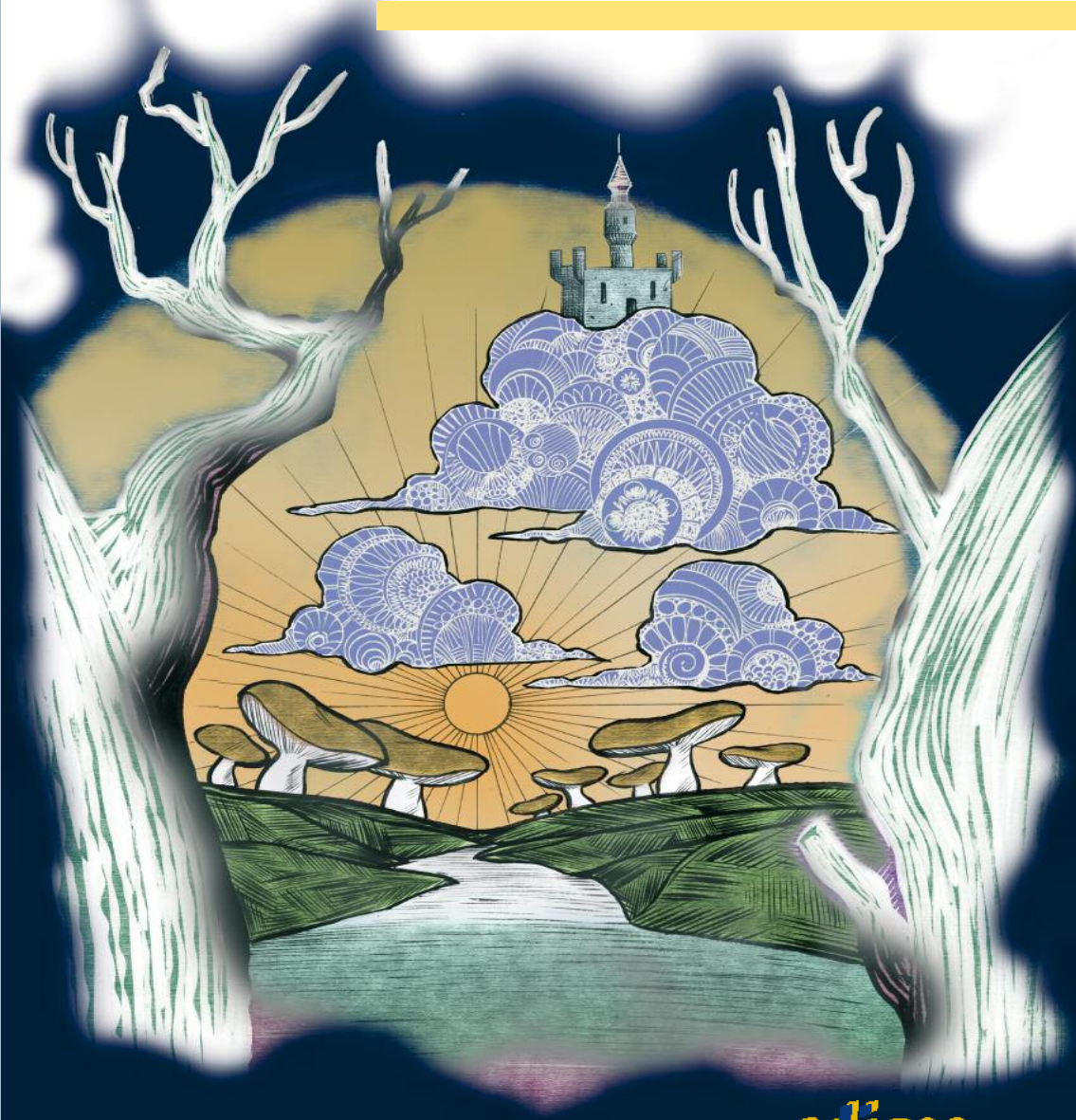




beginner

R A I N B O W S

Tales from the British Isles



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Tales from the British Isles

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Tales from the British Isles

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Folklore: legends, myths, fables and fairy tales



Folklore. Folklore is part of the culture of a population. It includes tales¹, music, dance, oral history and proverbs. It can contain religious, mythical or fantastic elements. Tales include: legends, myths, fables and fairy tales.

A **legend** is an old and popular story – perhaps true, perhaps not. Legends are about people (sometimes real people) and tell us about their great actions. The story of *King Arthur* is a legend in this sense. It is probably based on a historical and heroic figure of the 5th or 6th century. Another famous legend is the one of *Robin Hood*, the medieval hero. Other important legends are: the Holy Grail and Atlantis. There are also legendary animals, for example the Loch Ness monster.

