



Teacher Guide

***The Book of Three* by Lloyd Alexander**

Questions for Socratic Discussion by Melanie Huff

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Introduction

This teacher guide is intended to assist the teacher or parent in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, the Center for Literary Education's two day literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around **three unique ideas** which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — Context, Structure, and Style. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares him for meaningful discussion of the story's themes.

Context encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author's world.

Structure includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes *exposition*, *rising action*, *climax*, *denouement*, and *conclusion*), Setting, Characters and Theme.

Style refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc) enables a reader not only to understand the author's themes more readily, but also to appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, Children's Literature is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children's books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children's story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the Socratic Method. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well placed questions to teach students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the

most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essay and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces **deep thinkers** at any age.

The questions used in this guide have been taken directly from the Socratic list, and will therefore be familiar to the seminar alumnus.

More information about *Teaching the Classics* may be found at www.centerforlit.com.

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Note About Reference and Page Numbers

Question numbers and reference numbers in parentheses refer to the complete Socratic List, which is included in the course syllabus of the Center for Literary Education's flagship seminar, *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education*.

Questions about Structure: Setting

Where does this story happen? (Question 1)

The story takes place in the mythological land of Prydain, a land broken into many small kingdoms, or cantrevs, ruled over by one High King. (1.a.) Lloyd Alexander was greatly inspired by Welsh legend, and Prydain, though to use Alexander's own words, "is not to be used as a guide for tourists," was certainly influenced by that country and its legends, particularly those contained the collection known as The Mabinogion. Prydain is a land of farmers, herders, and artisans, dominated by a handful of legendary figures. Magic, though common enough to be recognized by all, is only practiced by a few. At the time when the story begins, Prydain has been at peace for many years, ruled by the wise and heroic Sons Of Don, but there is a growing threat from the neighboring kingdom of Annwvin (known as the Land of the Dead) and its king, the ruthless Arawn. (1.c. 1.g. 1.h.)

The story begins in Caer Dallben, the farm which is home to the old enchanter Dallben. It is springtime, peaceful and serene. (1.e.)

"The spring scent of apple blossom drifted through the open window. Beyond Dallben's chamber, Taran glimpsed the pale green fringe of forest. The fields, ready to cultivate, would soon turn golden with summer...From the forest came the monotonous tick of a beetle." (p. 13)

However, the mood changes within the first few pages, as the animals of Caer Dallben begin to sense danger and try to flee. Later we learn that their panic was caused by the nearness of Arawn's new war lord, the Horned King. Taran, responsible for keeping watch over Hen Wen, the oracular pig, tries in vain to keep her from burrowing her way out, but he is not fast enough. As he runs after her the forest appears "dark and threatening" ahead of him. (p. 15) It is the same forest he saw before from the window, but now he knows the danger and his perception of it has changed. (1.d.)

When does this story happen? (Question 2)

The story takes place in the spring and summer. (2.c.)

We are told that Taran is "barely on the threshold of manhood" when the story begins, probably in his middle teens. He is impetuous and dreams of being a great warrior like his hero, Gwydion, but his perceptions of heroism are highly romantic and unrealistic. When he does meet Gwydion, he is surprised and distressed to find the great man weather-hardened and clad in a travel-stained cloak. However, as they travel together he learns to revere Gwydion for his wisdom, nobility, courage, and skill as a tracker and fighter. His notions of heroism begin to change. (2.e.)

Questions about Structure: Characters

Who is the story about? (Question 3)

The story is told from the point of view of Taran, a boy in his teens. (3.a. 3.b. 3.c.) Raised by the enchanter Dallben, he has no knowledge of his past or parentage. He works with Coll on the farm and tends the oracular pig, Hen Wen, but this peaceful life is monotonous to him and he dreams of becoming a great hero. (3.h.)

Here is a list of adjectives describing Taran: (3.f.)

Impetuous

Impulsive

Brave

Kind

Immature

Loyal

Young

Honest

Awkward

Rash

Cocky

Eager

Impatient

Touchy (p. 126)

Headstrong (p. 126)

Stubborn (p. 29)

Though cocky, Taran is honest about his failings and admits his mistakes freely. When Gwydion first discovers him in the forest searching for Hen Wen, he views him as a burden, "I will not be hindered by an Assistant Pig-Keeper, who seems eager to bring himself to grief" (p. 20) but cannot afford to lose time from his own quest to see him safely home. However, after Taran jumps into a thorn bush in a misguided attempt to save his life, Gwydion realizes the value of his courage. "I shall take the intention for the deed. You may be many other things, Taran of Caer Dallben, but I see you are no coward. I offer you my thanks." (p. 32) After he is separated from Gwydion at Spiral Castle, Taran becomes the accidental but unquestioned leader of the companions with even Eilonwy admitting his leadership. (3.j. 3.k.)

Throughout the story, Taran is endearingly human. He is, in many ways, an "Everyman", or rather, an "Everyboy". His actions continually fall short of his intentions,

and his preconceptions are constantly challenged by new experiences. His relationship with Gurgi, for example, begins in frustration and intense dislike, but grows into compassion and respect when the creature is injured and begs the companions to cut off his head so he will not slow them down on their journey. Similarly, in the beginning Taran feels nothing but fear towards the gwythaints, but in Medwyn's valley he learns their history, how they were tortured by Arawn and pressed into his service. Later, when he finds a wounded young bird, he cares for it and nurses it back to health, an act which changes the outcome of their entire quest. (3.n. 3.p. 3.q.)

While Taran is the central figure in the story, he does not view himself as its hero at all. By the end he is fully convinced that he has only succeeded in making mistakes and getting in the way. It is the old enchanter, Dallben, who tells him in the end, "Though what you say may be true, you have cause for a certain pride nevertheless. It was you who held the companions together and led them. You did what you set out to do...If you made mistakes, you recognize them. As I told you, there are times when the seeking counts more than the finding." (p. 128)

Who else is the story about? (Question 4)

Lloyd Alexander has a wonderful gift for character, and this gift is particularly well displayed through the secondary characters in the story. Delightfully human and completely individual, it is through them, their individual voices, and their interactions with Taran that the story gains its depth.

In Taran's mind it is **Gwydion, Prince of Don**, who is the true hero. He stands as an example of what Taran hopes to become, and acts as his mentor. Gwydion's apparent death in the destruction of Spiral Castle prompts Taran to postpone his own search for Hen Wen in order to complete Gwydion's mission to warn the Sons of Don of the Horned King's imminent attack. (p. 67)

Eilonwy, the apprentice enchantress, is, in many ways, a feminine reflection of Taran. She is bold, impetuous, and well-meaning, and though she puzzles Taran constantly and annoys him with her chattering, he comes to like and even admire her. She is younger than Taran, but has gained more worldly knowledge due to her life with, and apprenticeship to, Achren, who, though harsh and cruel, has given her a rudimentary knowledge of magic and ancient lore. Thus it is Eilonwy who recognizes the nature of the sword Dyrnwyn and deciphers the ancient writing on the scabbard. (p. 63-65)

Fflewddur Fflam joins Taran and Eilonwy after the destruction of Spiral Castle. A likeable fraud, he is an ex-king who vacated his throne to become a wandering bard, but was unable to pass the examinations set by the Council of Bards. However, the chief bard did present him with a gift, a beautiful harp which Fflewddur only discovered later was enchanted, causing the strings to snap whenever he happened to "readjust the facts slightly". (p. 66) In spite of his habit of exaggeration, Fflewddur often provides a voice of reason which balances out Taran's impulse and inexperience, and will, at need, put his own life at risk for the sake of his companions. (p. 117)

Gurgi, the strange creature who accompanies the companions, is described as looking like "an owl's nest in need of housecleaning" and smelling like a wet wolfhound. (p. 24) Many of the changes in Taran's character are made apparent through his relationship with Gurgi. In the beginning, he has no patience with the creature and sees him only as an annoyance. (p. 26) It is only later, when Gurgi has offered to sacrifice himself, that he begins to see beyond his appearance and acknowledge the value of his loyalty and courage. "He put his hand gently on Gurgi's shoulder. The wet wolfhound odor did not seem as objectionable as before." (p. 75)

Doli and King Eiddileg of the Fair Folk are dwarves, though the Fair Folk in general are described as a motley collection: "some were tall, slender, with white robes; others were covered with glistening scales, like fish; still others fluttered large, delicate wings." (p. 98) They live in an underground kingdom, which the companions are sucked into by mistake, and have a general contempt for the humans who initially drove them underground. (p. 100) However, both King Eiddileg (p. 103) and Doli (p. 122) develop a fondness for the companions, which becomes apparent through their actions in spite of their surface gruffness and sarcasm.

Dallben and Coll, though we see them only briefly at the beginning and end of the story, are important figures in Taran's life. It was they who raised Taran from a baby, and Caer Dallben is the only home he has ever known. Dallben the enchanter is three hundred and seventy-nine years old (p. 10) and known for his wisdom. He is highly enigmatic, and Taran is certain that he knows more than he chooses to disclose. (p.13) Coll is in charge of the more practical side of Taran's education. In the first chapter, we him instructing Taran in the making of horseshoes. (p. 9) It is only after Taran meets Gwydion that he learns of Coll's heroic past. (p. 23)

Medwyn is one name for "an ancient dweller in the foothills of the Eagle Mountains," as Gwydion describes him. (p. 31) His valley is nearly impossible for humans to find, though it is known to all the animals of Prydain. It is Medwyn who tends Gurgi's injuries and sets the companions back on the right path after they become lost in the hills. He also offers Taran a home in his valley which Taran reluctantly refuses because his quest is not yet finished. (p. 89)

Melyngar and Hen Wen are the two most prominent animal characters in the story. Gwydion, in a moment of frustration, tells Taran, "As for Melyngar, she is wiser now than you can ever hope to become, even should you live to be a man -- which seems more and more unlikely." (p. 29) It is Melyngar who leads the companions to Medwyn's valley when they are lost in the foothills of the mountains. (p. 81) Hen Wen, the oracular pig, is in the unlucky position of being a pig who knows too much. It is her flight from the Horned King which sets Taran on his quest in the first place (p. 15) and it is she who communicates to Gwydion the secret of how to destroy the Horned King. (p. 125)

Is there a character or characters that oppose the protagonist in the story? (Question 4)

Antagonists in the story include:

The Horned King

The Horned King is the most obvious antagonist. A war leader sworn to Arawn, he is "a man of evil for whom death is a black joy" (p. 12) and a straightforward villain. (4.e. 4.m.) He wears a mask made from a human skull, crowned with the antlers of a stag. (p. 17) The man behind the mask is never seen. He is solely presented as a figure of cruelty and intimidation. The Horned King's coming in search of Hen Wen is the inciting incident which propels Taran into his quest. (4.b. 4.c.)

Arawn

In *The Book Of Three*, all we know of Arawn comes from reputation. He is the evil mastermind who directs his servants from his throne in Annuvin, but is never actually seen outside his own realm. He is opposed to Taran's quest in the beginning, as his servants are also searching for Hen Wen, the oracular pig, and also later, when Taran believes Gwydion dead and takes it on himself to warn the Sons of Don of the Horned King's coming attack. (4.b. 4.d. 4.f. 4.k.)

We learn that Arawn long ago attempted to bring all of Prydain under his rule, but his plans were foiled when the Sons of Don came over the Sea from the Summer Country. He was driven back to Annuvin but not fully defeated. Dallben tells Taran that Annuvin is "more than a land of death. It is a treasure house, not only of gold and jewels but of all things of advantage to men...By craft and deceit, Arawn stole them, one by one, for his own evil uses." (p. 11) (4.n.) He has created an army of Cauldron-Born by steeping the bodies of the dead in a huge cauldron, giving them a sort of life again. They cannot be killed, and have no memory of their former lives. (p. 30) Though Taran never meets Arawn himself, he is constantly harassed by him through his servants, the Horned King, the gwythaints, and the Cauldron-Born.

Achren

Achren the enchantress is a somewhat mysterious figure. Beautiful as well as cruel, her appearance and soothing voice can be deceptive, and the inexperienced Taran is ready to tell her everything. (4.h. 4.j.) He is stopped by Gwydion, who knows Achren for what she is. (p. 38) She tries to tempt Gwydion with promises of power, and when he refuses to listen to her she gives way to rage, breaking his sword with her bare hands and promising to break him in the same way. (p. 39) (4.e.)

The Fair Folk

The Fair Folk, primarily King Eiddileg, are somewhat accidental antagonists. When the companions are sucked into their underground kingdom by mistake, the Fair Folk take them prisoner and bring them before the sarcastic King Eiddileg, who is not fond of humans and at first believes that they have ulterior motives. (p. 97) (4. f. 4.m.) He finally agrees to let them go, but neglects to mention that he has Hen Wen, even after hearing their story. (4.b. 4.c.) At last they are able to win him over, and in the end, though he complains constantly, he even provides them with provisions, weapons, and sends Doli with them as a guide. (p. 103)

Dallben

Dallben the enchanter is only antagonistic in the beginning of the story in the way any authority figure is at one time or another to an impatient boy dreaming of heroism. He keeps Taran tending the vegetables and caring for Hen Wen when Taran would much rather be learning swordplay and having adventures. (p. 12) (4.b. 4.c.) Dallben does this for Taran's own good, and by the end of the story Taran has come to appreciate the humbler duties which he once scorned and longs to return home. (p. 126) (4.m.)

NOTES:

Questions about Structure: Conflict and Plot

What does the protagonist want? (Question 5)

This story is about Taran trying to find Hen Wen and warn the Sons of Don about the Horned King's army. (5.a.) In the beginning, he sets out to find Hen Wen when she escapes, to fulfill his duty as Assistant Pig-Keeper. When he meets Gwydion, their paths converge, as Gwydion is also seeking Hen Wen. However, when they lose her trail and are separated at Spiral Castle and he believes Gwydion dead, Taran decides that he must journey to Caer Dathyl to warn the Sons of Don of the Horned King's army. (5.f.)

Why can't he have it? (Question 6)

Taran's quest is primarily a physical one, as it takes him across most of Prydain. (6.a.)

There is a definite Man v. Man struggle between Taran and the servants of Arawn, particularly the Cauldron-Born and the Horned King. (6.g.) However, there is also a Man v. Himself struggle, as Taran is forced to readjust his preconceived notions of heroism and the nature of evil. (6.k.) The latter is demonstrated in the case of the wounded gwythaint, and Taran's realization that the birds themselves are not evil, but only the product of evil treatment. His decision to treat the bird's injuries is symbolic of his personal growth. (p. 109)

What other problems are there in the story? (Question 7)

Besides the obvious difficulties presented by the servants of Arawn, there are a number of other difficulties encountered by Taran and his companions in the course of their journey. Often the terrain is rough, and it is nature itself which stands in their way:

"During the night, however, a gale rose, and by morning a drenching rain beat into the cleft. Instead of slackening, the wind gained in force and screamed over the rocks. It beat like a fist against the travelers' shelter, then pried with searching fingers, as if to seize and dash them into the valley." (p.92)

Their stop in Medwyn's valley provides them with much-needed rest and refreshment, but it is there that Taran is most tempted to turn aside from his purpose. Later, they are trapped in the underground kingdom of the Fair Folk and time is lost while they try to convince King Eiddileg to let them go. (7.a.)

Though Taran's quest begins simply as a search for a pig, he quickly becomes embroiled in the larger conflict taking place in Prydain and the immediate threat of the Horned King and his army. (7.c.)

How is the main problem solved? (Question 9)

Taran does at last fulfill his original purpose of finding Hen Wen, though the final glory of defeating the Horned King and averting war belongs to Gwydion. In the end, the conflict is resolved through the combined efforts of all the companions. (9.a. 9.e)

How does the story end? (Question 10)

There are several questions left unanswered at the end of *The Book of Three*, but, as it is the first book in a series, this is to be expected. While the immediate conflicts are resolved by the defeat of the Horned King and Hen Wen's safe return to Caer Dallben, there are greater issues at hand which hint at more to come. (10.a.)

By the end of the story Taran has experienced the life of adventure he longed for in the beginning, but realizes that he misses the simplicity of his old life and the peace of Caer Dallben:

"In spite of all that has befallen me, I have come to love the valleys and mountains of your northern lands. But my thoughts have turned more and more to Caer Dallben. I long to be home." (p. 126)

Though he is glad to return home, however, he finds it smaller, and not quite as he remembered it – which, as Dallben tells him, is only a sign of his own growth. (p. 129) He is merely one step closer to adulthood. (10.d.)

For Eilonwy and Gurgi, neither of whom has ever had a settled home, Caer Dallben is a place of refuge and comfort to welcome them at their journey's end. (10.d.)

At its heart, *The Book of Three* is a coming of age story. Taran is not satisfied with himself at the end, and sees only his own errors, a sure sign of growing maturity. In the final chapter Dallben tells him,

"Though what you say may be true, you have cause for a certain pride nevertheless. It was you who held the companions together and led them. You did what you set out to do, and Hen Wen is safely back with us. If you made mistakes, you recognize them. As I told you, there are times when the seeking counts more than the finding." (p.128) (10.f.)

NOTES:

Questions about Structure: Theme

What does the protagonist learn? (Question 11)

Taran begins his journey with unrealistic ideas about the nature of heroism. When he first meets Gwydion in the forest he is disappointed to find him clad in simple, travel-stained clothing.

"As Gwydion helped him rise, Taran still stared in disbelief at the simple attire and the worn, lined face. From all Dallben had told him of this glorious hero, from all he had pictured to himself--Taran bit his lips." (p. 18)

Similarly, when he learns of Coll's heroic past, his response is one of amazement. "Coll? A hero? But...he's so bald!" (p. 23) As his journey progresses and he experiences the realities of cold, hunger, weariness, and fear, he comes to respect and value his heroes more deeply for their inner qualities of courage, wisdom and resilience. In the end, when Dallben asks Taran what he thinks of being a hero, Taran's reply reveals that he does not think of himself that way, and he credits his companions with the heroic acts he would have liked to have accomplished himself. "As for me, what I mostly did was make mistakes." (p. 128) He has gained humility. (11.a. 11.e.)

Throughout his journey, Taran must learn to see past appearances, not only where his heroes are concerned, but with the other characters he encounters. Achren, for example, appears both beautiful and kind at first. Her touch is soothing, and Taran begins to tell her about his quest, until he is warned of her true nature by Gwydion. (p. 38) In her rage at Gwydion's defiance, she reveals her cruelty and vindictiveness. The opposite of this is his treatment of the creature Gurgi. At first repelled by his appearance and odor, Taran learns to value his courage and simplicity when Gurgi offers to sacrifice himself when he is wounded and the companions are trying to outrun the Cauldron-Born. Likewise, in the case of the wounded gwythaint, Taran exercises his new-found compassion by tending it's wounds and nursing it back to health. (11.b.)

What do the other characters learn? (Question 12)

Gurgi's evolution as a character mirrors Taran's. In the beginning, their distaste is mutual, and Taran's value for his life affects Gurgi as much as Gurgi's offer of sacrifice affects Taran. As Medwyn says, "Gurgi's misfortune is that he is neither one thing nor the other, at the moment. He has lost the wisdom of animals and has not gained the learning of men. Therefore, both shun him. Were he to do something purposeful, it would mean much to him." (p. 86) The companions, by treating him as an equal member of their company, gain his unfailing loyalty, and he gains a sense of purpose. (12.a. 12.b. 12. c.)

Through the course of the story, Gwydion comes to value Taran, in spite of his youth and impulsiveness, for his courage and determination in his quest. In the end, he rewards him with the gift of the stallion Melynlas, of the same lineage as his own horse, Melyngar. (12. c.)

What is the main idea of the story? (Question 13)

At its heart, *The Book of Three* is a coming of age story, but it also handles themes of loyalty, honor, and human integrity. Through the story's exploration of the nature of heroism, Alexander emphasizes the importance of courage, loyalty, and compassion in life. (13.a. 13.d.)

NOTES:

Questions about Style: Literary Devices

Does the author use the sounds of our language to create interest in his story? (Question 14)

Alexander frequently employs the sound and rhythm of the words to enhance the narrative, often through the individual voices of the characters. Hen Wen's favorite utterance, "Hwoinch!" is a great example of Onomatopoeia, (14.a) and she is also frequently described as "grunting and chuckling to herself". (14.b.)

Gurgi, more than any other character, uses Alliteration and Rhyme frequently, whether it is to ask for his favorite "crunchings and munchings" (used throughout the story) or to refer to his weapons. "He has a grinding gasher and a pointed piercer! He is ready for great fightings and smitings!" (p. 113) (14.e. 14.f.)

Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader's mind? (Question 16)

Alexander creates highly effective imagery throughout the story, using well-placed and carefully chosen verbs, adverbs, and adjectives, together with a use of smells, to paint word pictures of scenes and characters.(16.a. 16.b. 16.c.)

"Approaching the Eagle Mountains, Taran felt his burden lighten, as he inhaled the spicy scent of pine." (p. 79)

"Against the westering sun, the long shadows of the horsemen reached across the hill slope toward the flatlands where the small troop struggled onward." (p. 76)

"...a bag smelling strongly of onions was jammed over his head." (p. 96)

"Here the air was gentler, without the tooth of the wind; the grass spread rich and tender before him." (p. 83)

"A blinding flash split the air in front of him. Lightning seared his arm and he was thrown violently to the ground." (p.118)

He uses a choice selection of similes to enhance his descriptive passages. (16.d.)

"The sky had grown as thick and gray as lead." (p.113)

"The gwythaint hung like a crumpled black ragÉ" (p. 109)

"His great shock of bright yellow hair burst out in all directions, like a ragged sun." (p. 58)

"Raspings and shriekings, like sword points dragged over stones." (p. 53)

Eilonwy single-handedly produces a steady stream of inventive similes. (16. d)

"...it's like handing them a toad..." (p. 47)

"...it makes my nose feel like a melted icicle." (p. 57)

"...that's like putting caterpillars in somebody's hair." (p. 58)

"That would be like asking someone to dinner and then roasting him." (p. 88) "It's like counting stones in a wall." (p. 120)

Alexander adds depth with personification. (16.e. 16. g.)

"...the wind...screamed over the rocks. It beat like a fist against the travelers' shelter, then pried with searching fingers, as if to seize and dash them into the valley." (p. 92)

NOTES:

Questions about Context: The Author's Life and Times

Who is the author? Where and When did the author live? (Questions 18, 19 and 20)

Lloyd Chudley Alexander was born on January 30th, 1924, in Philadelphia, PA. (18.a. 19.a. 20.a.) Though neither of his parents cared remotely for books, he developed an early fondness for Arthurian legend and mythology of all kinds, as well as the work of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. When, at the age of fifteen, he announced that he wanted to become a writer, his parents did not take the news well and instead insisted that he take a job as a bank messenger. (18.f.) However, far from neglecting his writing as a result of his new job, he used his experiences as a bank messenger to inform his first semi-autobiographical novel, *And Let the Credit Go*, which he published in 1955.

In 1943 Alexander enlisted in the U.S. Army, and was sent to Wales for training. This was during the height of WWII. (18.f. 20.b.) It was then that he first became enthralled by the atmosphere of Wales and its legends, which would find their way into his later novels, particularly the *Prydain Chronicles*. In his memoir, *My Love Affair With Music*, published in 1960, he wrote of Wales, "It seemed I recognized faces from all the hero tales of my childhood. Not until years afterwards did I realize I had been given, without my knowing, a glimpse of another enchanted kingdom."

After the conclusion of WWII, he was sent to Paris to work in counterintelligence, and it was there that he met Janine Denni. They were married in 1946, and in 1947 Alexander returned to Pennsylvania with his wife and young step-daughter and settled in the Drexel Hill area. He worked in a variety of publishing-related jobs and published several novels for adults. He finally found his niche writing juvenile fiction in 1963, with the publication of his novel, *Time Cat*. It was while doing research for a section of that novel that he revisited the Welsh mythology, and namely the collection of legends known as *The Mabinogion*, which would become the framework for the land of *Prydain* and its inhabitants.

Alexander published *The Book of Three* in 1964, at the age of 40. (18. c.) In it, and in the subsequent *Prydain* novels, though they are fantasy, he revisits his time in Wales as a young man, and the threat of war. (20.c. 20.d.) Through his novels he confronts the dangers of tyranny and oppression. His world-view is probably best conveyed in his own words. In his Newbery acceptance speech in 1969 (for *The High King*) he said, "In whatever guise -- our own daily nightmares of war, intolerance, inhumanity, or the struggles of an Assistant Pig-Keeper against the Lord of Death -- the problems are agonizingly familiar, and an openness to compassion, love, and mercy is as essential to us here and now as it is to any inhabitant of an imaginary kingdom."

Alexander died of cancer in 2007 at the age of 83, just two weeks after the death of his wife Janine. (20. a.)

Suggested Essay Assignments

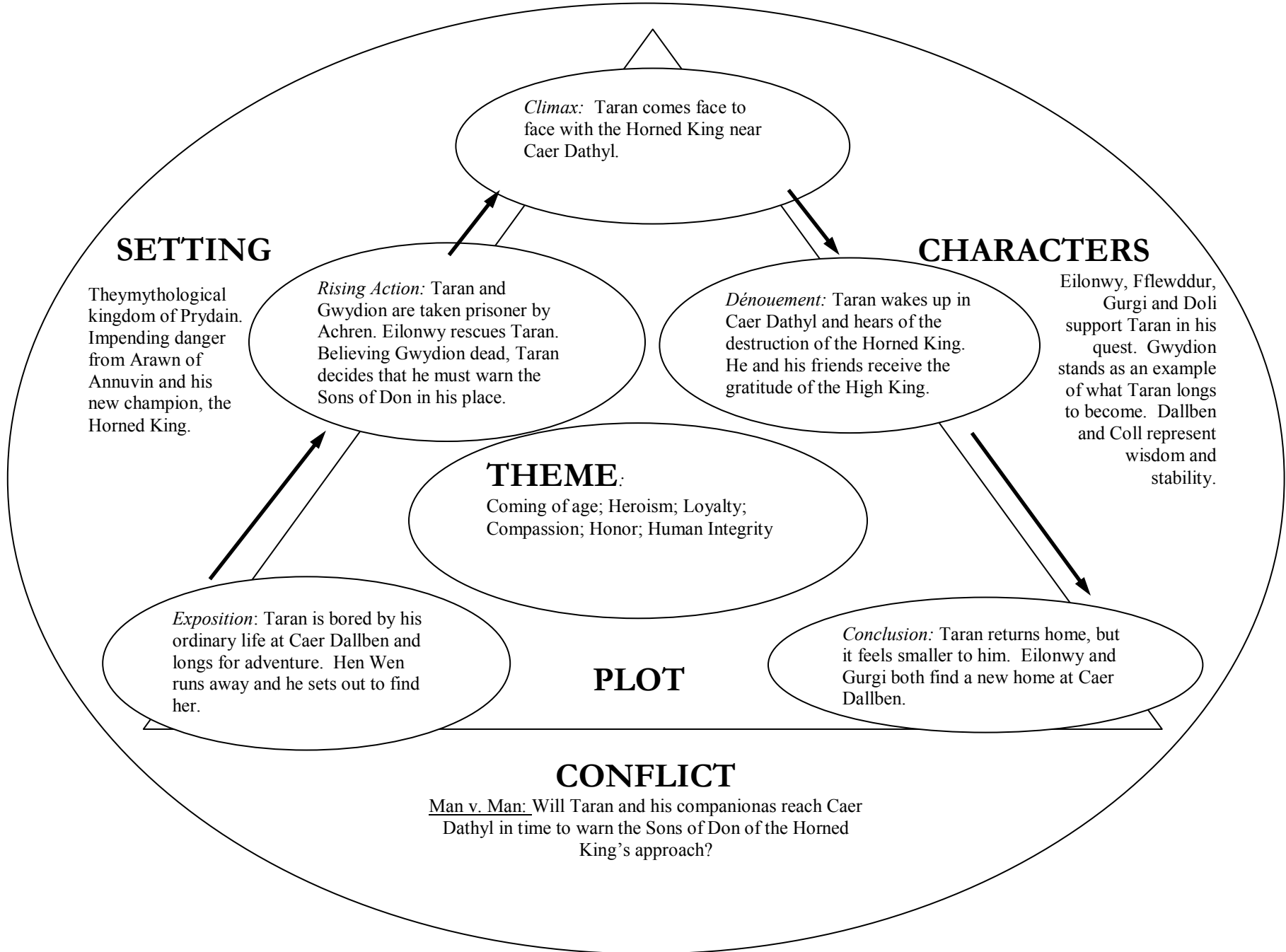
1. How does Lloyd Alexander define heroism in the story?
2. Alexander said, "In whatever guise -- our own daily nightmares of war, intolerance, inhumanity, or the struggles of an Assistant Pig-Keeper against the Lord of Death -- the problems are agonizingly familiar, and an openness to compassion, love, and mercy is as essential to us here and now as it is to any inhabitant of an imaginary kingdom." How does Alexander use the story to illustrate this philosophy?
3. Which character in the story did you relate to the most? Why? How is his/her struggle relevant to life in the world of today?
4. Research Welsh legend. Compare and contrast the characters and events with their counterparts in *The Book of Three*.
5. At the end of the story Dallben tells Taran that sometimes "the seeking counts more than the finding." What do you think he means? Do you agree?
6. What is the most important theme of *The Book of Three*? Why? Use examples from the text.

Story Charts

The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander: