

Summer Reading for incoming Grade 8

Below you will find some information and directive questions concerning the books, *Sword At Sunset*, *The Lantern Bearers*, and *The Sword and the Circle*. You must read EITHER *The Lantern Bearers* OR *Sword at Sunset*. You MUST also read *The Sword and the Circle*. Questions: Call or email: 410-823-4288/mllambooy@yahoo.com

- I. *Sword At Sunset* is set during the 5th and 6th centuries AD in what could be termed “Romano-Britain.” The Roman legions have left to attempt to hold back the barbarian invasions into their Empire (fat chance!), so the people left to defend Britain from the waves of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes arriving on their island were a mixture of the Romans and the ancient Celtic people called Britons.

At just this harrowing and violent time appeared a courageous and intelligent British chieftain to lead his people in battle against the Saxons. His name was Arturius or Artos, and he has come down to us as Arthur, the “once and future king.” Whether or not you believe he will ever return (some Brits do!), he did once walk upon English soil. And this summer you meet him as the hero of Rosemary Sutcliff’s finely told tale.

WARNING: There are a few “love scenes” in this book, but they are not unlike what you will encounter (or perhaps have encountered already, e.g. *Gilgamesh*) in Great Literature. For example, you will meet with sexual matters in Shakespeare, in *The Canterbury Tales* and in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* this coming year. But, as with these stories, the real point in *Sword At Sunset* is, not if sexual relations are mentioned, but how they are defined in terms of good and evil. You may be thinking, “Hey, I can skip these scenes when I come to them and save myself some reading.” Good try, but you won’t be skipping more than about three or four paragraphs! Those paragraphs are in the following chapters: “The Birds of Rhiannon” and “Guenhumara.”

So, if you opt NOT to read *Sword At Sunset*, then you MUST read *The Lantern Bearers*, also by Rosemary Sutcliff. Something of a “prequel” to *Sword At Sunset*, this tells the story of Aquila (father of Artos’s buddy Flavian) whom you meet as an older man in the later book. This is a great book with something for girls as well as guys: lots of early British history and battle tactics, and very strong women!

- II. The second book, *The Sword and the Circle*, is based primarily on Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, written in the 1400’s. Sutcliff brings in Welsh strands of the Arthurian legend as well, so that this story combines a little of the Saxon struggle and intriguing tales of Merlin (yes, he was the son of the Devil) with the High Middle Ages romantic vision of the Christian brotherhood of knights who seek to uphold a chivalric ideal.

WARNING: As in *Sword At Sunset*, Arthur commits a grievous sin that is part of the Arthurian legend, but it is handled in a muted way. You will also find that it has biblical overtones. Again, you MUST read *The Sword and the Circle*.

Questions and Exercises (Please type OR you may write on ruled paper, using black or blue ink and complete sentences.)

Sword At Sunset

1. List *at least* five characters whom you think are important and write one or two complete sentences for each telling *why* that character is essential to the story.

2. Is Artos a good king? Answer in three to four complete sentences.
3. How does this version of the Arthur story end? Use three to five complete sentences.

The Lantern Bearers

1. List *at least* five characters whom you think are important and write one or two complete sentences for each telling *why* that character is essential to the story.
2. Is Ambrosius a good leader? Answer in three to four complete sentences.
3. How does this story end? What has happened to Aquila, Ness, Flavian, and Ambrosius?

The Sword and the Circle

1. List *at least* seven knights and ladies of Camelot and write one or two complete sentences that briefly describes an adventure or tells an important fact about each one.
2. Compare this Arthur to one of the 6th century Romano-British chieftains (either Ambrosius or Artos), using no more than three or four complete sentences, and concentrating on character traits and actions, not on external trappings, such as clothing and castles.
3. How does Sutcliff portray Arthur's encounter with Margawse in this version that reminds you of King David? Use one quote from the story.
4. In three or four complete sentences, tell which is your favorite tale from this book and *why*. Your reason(s) must include some description or comment on a character or aspect of the story.

For further reading

1. *Ivanhoe*, by Walter Scott. Wilfrid of Ivanhoe, a Saxon, comes home from the Crusades to Norman England. His name is mud, his inheritance is gone, and his lifelong love, Rowena, is engaged to someone else. In sorting out his life (without help from Dr. Phil) he encounters Robin Hood, King John, the Knights Templar, and the medieval Jewish community, including the dark-eyed healer, Rebecca of York.
2. *Henry V*, by William Shakespeare. Centered around the famous English victory at Agincourt (1415), this is a portrait of a king who is at once a courageous general and a man unsure of his own motives for invading France. I also recommend viewing the Kenneth Branagh film version.