir Bedivere, weep no more," said King Arthur, "for you can save neither your brother nor me; and I would ask you to take my sword Excalibur[30] to the shore of the lake and throw it in the water. Then return to me and tell me what you have seen."

"My lord, as you command, it shall be done."

Sir Bedivere took the sword, but when he came to the water's edge, it appeared so beautiful that he could not bring himself to throw it in, so instead he hid it by a tree, and then returned to the king.

"Sir Bedivere, what did you see?"

"My lord, I saw nothing but the wind upon the waves."

"Then you did not obey me; I pray you, go swiftly again, and this time fulfill my command."

Sir Bedivere went and returned again, but this time too he had failed to fulfill the king's command.

"Sir Bedivere, what did you see?"

"My lord, nothing but the lapping of the waves."

"Sir Bedivere, twice you have betrayed me! And for the sake only of my sword: it is unworthy of you! Now I pray you, do as I command, for I have not long to live."

This time Sir Bedivere wrapped the girdle around the sheath and hurled it as far as he could into the water. A hand appeared from below the surface, took the sword, waved it thrice, and disappeared again. Sir Bedivere returned to the king and told him what he had seen. L

"Sir Bedivere, I pray you now help me hence, or I fear it will be too late."

Sir Bedivere carried the king to the water's edge, and there found a barge in which sat many beautiful ladies with their queen. All were wearing black hoods, and when they saw the king, they raised their voices in a piteous lament.

"I pray you, set me in the barge," said the king.

Sir Bedivere did so, and one of the ladies laid the king's head in her lap; then the queen spoke to him:

"My dear brother, you have stayed too long: I fear that the wound on your head is already cold."

Thereupon they rowed away from the land and Sir Bedivere wept to see them go.

"My lord King Arthur, you have deserted me! I am alone now, and among enemies."

"Sir Bedivere, take what comfort you may, for my time is passed, and now I must be taken to Avalon[31] for my wound to be healed. If you hear of me no more, I beg you pray for my soul."

The barge slowly crossed the water and out of sight while the ladies wept. Sir Bedivere walked alone into the forest and there remained for the night.

In the morning he saw beyond the trees of a copse[32] a small hermitage. He entered and found a hermit kneeling down by a fresh tomb. The hermit was

L CONFLICT
What **internal conflict** does Sir Bedivere experience in lines 343–360? How does he ultimately resolve it?

30. **Excalibur** (ĕk-skăl′ə-bər): Arthur's remarkable sword, which originally came from the Lady of the Lake.
31. **Avalon:** an island paradise of Celtic legend, where heroes are taken after death.
32. **copse** (kŏps): a grove of small trees.

weeping as he prayed, and then Sir Bedivere recognized him as the Archbishop of Canterbury, who had been banished by Sir Modred.

"Father, I pray you, tell me, whose tomb is this?"

"My son, I do not know. At midnight the body was brought here by a company of ladies. We buried it, they lit a hundred candles for the service, and rewarded me with a thousand bezants."[33]

"Father, King Arthur lies buried in this tomb."

Sir Bedivere fainted when he had spoken, and when he came to he begged the Archbishop to allow him to remain at the hermitage and end his days in fasting and prayer.

"Father, I wish only to be near to my true liege."

"My son, you are welcome; and do I not recognize you as Sir Bedivere the Bold, brother to Sir Lucas the Butler?"

Thus the Archbishop and Sir Bedivere remained at the hermitage, wearing the habits of hermits and devoting themselves to the tomb with fasting and prayers of contrition.[34]

Such was the death of King Arthur as written down by Sir Bedivere. By some it is told that there were three queens on the barge: Queen Morgan le Fay, the Queen of North Galys, and the Queen of the Waste Lands; and others include the name of Nyneve, the Lady of the Lake who had served King Arthur well in the past, and had married the good knight Sir Pelleas.

In many parts of Britain it is believed that King Arthur did not die and that he will return to us and win fresh glory and the Holy Cross of our Lord Jesu Christ; but for myself I do not believe this, and would leave him buried peacefully in his tomb at Glastonbury, where the Archbishop of Canterbury and Sir Bedivere humbled themselves, and with prayers and fasting honored his memory. And inscribed on his tomb, men say, is this legend:

HIC IACET ARTHURUS,
REX QUONDAM REXQUE FUTURUS.[35]

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33. **bezants** (bĕz′ənts): gold coins.

34. **contrition** (kən-trĭsh′ən): sincere regret for wrongdoing.

35. ***Hic iacet Arthurus, rex quondam rexque futurus*** (hĭk yä′kĕt är-tōō′rŏŏs rāks kwôn′däm rāk′skwĕ fŏŏ-tōō′rŏŏs) *Latin:* Here lies Arthur, the once and future king.

Reading for Information

William Caxton, the first English printer, had a significant impact on the literature of his day. In his preface to the first edition of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1485), Caxton describes his anticipated audience and reveals his purpose in publishing the work.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION OF LE MORTE D'ARTHUR

WILLAM CAXTON

I have, after the simple cunning that God hath sent to me, under the favor and correction of all noble lords and gentlemen, enprised to enprint a book of the noble histories of the said King Arthur and of certain of his knights, after a copy unto me delivered, which copy Sir Thomas Malory did take out of certain books of French and reduced it into English.

