Title: *Sir Gawain and* *the Green Knight*

Suggested Time: 5-6 days (45 minutes per day)

Common Core ELA Standards: RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.4; W.7.2, W.7.4, W.7.9; L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.4; SL.7.1, SL.7.2

Teacher Instructions

**Preparing for Teaching**

1. Read the Big Ideas and Key Understandings and the Synopsis. Please do **not** read this to the students. This is a description for teachers about the big ideas and key understanding that students should take away **after** completing this task.

Big Ideas and Key Understandings

Dying with honor is more important than living a coward. Chivalry is a code of honor for worthy knights.

Synopsis

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is a legend about King Arthur’s court and the Knights of the Round Table. During a New Years celebration, a strange man, only referred to as the Green Knight, enters the court and challenges the knights to a beheading game. He will allow whoever accepts the challenge to strike him with his own ax. There is one condition, the challenger must return in one year for the Green Knight to return the same blow.

1. Read the entire selection, keeping in mind the Big Ideas and Key Understandings.
2. Re-read the text while noting the stopping points for the Text Dependent Questions and teaching Tier II/academic vocabulary.

**During Teaching**

1. Students read the entire selection independently.
2. Teacher reads the text aloud while students follow along or students take turns reading aloud to each other. Depending on the text length and student need, the teacher may choose to read the full text or a passage aloud. For a particularly complex text, the teacher may choose to reverse the order of steps 1 and 2.
3. Students and teacher re-read the text while stopping to respond to and discuss the questions, continually returning to the text. A variety of methods can be used to structure the reading and discussion (i.e., whole class discussion, think-pair-share, independent written response, group work, etc.)

Text Dependent Questions

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| **Text-dependent Questions** | **Evidence-based Answers** |
| Describe Christmas time in Camelot. | For fifteen days after holy Mass each morning during Christmas time people were celebrating all of their good fortune. There was nothing but, “feasting and dancing and singing and hunting and jousting.” It was an honor to celebrate all of their achievements with their king. |
| What do the lines, “So, this was a time when love and friendship were renewed. A time to celebrate with their young king all of their achievements and their great and good purpose: to bring peace to the land…” tell you about the people of Camelot? | The people admired those that were brave and honorable. These lines also exhibit that times of peace were highly regarded and “near to heaven.” The people valued friendship and they were happy they were together. Everyone tried to work together for their king. |
| What does the narrator mean when he says, “...a kingdom as near to heaven on Earth as had ever been achieved in Britain, or any other land come to that”? | The narrator’s opinion of King Arthur and Camelot is very high; he believes he is superior to all other rulers. This is evident when he says “a kingdom as near to a heaven on Earth as had never before been achieved in Britain or in any other land, come to that.” |
| What words describe the New Year’s feast? | Grand, lavish, elaborate, fancy, large, magnificent. “Truly there was enough food to feed five thousand, but there were only five hundred to eat it.” “The servants came in carrying the food on great silver plates, piling each table high with toasted meat, capons, venison and pork and fish fresh-basked in sea salt, and baskets of crusty bread and steaming soups too.” |
| What is the “custom” and what does the custom tell us about the feast? | The king must be told of some “new and stirring tale, some wonderfully outlandish adventure, some extraordinary feat of arms that is unheard of…” before the King eats. This custom implies that this is a regularly practiced custom because the King says, “you know the custom.” |
| What clues help to determine the meaning of “tall stories”? | A tall story is a great adventure story that is not true or exaggerated greatly. This evident in the sentences above this one where its stated the king wants to hear an “ outlandish extraordinary feat of arms...and it must be true too. I don’t want you to go making it up just so you can get at the food – some of you are good at tall stories.” |
| Describe the Green Knight. | He was “the most awesome stranger anyone there had ever set eyes on,” “a giant of a man green from head to toe” and massive in size. He was green all-over with an evil scowl on his face. His appearance “struck terror in every heart.” |
| Describe the ax in lines. | “The weapon was a real head cruncher,” yet it was delicately carved and an object of beauty. It is ironic though because it was used as a killing weapon. |
| What inference can you make about how people in the Middle Ages believed guests should be treated? | In the Middle Ages, hospitality was very important. Without knowing who the stranger is, King Arthur invites him to the feast. Although the Green Knight was uninvited, he was still welcome. |
| What do you learn about the Green Knight? | It is evident that the Green Knight believes the Knights of the Round Table are inferior to him. He does not believe they have the capability of beating him, nor do they have the bravery to fight him. The Green Knight refers to the court as “beardless boys.” He is trying to make them angry so someone will accept his challenge. |
| When the King shouts, “Cease your insults!” | This is a turning point in the story because the king has had enough of the Green Knight’s insults. He is defending his court and decides that the Green Knight’s challenge will be accepted. “I shall take up your challenge myself. So get down off that horse, hand me your ax, and I’ll give you what you asked for.” |
| How does Sir Gawain prove his chivalry? | He takes King Arthur’s place in the challenge. He believed the challenge was “too demeaning” for his king. “Lose you and we lose the kingdom. Lose me and there will always be others to come in my place.” |
| What does the Green Knight “have in store” for Sir Gawain? | Sir Gawain must promise that in a year and a day he will find the Green Knight so that he can pay him “back in kind.” This is suspicious because if Sir Gawain is able to behead the Green Knight, then “short of a miracle,” he should not have to meet him again. |
| What does Sir Gawain mean when he says, “Make peace with your Maker.” | He is asking The Green Knight to talk to a higher spirit before his impending death. The capital letter on Maker is important because implies a God for the Green Knight to talk to. This is part of the rising action in the story right before Gawain beheads the Green Knight. |
| Why was everyone “struck dumb with terror”? | The giant is beheaded but not killed. The Green Knight is still alive and he begins to speak. He can still function without a head. “But instead of toppling over, as everyone expected, that grotesque headless body rose up onto his feet and strode across the floor to where his head lay bleeding, the eyes closed in death.” |
| What does the King mean when he says, “Come on now. Let’s not be upset…After all, this was just such a marvel as we were waiting for, was it not?” | He wants to break the silence from the horrifying event everyone witnessed and lift their spirits to distract them from the horrible scene that has just occurred there. He wants everyone to continue with his or her feasting and celebrating. “I agree it wasn’t a very appetizing spectacle, you have to admit we’ve never seen anything quite like it before, have we?” “Let’s eat, my friends. Let’s drink. Let’s be merry.” |
| What does the author’s note at the end of the story reveal about Gawain’s character? | Sir Gawain keeps his word and finds the Green Knight a year later at the Green Chapel. Through “temptations” on his voyage there, Sir Gawain proved himself a “worthy, though not perfect, knight.” Because of this, The Green Knight does not take his life. This shows Sir Gawain is chivalrous for keeping his promise and courageous for keeping his promise knowing the dire consequences of fulfilling his promise. |

