



Book club 3: Honour & mortality

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
by an anonymous poet

Rules

In this book club you will discuss *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by an anonymous poet in a group of 4-6 readers. You will start a conversation by responding to discussion questions about the text. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 quiz questions about the text. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of genuine questions that you have. Each group member consults the group about a part of the text that they thought was unclear. Together, you try to find answers to the questions that are raised. After everything has been cleared up, your group is ready to proceed to the next round.
- 3 Round 3 consists of questions for discussion. There are two categories to choose from. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teachers' manual and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



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Introduction

'He acknowledged no one but looked over their heads, and the first thing he said was, "Where is the noblest of all of this crowd?"'

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is, arguably, the most famous example of a chivalric romance story. Originally written by an unknown poet during the fourteenth century, this long-form poem features numerous stylistic devices that lend it a clear poetic character – something you will undoubtedly notice while reading. Gawain's story is conveyed through several stanzas, each ending with four lines that used end-rhyme in the original middle English. In this story, you will see Sir Gawain try and find the Green Knight, a gigantic knight fully clad in green vestments with green decorations. After this knight challenges King Arthur to a beheading game, Sir Gawain steps forward to take his king's place in the game. This leads to Gawain needing to traverse forests and mountains in his search for the Green Knight in order to defend his honour as a knight.

This book club aims to explore the places where honour and self-preservation come into conflict with one another. How far are you willing to go to save someone else's life? Even if it endangers your own?

Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Review

Review *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

On what day does the Green Knight enter the royal hall at Camelot?

Question 2

What is the relationship between Sir Gawain and King Arthur?

Question 3

How many times does the lady of the castle attempt to seduce Sir Gawain?

Question 4

What does the lord of the castle do on the days when Gawain stays with him?

Question 5

How often does the Green Knight swing his axe before he ultimately lets it fall upon Gawain?

Answers

1. on New Year's Day
2. King Arthur is Gawain's uncle.
3. three times
4. He goes out to hunt while Gawain stays at the castle.
5. three times



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

Imagine you are one of the knights of King Arthur's Court. How would you have reacted when the Green Knight arrived? Why?

Personal connections? 2

Gawain seems determined to keep his promise to the Green Knight. What motivates Gawain to risk his life in search of the Green Knight, and do you think you would have the courage to do the same? Why or why not?

Personal connections? 3

During his stay at the castle, Gawain struggles to maintain loyal to both the lord and the lady of the castle. Have you ever been in a situation where feelings of loyalty towards two people made you feel torn? How did you deal with it?

Personal connections? 4

Gawain is often described as brave. What qualities do you believe make someone truly brave, and do you think Gawain embodies those qualities? Explain.

Personal connections? 5

The story emphasizes Gawain's commitment to chivalry. What are the contemporary views on chivalry in your culture? How does the chivalric code Gawain follows compare to modern views on chivalry?

Personal connections? 6

Think about a moment when you faced a significant challenge or test. How did it change you? How does the Green Knight's challenge impact Gawain's character and what can you learn from his experience?

Personal connections? 7

At the end of the story, Gawain makes a difficult choice to protect himself, which shows both his human side and his knightly honor. How do you interpret his decision? Do you think it reveals more about his weaknesses, his strengths, or both? Reflecting on your own character, what traits do you think would be most challenged in a similar situation, and why?

Personal connections? 8

How do the actions and motivations of the lady of the castle and Morgan le Fay affect Gawain's journey and challenges? Can you think of any stories from your culture where women play similar roles in influencing the main character? What do you think of this role?



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



Food for thought? 1

All of the major events in the story take place on or around significant holidays. What does this suggest about the cultural background of the writer and the characters?

Food for thought? 2

The story clearly contrasts the Green Knight with the knights at King Arthur's court. What cultural or religious differences do you see besides their physical appearance? How do these contrasts help you understand the story's deeper messages about honor and bravery?

Food for thought? 3

The poet describes Gawain with qualities such as 'generosity,' 'sympathy,' 'chastity,' 'courtesy,' and 'compassion,' stating that these traits were 'fixed more firmly in him than anyone else.' (lines 651-655). Do you agree that he exemplifies these traits more than any other character in the tale? Why or why not?

Food for thought? 4

Read 'Now will...about love-talking' (lines 916-927). These words are spoken to (and about) Gawain when he first enters the castle. Considering what we now know about the identity of the lord of the castle, what effect does the story's ending have on the meaning of these words?

Food for thought? 5

'What I gain in the woods will be given to you, in exchange for whatever your luck gives you here' (lines 1106-1107). Why do you think the lord of the castle proposes this wager to Gawain?

Food for thought? 6

At several points in the story Gawain is told that he 'cannot be the Gawain that [they] have previously heard about'. Why do you think these characters say this to Gawain?

Food for thought? 7

It is ultimately revealed that his journey was intended to test Gawain's chivalry, a test that he does not end up passing. At what point in the story do you think Gawain fails, and what event(s) lead(s) to his failure?

Food for thought? 8

Consider the Green Knight's decision to spare Gawain's life. What reasons might he have for this? Find evidence in the text to support your ideas.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4

Food for thought?

8

Food for thought?

7