And I, according to my copy, have done set it in enprint to the intent that noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentle and virtuous deeds that some knights used in tho[se] days, by which they came to honor, and how they that were vicious were punished and oft put to shame and rebuke; humbly beseeching all noble lords and ladies with all other estates, of what estate or degree they been of, that shall see and read in this said book and work, that they take the good and honest acts in their remembrance, and to follow the same; wherein they shall find many joyous and pleasant histories and noble and renowned acts of humanity, gentleness, and chivalries. For herein may be seen noble chivalry, courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love, friendship, cowardice, murder, hate, virtue and sin. Do after the good and leave the evil, and it shall bring you to good fame.

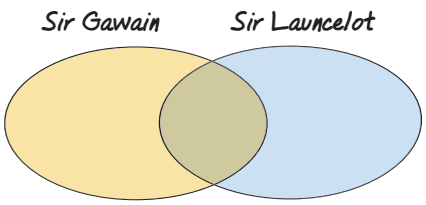
Comprehension

1. **Recall** What prevents Arthur from accepting Launcelot's peace offers?
2. **Recall** Why does Arthur call off the siege of Benwick and return to Britain?
3. **Clarify** What happens when Arthur fights Modred?

READING 5A Analyze how complex plot structures and devices function and advance the action in a work of fiction. **5B** Analyze the moral dilemmas and quandaries presented in works of fiction as revealed by the underlying motivations and behaviors of the characters. **RC-12(A)** Reflect on understanding to monitor comprehension.

Literary Analysis

4. **Summarize** Review the chart you created as you read. Then summarize the ways in which Gawain's hostility toward Launcelot contributes to Arthur's downfall.
5. **Analyze Conflict** To what extent are Arthur's **internal** and **external conflicts** with Launcelot similar to his conflicts with Modred? In what ways are they different?
6. **Examine Medieval Romance** Review the Literary Analysis instruction on page 229. *Le Morte d'Arthur* is one of the most influential medieval romances. What characteristics of medieval romance appear in this work?
7. **Compare and Contrast Characters** Make a Venn diagram like the one shown to help you compare and contrast Gawain's and Launcelot's character traits. Which knight's failure to exemplify the ideals of chivalry is greater? Support your answer with evidence from the text.



8. **Evaluate Texts** In his preface on page 262, William Caxton explains that he has published *Le Morte d'Arthur* to provide a model for good behavior. How well does this selection from Malory's romance fulfill Caxton's purpose?

Literary Criticism

9. **Critical Interpretations** One critic has suggested that when "confronted by a need to make a decision in a moment of crisis," Arthur "invariably chooses the wrong course of action" because he is unable or unwilling to see the situation as it really is. Think about the various conflicts, both internal and external, that Arthur struggles with in the selection, and consider the important decisions he makes. Do you agree or disagree that he "invariably chooses the wrong course of action"? Give examples from the text to support your opinion.

What is your ultimate LOYALTY?

Should Arthur have forgiven Launcelot for his disloyalty? Why or why not? Can loyalty, once lost, ever be restored? Explain your response.

Vocabulary in Context

▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Choose the vocabulary word that best completes each sentence. Use the context clues in the sentence to help you decide.

1. It is _____ on you to work hard if you want to succeed.
2. The queen had _____ over six new colonies.
3. The king's nephew tried to _____ power for himself.
4. He demanded that someone offer _____ for his grievances.
5. Clever but dishonest, she often used _____ to trick others.

WORD LIST

dominion
guile
incumbent
redress
usurp

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN SPEAKING

• concept • culture • parallel • section • structure

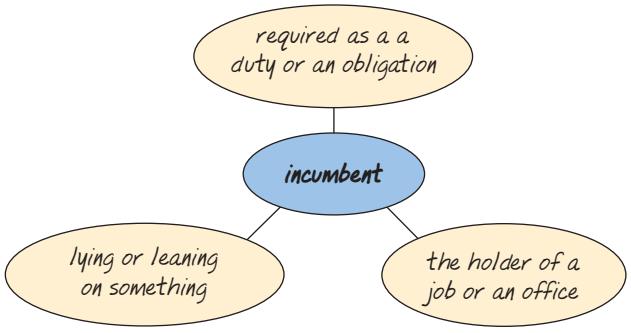
How do the internal conflicts of Gawain and Arthur **parallel** each other? Which of them changes most dramatically in response to his internal conflict and why? Discuss these questions with a partner, using at least two additional Academic Vocabulary words in your discussion.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: MULTIPLE-MEANING WORDS

Incumbent has more than one possible meaning. To determine which meaning applies in a particular instance, consider the context, or surroundings. For instance, in the sentence "It is incumbent on my honor to do so," the context suggests that *incumbent* means "required as a duty or obligation."

READING 1B Analyze textual context (in larger sections of text) to draw conclusions about the nuance in word meanings.

PRACTICE In the passage below, use context to determine the likely meaning of each boldfaced word. Then explain which context clues in the paragraph helped you determine the correct meaning of the word.



