



**READING 12A** Evaluate how messages presented in media reflect social and cultural views in ways different from traditional texts. **12B** Evaluate the interactions of different techniques used in multilayered media. **12C** Evaluate how one issue or event is represented across various media to understand the notions of bias, audience, and purpose. **12D** Evaluate changes in formality and tone across various media for different audiences and purposes.

# Legends in Film: King Arthur

Film Clips on Media  **Smart** DVD-ROM

## *How do movies portray* **LEGENDS?**

A **legend** is an unverified story passed down from earlier times. Legends often change over time as storytellers embellish some details and diminish others to appeal to different audiences or achieve different purposes. In addition, each society may impose its own values on a legendary figure. In examining two very different film versions of King Arthur, one of the Western world's oldest legends, you'll see how the era in which the films were created determined how the legendary king was portrayed.

## **Background**

**A Tale of Two Arthurs** Some historians believe the Arthurian legend is based on the exploits of a real 5th- or 6th-century British military leader who defended Britain against invading Anglo-Saxons. In the 15th century, Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* combined various versions of the legend to include supernatural elements, love stories, and detailed adventures of the Knights of the Round Table. Malory's interpretation of the Arthurian legend is the most widely read English language version in history.

Nearly 500 years after Malory's version, in December of 1960, Alan Jay Lerner

and Frederick Loewe debuted *Camelot*, their musical retelling of the Arthurian legend. The tenor of the time was upbeat: the United States was a world superpower and had experienced eight years of unprecedented economic growth. Lerner and Loewe's Arthur reflects that time. Eschewing the brutal battle tales and death-defying adventures of Arthur and his brave knights, the musical focuses on the love triangle between Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot. The first clip you'll view is from the film version of *Camelot*, which was released in 1967.

The second clip you'll view is from *King Arthur*, the 2004 film version of the Arthurian legend. It reflects its time as well. Filmed in the aftermath of the 2001 terrorist attacks on the United States and during the U.S. war in Iraq, *King Arthur* reflects the earliest known sources of Arthur's history, presenting him as a valiant but brutal defender of the failing Roman Empire and the British people under its rule. You'll view a clip from each film. As you analyze these very different interpretations of the King Arthur legend, consider the time in which each film was made and how it may have impacted the filmmakers' choices.

# Media Literacy: Legends Over Time

Filmmakers adapting an old tale may go beyond a simple retelling. They can weave their own interpretations and beliefs into a film through **mise en scène**, a term that refers to the staging of a scene’s action and the way in which it is photographed. The elements of mise en scène include **setting, props, lighting, composition, facial expressions, body language, costumes, and makeup**. Filmmakers carefully choose and combine each detail to form their overall vision. As you watch a legend adapted to film, think about how the filmmakers used mise en scène to reflect the issues of their time.

from Camelot



from King Arthur



ANALYZING MISE EN SCÈNE	OPTIMISTIC TIMES	PESSIMISTIC TIMES
Notice how the <b>setting</b> and <b>props</b> establish the world of the film.	An upbeat time may be reflected in lavish studio sets.	Less innocent times call for films shot on grim, realistic locations.
<b>Lighting</b> helps create mood and guide the audience’s attention.	To reflect a positive time, soft lighting may bathe a scene in a tranquil glow.	The shadows and glares of harder, direct lighting can create a harsh mood of bleak reality.
Notice the <b>composition</b> —camera angles and movement, and the placement of characters and objects within the frame.	Characters moving closer together within the frame can convey a growing feeling of good will.	Choppy cuts and distance between two characters in an argument can imply conflict and create a disjointed feeling.
Watch the actors’ <b>facial expressions</b> and <b>body language</b> .	In an era of idealism, an actor may portray a legendary hero as friendly and unguarded, even playful.	In more cynical times, a hero might be more closed-off, displaying the tense posture and set jaw of grim determination.
Consider the actors’ <b>costumes</b> and <b>makeup</b> .	Idealized characters of traditional legends may display a surprising ability to remain clean and neat.	On the other hand, heroes in cynical times may be dirty and rumpled under the best of circumstances.