We sometimes say that a legend is a **myth**, but a myth is generally different from a legend. Myths are about ancient² stories, like the ones of the Greek or Latin gods³ and goddesses⁴ like Zeus, (Jupiter in Latin), Poseidon (Neptun), Aphrodite (Venus).

1. *tale*: an imaginative story, especially one with action and adventure.

2. *ancient*: very old.

3. *god*: spirit or being with supernatural powers.

4. *goddess*: female god.



In a myth, these super-natural beings⁵ have human emotions and qualities. A myth can also be about heroes, like *Owain* in Celtic mythology.

Fables are short simple stories that have a moral, that is, they teach us a lesson. Their characters are animals, plants, objects or forces of nature. The most famous authors of fables are Aesop (“The Fox and the Grapes⁶”) and Phaedrus (“The Wolf and the Lamb”). *The Sprightly Tailor*, with its final moral, is a fable.

A **fairy tale** is a traditional story. The events in it are generally caused by magic. A fairy tale is a complex tale with many invented characters⁷. It happens in a world without time, space and causality⁸; its hero or heroine has no historical importance; and it is clearly not true. Some famous fairy tales are the works of the brothers Grimm (“Cinderella”, “Little Red Riding Hood”, “Hansel and Gretel”, etc.); or *Deirdre* from Irish folklore.

Anyway⁹, the distinction is not rigid. A legend is also called a myth or a fairy tale.

5. *being*: something that is alive.

6. *grapes*:



7. *character*: a person or an animal represented in a story, play or film.

8. *causality*: the principle that there is a cause for everything that happens.

9. *anyway*: but.



BEFORE READING

1 Choose the right answer.

- a. Merlin is
☐ a knight ☐ a magician ☐ a servant
- b. The Table of King Arthur and his Knights is
☐ round ☐ rectangular ☐ square
- c. Excalibur is a
☐ sword ☐ horse ☐ castle

2 Match the words with the pictures.

- a. castle
 b. king
 c. sword
 d. spear
 e. magician
 f. stone
 g. knight
 h. boat



3 Match the verbs in column A with the words in column B.

A	B
a. win ...	1. a book
b. write ...	2. against enemies
c. fight ...	3. at the table
d. look after ...	4. in love
e. have ...	5. a battle
f. attack ...	6. a sword
g. sit ...	7. a castle
h. fall ...	8. magic power
i. take out ...	9. a baby

Tales King Arthur

Chapter 1 – (*English Legend*)

Who is King Arthur? Who are the famous Knights of the Round Table?

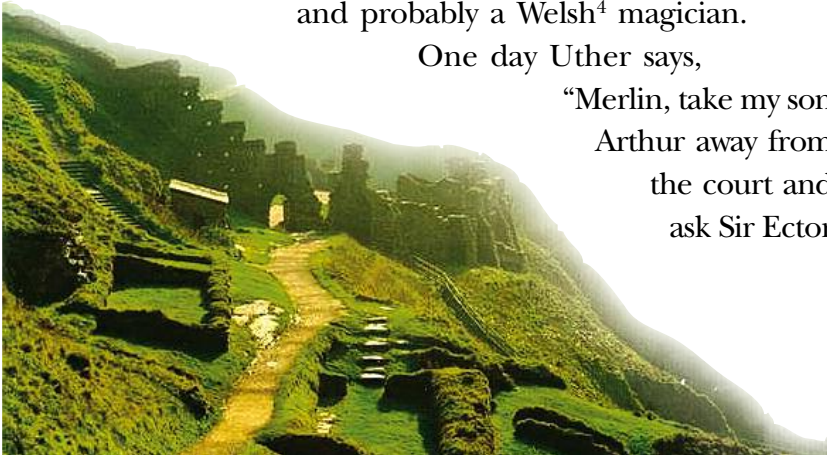
In the 9th century, the historian¹ Nennius writes a book about him: King Arthur is famous because he fights against the Saxons and the Angles. These warriors² arrive in the island of Britain in the 5th century; they come from the northern lands of Europe.

The legendary King Arthur fights against the invaders. He wins lots of battles against the Saxons. His people love him and remember his actions for centuries.

Arthur is the son of Uther, King of Britain. Uther falls in love with Igraine of Cornwall. They have a child, Arthur; he is born at Tintagel Castle in Cornwall. The magician Merlin lives at Uther's court³. He is a legendary character and probably a Welsh⁴ magician.