The legend of Arthur has captured the imagination of writers since at least 1136, with the appearance of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*. From this text, later writers would **adopt** some of the essential **elements** of Arthurian lore: Merlin, Excalibur, and Arthur's final **repose** at Avalon. A few decades later, the French poet Chrétien de Troyes introduced the character of Launcelot to the growing **body** of Arthurian literature. *Le Morte d'Arthur* (1469), one of the earliest books printed in English, would eventually become the **ultimate** source for writers of Arthurian literature.

Interactive Vocabulary THINK central
Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML12-264

The Legacy of Medieval Romance

Firmly embedded in the tradition of Arthurian romance is the code of chivalry prescribed for all knights. Along with the traits of bravery, courtesy, and personal honor, this code of conduct required that men behave gallantly toward women. It is this treatment of women that, even today, is most often associated with mention of the chivalric code.

Writing to Persuade

Re-examine the selections on pages 230–261 for examples of chivalric behavior, but look for more than just gallantry toward women. Find examples of knights displaying the other ideals of chivalry you've learned about: loyalty, modesty, faith, honor, bravery, and courtesy. Use these examples to write an essay persuading a contemporary audience—your peers, parents, and teachers—that chivalry is or is not an outmoded virtue in the 21st century.

Consider

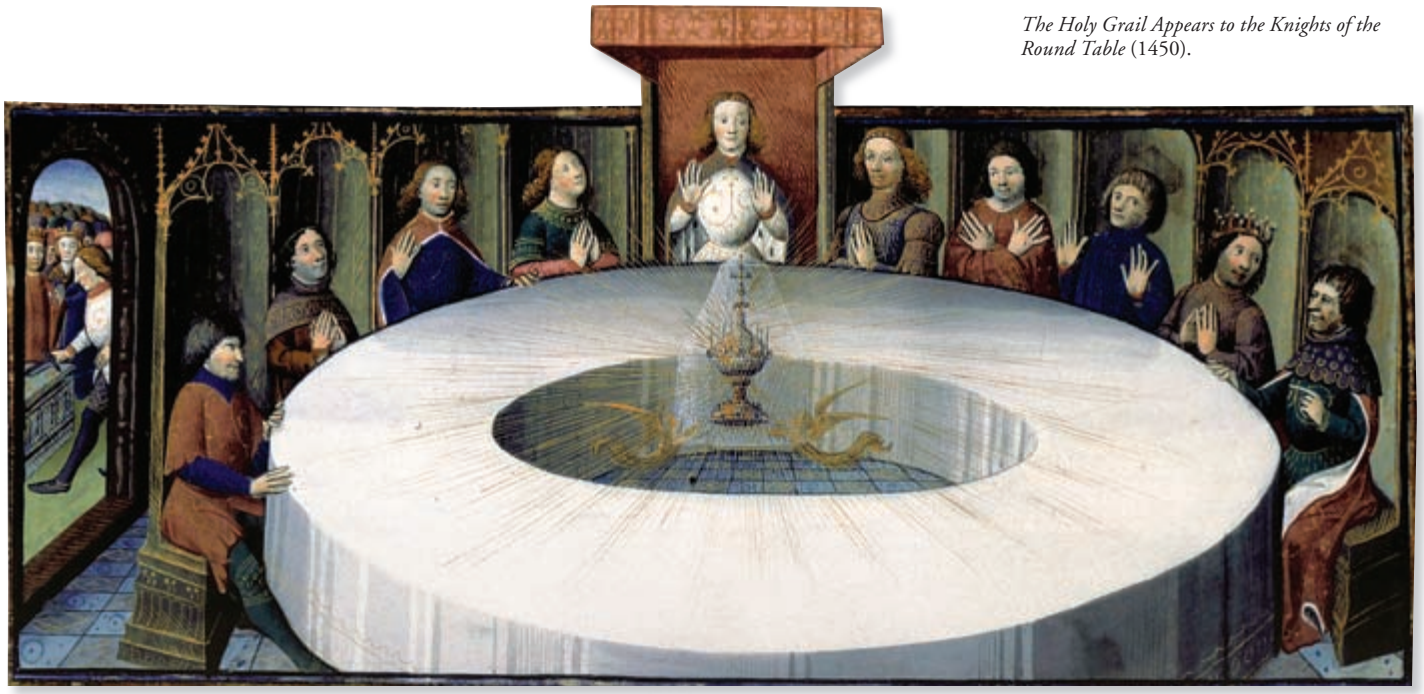
- which details from the selections will provide you with the best support for your argument
- what language will best persuade your audience
- how to organize your writing to prove your argument clearly and logically

Extension

LISTENING & SPEAKING

Divide into teams to debate this statement: *Chivalry is dead.* You may use your persuasive essays as a jumping-off point, but with your team members find additional examples from today's world to prove that chivalry is alive and well or has withered and died in the face of our modern sensibilities and values.

WRITING 16 Write persuasive texts. **LISTENING AND SPEAKING 26** Participate productively in teams, offering ideas or judgments that are purposeful in moving the team towards goals.



The Holy Grail Appears to the Knights of the Round Table (1450).