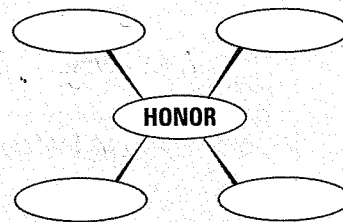


from Sir Gawain and the Green Knight

Romance by THE GAWAIN POET
Translated by JOHN GARDNER

Connect to Your Life

A Person of Honor Suppose that you hear someone say, "The student-council president should be a person of honor." What qualities or ideals come to mind? Create a word web like the one shown, jotting down words or phrases that you think describe an honorable person.



Build Background

An Ideal World Medieval aristocrats relished tales of adventure, especially stories of brave and gallant knights. Although real knights were far from perfect, the knights of legend strove continually to obey a code of chivalry, a set of rules for gentlemanly and heroic behavior. Their code represented a combination of Christian and military ideals, including faith, modesty, loyalty, courtesy, bravery, and honor. The ideal knight respected and vigorously defended his church, his king, his country, and victims of injustice.

Especially popular during the medieval period were legends of King Arthur and his heroic knights of the Round Table. The popularity of these tales was due in part to the idealized world in which they were set. It was a world of castles, heroes, courtly love, and magical spells—a world quite unlike the real medieval England, with its plagues, political battles, and civil unrest. Although Launcelot was often presented as the greatest and most distinguished of Arthur's knights, in early tales that role was given to Arthur's nephew Gawain (gə-wān'), who was famous for his courage and for his unflinching chivalry.

WORDS TO KNOW Vocabulary Preview

| | |
|-------------|----------|
| aghast | pivot |
| amended | renown |
| chagrin | reproof |
| daunt | respite |
| efficacious | uncanny |
| flinch | unwieldy |
| heft | wince |
| ingeniously | |

Focus Your Reading

LITERARY ANALYSIS ROMANCE The **romance** has been a popular narrative form since the Middle Ages. Generally, the term *romance* refers to any imaginative adventure concerned with noble heroes, gallant love, a chivalric code of honor, and daring deeds. Romances usually have faraway settings, depict events unlike those of ordinary life, and idealize their heroes as well as the eras in which the heroes lived. Medieval romances are also often lighthearted in tone and involve fantasy. Be aware of the characteristics of romance as you read the excerpt from *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*.

ACTIVE READING READING A NARRATIVE POEM

Like all narrative poems, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* contains the same elements as a short story—**setting**, **characters**, and **plot**. These elements combine to develop one or more **themes**. With any narrative poem, it is important to identify details of setting, character, and plot as you read.

READER'S NOTEBOOK Keep track of the plot by writing brief notes about the actions of each character. Note the ways in which honor plays a role in the course of events.