One day Uther says,

“Merlin, take my son
Arthur away from
the court and
ask Sir Ector



Tintagel Castle in Cornwall.

1. *historian*: a person expert at history and that writes about it.

2. *warrior*:



3. *court*: the place where queens and kings live.

4. *Welsh*: person that lives in or comes from Wales.



and his wife to look after⁵ him. It's better for Arthur to live with them!"

Merlin gives the baby to Sir Ector and his wife; they look after him and are good parents.

After some years, in 509, Uther dies. By magic art Merlin transports very big stones from Ireland and forms the tomb of Uther. This monument is called Stonehenge. Now Britain has no king. So Merlin says to the Archbishop of Canterbury,

"On Christmas Day let's meet outside the great church and God will show us the new King!"

Outside the church they find a big stone with a sword in it. On the stone they can read,

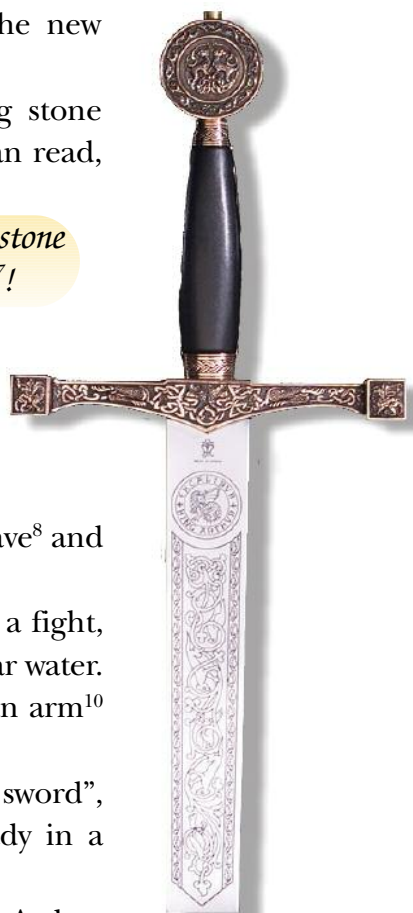
*He who takes the sword out⁶ of the stone
Is the true King of Britain alone⁷!*

A lot of noblemen try to take the sword out of the stone, but they can't do it. Then Arthur tries and he pulls it out easily! Now he is the new King of Britain: he is young but brave⁸ and loyal⁹. His people love him.

One day he breaks his sword during a fight, so Merlin and Arthur go to a lake of clear water. In the middle of the lake Arthur sees an arm¹⁰ holding¹¹ a sword.

"Ask the Lady of the Lake for the sword", says Merlin. Arthur sees a beautiful lady in a boat and asks her for the sword.

"Yes, you can have it", she answers. Arthur



Excalibur

5. *look after*: be responsible for someone; take care of someone.

6. *takes... out*: pulls out, extracts.

7. *alone*: only, unique.

8. *brave*: courageous.

9. *loyal*: a person who is a very good friend; faithful.

10. *arm*: see Act. 2 on p. 37.

11. *holding*: having in one's hand.



Queen Guinevere.

takes it and looks at it. It's a wonderful sword with jewels¹² on it.

"It's Excalibur, Arthur", says Merlin, "It has great magic power!".

Arthur fights against a lot of enemies with Excalibur because the Angles, Saxons, Jutes and also the Picts want to conquer Britain.

One day he goes to help King Laodegan in his castle because the Saxons are attacking him. Young Arthur and his knights fight against them and win.

After the battle King Laodegan invites Arthur and his knights to a royal banquet¹³. At the banquet, Arthur meets Laodegan's daughter, Guinevere. They fall in love and soon after they get

married.

Laodegan gives the Round Table to Arthur as a present. Everyone in the kingdom is happy. Arthur goes back to his castle at Camelot with Guinevere and calls the best knights of the kingdom to sit at the Round Table. It is a symbol of equality between the knights because no knight can sit in a superior position. There is a rule at the Round Table: nobody can eat before telling a story of heroism. At Camelot the knights have competitions and they also go to look for the Holy Grail, the cup of the Last Supper of Christ.

King Arthur and Guinevere live happily at Camelot, but one day he must fight against the King of Ireland, the King of Denmark and other kings that want to invade Britain. Arthur asks Guinevere to go with him and his knights. Arthur wins and saves Britain from a dangerous invasion.

In 573 King Arthur goes away again from his castle to fight in a distant land. He says to Mordred, one of his knights,

12. *jewel*:



13. *banquet*: a formal dinner to celebrate.

14. *rule*: have the power over a country.