## Media Smart DVD-ROM

- **Film 1:** *Camelot*
- **Director:** Joshua Logan
- **Genre:** Musical
- **Running Time:** 2 minutes
- **Film 2:** *King Arthur*
- **Director:** Antoine Fuqua
- **Genre:** Action
- **Running Time:** 2 minutes



## Viewing Guide for King Arthur in Film

To critically analyze these clips, you may need to view them more than once. Both scenes depict Arthur and Guinevere's first meeting. Notice how the directors stage the scenes and how the actors portray their characters. Look for ways you think the *Camelot* clip might reflect the hopeful idealism of the 1960s and how the *King Arthur* clip might reflect a post-9/11 United States at war in 2004. Consider the following questions to help you examine the clips.

### NOW VIEW

#### FIRST VIEWING: Comprehension

1. **Recall** In *Camelot*, what does Guinevere ask Arthur to do for her before she learns his identity?
2. **Recall** In *King Arthur*, how does Guinevere describe the impression she has of Arthur based on his reputation?

#### CLOSE VIEWING: Media Literacy

3. **Compare Performances** Guinevere is prominent in both of these clips. Compare the two actresses' portrayals of the queen-to-be. Describe the portrayals and cite details that create your impression of each. Consider
  - facial expressions
  - body language
  - costumes and makeup
4. **Make Judgments** Consider your own perceptions of how a king should act—especially a legendary king like Arthur. Of the two very different portrayals in these clips, which Arthur seems more like a truly legendary king? Cite examples from the clips to support your answer.
5. **Analyze Film Technique** Think about each element of *mise en scène* in the scenes you viewed. For each clip, describe the decisions the director made and the effect they had on the look and mood of the scene.



**WRITING 15D** Produce a multimedia presentation.

## Write or Discuss

**Analyze Historical Context** Think about the eras in which these films were released. The musical that the film *Camelot* was based on came out in 1960, a time when many Americans were optimistic about the future. *King Arthur* was released in 2004, three years after the United States had been attacked by terrorists and during the U.S. war in Iraq. Write a paragraph describing whether you think these films reflect their times. Cite evidence from the clips to explain your answer. Consider

- the look of the films
- the way the characters are portrayed
- your knowledge of the eras in which the movies were released
- how the audiences of the day might have reacted to or interpreted the films

## Create a Film Treatment

**Create a Film Treatment** A film treatment is a brief written description of a proposed film. It covers the basic plot lines and conflicts, the characters, and even location ideas. The purpose of a treatment is twofold: to interest financial backers, directors, and actors, and to provide those same people with a fully conceived and visualized sense of what the movie will be.

Choose a famous myth or legend on which to base a movie treatment. What message do you want to convey with your interpretation? What might the story offer today's society? How do you want audiences to perceive this legend? Your treatment should be as detailed as possible about the story you're going to tell, as well as how you're going to tell it.

**HERE'S HOW** Keep the following in mind as you write your treatment:

- Include details of the major plot lines.
- Describe the events in a detailed manner so readers can visualize them.
- Include information on costuming, setting, lighting, and composition.
- Include some representative dialogue from a key moment in the film.

## Further Exploration

**Many More Arthurs** There have been many different film adaptations of the Arthurian legend, some that treat the legend respectfully and others that poke fun at the ancient story. While many movies concentrate on the romantic entanglements between King Arthur, Guinevere, and Sir Lancelot, others highlight the adventures of the Knights of the Round Table. Research some of the adaptations that have been filmed over the years, and choose a few that were made at different time periods. Watch them in a small group. Analyze the films to see how Arthur and the other main characters are presented. Are they heroic? comical? romantic? tragic? Present your findings to the class.

**Media Tools**

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