

The Sword in the Stone

Many centuries ago, Britain was ruled by a great and successful king called Uther. However, while his people were happy and prosperous, and had everything they needed, the king was deeply unhappy because he lacked the one thing he needed most — a family. Uther desperately wanted a wife to love and a child to inherit his throne after he was gone.

Uther had his heart set on marrying Ygraine, a beautiful noblewoman. However, the king knew it would be difficult to become close to her, so he asked the wizard Merlin for help. Merlin agreed to assist Uther, but at a great cost: any children the couple had together would be passed into Merlin's care. King Uther wasn't happy with the arrangement but he reluctantly agreed.

With Merlin's help, Uther and Ygraine were soon married. The couple were so happy together that Uther hardly gave his promise to Merlin a moment's thought. Even when he learned that Ygraine was pregnant, Uther simply thought that the child would make them happier still.

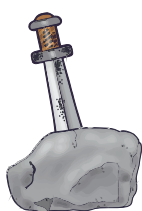
Merlin, however, had not forgotten the agreement. A few days after Ygraine gave birth to a baby boy, he came to Uther's castle and carried the child away. Merlin took the boy, who was named Arthur, to the castle of Sir Ector, where he would be raised without anyone knowing his true royal identity.

King Uther was so distraught at the loss of his son that he fell gravely ill, and within a few months he passed away. Without a king to rule Britain, the kingdom rapidly began to fall apart, with different groups fighting bitterly to seize control. In desperation, the noble families approached Merlin to ask how they could find the rightful king of Britain. Merlin's solution was to place a stone in the centre of London with a heavy sword deeply embedded in it. An inscription along the sword's blade read "Whoso pulleth out this sword of the stone is rightwise king born of all England".

Word quickly spread that whoever managed pull the sword from the stone would be crowned the rightful king of Britain, and nobles from across the land eagerly travelled to London to attempt the task. Despite their best efforts, even the strongest of them failed, and after a while the buzz around the sword died down.

The years passed, and Arthur remained at Sir Ector's castle, his true identity still a closely-guarded secret. As Arthur got older, Merlin mentored him in a wide range of subjects, teaching him the value of knowledge, wisdom and kindness. Increasingly, Merlin saw the boy's potential to be a great ruler.

One day, when Arthur was 15, Sir Ector decided to take his own son, Kay, to attempt to retrieve the sword from the stone. Kay was older than Arthur, and much stronger. A small crowd gathered to watch him tackle the sword, but Kay was unable to budge it even one bit. The crowd was about to leave when Arthur stepped forward and placed his hand on the hilt of the sword. He was a scrawny boy, probably weighing less than the sword itself, and a few chuckles rose from the audience when he stepped up. However, as he tugged at the sword it slowly began to shift, and then gently slid free of the stone. There was a shocked silence. The rightful king of Britain had been found.



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1. What does the word '**prosperous**' mean? Use a dictionary to help you.

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2. According to the first paragraph of the story, why was King Uther unhappy?

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3. What did Merlin ask for in return for helping King Uther? Circle your answer.

King Uther's children would be passed over to Merlin.

Merlin would be part of the king's council.

King Uther would split his riches with Merlin

Merlin would get Sir Ector's castle.

4. King Uther '**reluctantly agreed**' to the arrangement with Merlin. What type of word is '**reluctantly**'? Circle your answer.

adjective

adverb

verb

noun

5. What was the kingdom like while Uther was king? How did it change when he died?

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6. Read the paragraph starting '**King Uther was so distraught**'. Find and copy a phrase from this paragraph that suggests it would be difficult to remove the sword from the stone.

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7. The story says that **'the buzz around the sword died down'**. What do you think this phrase means?

Merlin moved the sword to a quieter place.

Everyone thought that getting the sword was impossible.

The sword didn't make a buzzing sound any more.

People stopped talking about the sword.

8. Draw lines to show whether each sentence is true or false.

The sword in the stone was placed in London.

True

Sir Ector mentored Arthur in a wide range of subjects.

False

Sir Ector had a son called Kay.

9. Why do you think the crowd chuckled when Arthur stepped up to the sword?

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10. Why do you think Arthur was able to lift the sword?

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