

Arthur, High King of Britain

Michael Morpurgo

As a child, Arthur was found wandering and near dead from hunger and exhaustion. He was taken to a Welsh Knight's castle and became squire to his 'brother' Sir Kay who disliked him and bullied him.

It was a time of great trouble in the land as lords and knights battled for power. One Christmas Day, they were called together for a tournament to decide who would be King.

Arthur and the other squires were kept busy by the knights they served. Just before his fight, Sir Kay sent Arthur back to his lodgings to collect the sword that Arthur had forgotten to bring. Arthur set off, but on the way through the Abbey gardens, he saw a sword sticking out of a stone. He pulled the sword from the stone, planning to put it back after the fight. Kay fought with the sword, and lost. Arthur explains what happened next.

Father had retrieved the sword and was turning it over in his hands.

"This sword, Kay," he said, "this is the sword from the stone in the Abbey churchyard. I am sure of it." There was a sudden hush and people began to gather around. Kay got to his feet. He glanced at me, a puzzled frown on him, and then his face lit with a sudden smile. "Of course it is, Father," he said. "I thought I'd surprise you, that's all. I couldn't get a proper grip on it earlier. So I went back later on my own, and I tried again. It came out, just like that, with no trouble at all."

Father was looking at him hard. "You took the sword from the stone?"

"And why not?" Kay was offended. "Why should it not be me? Am I not good enough?" All this time I said nothing. I couldn't understand what all the bother was about, nor why it was that Kay was claiming that he had taken the sword from the stone. Why should he be confessing to such a thing, boasting about it even? Thieving was bad enough. But thieving from a churchyard! If Kay wanted to brag about it, let him. I'd keep quiet.

"There is only one way to settle this Kay," said Father. "We will go back to the Abbey churchyard, replace the sword in the stone and then see if you can draw it out again. Agreed?"

As we rode back across the bridge I felt Kay's eyes always on me, and Father too kept twisting in his saddle to look back at me. Somehow he already knew Kay had been lying, that it was I who had pulled the sword from the stone. I looked down to avoid the accusation in his eyes. How could I explain that I had just borrowed it, that I was going to put it back? He wouldn't believe me, and neither would anyone else.

Once in the churchyard again, we gathered around the stone in silence, our several steaming breaths misting the frosty air around us. Father took the sword and thrust it deep into the stone. A bird sang suddenly and shrill above my head. I looked up. It was my robin again, his red breast fluffed up against the cold.

“Well, Kay,” said father, standing back. “Go on then. Pull it out.”

Kay stepped up. I could see he did not want to go through with it, but he had no choice. He grasped the hilt with both hands, took a deep breath, and pulled with all his might. The sword stayed firm in the stone. He heaved at it. Red in the face now, he shook it. He wrenched at it. It would not move.

“That’s enough, Kay,” said Father quietly. “You lied. You have always lied. You have shamed me yet again and this time in front of the world. Step down,” And he turned at once to me. “It is your turn, Arthur. Everyone else has already tried.”

Highlighting

Cohesive devices (not all identified)

First person pronouns and determiners

Conjunctions, adverbs and prepositions