Tier II/Academic Vocabulary

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|  | **These words require less time to learn**  (They are concrete or describe an object/event/  process/characteristic that is familiar to students) | **These words require more time to learn**  (They are abstract, have multiple meanings, are a part  of a word family, or are likely to appear again in future texts) |
| **Meaning can be learned from context** | succlence  lanky  grim  daunting  clattered  unperturbed  demanding  cumbersome  haughty  boorishness  demeaning | jousting  outlandish  dais  revered  severing |
| **Meaning needs to be provided** | comradeship  apparition  chivalry  severity | incredulous  supercilious |

Culminating Writing Task

* Prompt
  + *What is the theme of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and how is the theme developed over the course of the story? Write an essay identifying the theme and use specific evidence from the text to show how this theme is developed.*
* Teacher Instructions

1. Students identify their writing task from the prompt provided.
2. Students complete an evidence chart as a pre-writing activity. Teachers should guide students in gathering and using any relevant notes they compiled while reading and answering the text-dependent questions earlier. Some students will need a good deal of help gathering this evidence, especially when this process is new and/or the text is challenging.

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| ***Evidence***  ***Quote or paraphrase*** | ***Elaboration / explanation of how this evidence supports ideas or argument*** |
| “Let me prove myself worthy, uncle, worthy of being your knight and your nephew, too” | This quote is evidence that Gawain greatly wanted to be respected by his king, and he wanted to serve his ruler-both components of chivalry. |
| After Sir Gawain accepted the challenge, the Green Knight told him, “I’ll be honored to take the first blow from a knight as noble and worthy as yourself, for you are known and revered throughout all Britain as a man not only of the greatest courage, but also the greatest integrity.” | The Green Knight is happy that it is Sir Gawain who will play his “game” because of his reputation of being honorable and courageous. |
| “ I promise you willingly, on my honor as a Knight of the Round Table…you have my word.” | This shows that Gawain is brave, courageous, and he is a man of his word. He has integrity. This shows chivalry because he is an honorable man. |
| “So hang up your ax, Gawain, somewhere we can all see it and be reminded of your courage, and come join us.” | The King does not want his people to be “downhearted” on the festive night, so he celebrates Gawain's courage and chivalry in front of everyone. |
| “Eventually, Sir Gawain did indeed set out and find the Green chapel and fulfill his promise.” | This proves that Gawain understood it was certain he would die from the return blow from the ax, but he still makes the journey as promised. This proves that he is an honorable man and a man of his word, despite the consequences. |

1. Once students have completed the evidence chart, they should look back at the writing prompt in order to remind themselves what kind of response they are writing (i.e. expository, analytical, argumentative) and think about the evidence they found. (Depending on the grade level, teachers may want to review students’ evidence charts in some way to ensure accuracy.) From here, students should develop a specific thesis statement. This could be done independently, with a partner, small group, or the entire class. Consider directing students to the following sites to learn more about thesis statements: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/545/01/ OR http://www.indiana.edu/~wts/pamphlets/ thesis\_statement.shtml.
2. Students compose a rough draft. With regard to grade level and student ability, teachers should decide how much scaffolding they will provide during this process (i.e. modeling, showing example pieces, sharing work as students go).
3. Students complete final draft.

* Sample Answer

The theme of the story “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” is that it is important be chivalrous and do the right thing no matter the situation or possible consequence. Chivalry is a code of conduct for knights and is characterized by bravery, courage, respect and courtesy to others, especially those in positions of authority. The theme of being chivalrous despite the situation or consequence is developed throughout the story through the actions of Sir Gawain.

One of the ways Gawain proves he is chivalrous is when he volunteers to accept the Green Knight’s challenge that would be “testing of a man’s courage.” The Green Knight challenges the court to a beheading contest where even the “bravest of knights lowered their eyes.” Gawain says, “Let me prove myself worthy, Uncle, worthy of being your knight and your nephew too.” Gawain’s acceptance of this dangerous challenge shows his courage, despite the consequences that may come to him. After Sir Gawain accepted the challenge, the Green Knight told him, “I’ll be honored to take the first blow from a knight as noble and worthy as yourself, for you are known and revered throughout all Britain as a man not only of the greatest courage, but also the greatest integrity.” Sir Gawain accepts the challenge, which would have deadly consequences and The Green Knight acknowledges Gawain’s chivalrous reputation. The Green Knight reminds Gawain that he must find him in a year so that he can “pay him back in kind,” which would have deadly consequences for Gawain. Gawain responds, “ I promise you willingly, on my honor as a Knight of the Round Table…you have my word.” Knowing the consequences, Gawain’s promise shows that Gawain is brave, courageous, and that he is a man of integrity, all characteristics of chivalry.

As the plot develops, the crowd was “struck dumb with terror” when the giant was beheaded but not killed. After Gawain severed his head with the ax, The Green Knight was still alive and he began to speak before he left the hall with a reminder for Gawain to keep his promise “made freely and openly in front of everyone here and in front of your King.” At this point in the story, “no one found the voice to speak” and the King broke the silence when he said, “Hang up your ax, Gawain, somewhere we can all see it and be reminded of your courage, and come join us.” The King does not want his people to be “downhearted” or think of the consequences to Gawain’s actions, so he celebrates his nephew’s courage and chivalrous behavior in front of the crowd.

The author’s note concludes the development of the theme when it states, “Eventually, Sir Gawain did indeed set out and find the Green chapel and fulfill his promise.” Gawain understood it was certain he would die from the return blow from the Green Knight’s ax, but he still made the journey as promised. This proves that he is an honorable man and a man of his word, despite the consequences.

It is important be chivalrous and do the right thing no matter the situation or possible consequence. Sir Gawain’s actions and words in the text, “Sire Gawain and the Green Knight” develop this theme.

Additional Tasks

* Read the story ”Young Arthur” in McDougal Littell’s *Literature* anthology. Then, create a Venn Diagram with evidence from the text comparing and contrasting the boy Arthur to the grown man Arthur.
* Based on the description provided in “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”, draw and label a detailed picture of the Green Knight.

Note to Teacher

* It will be important for students to understand the concept of chivalry before reading the story in order to understand the development of the theme throughout the story.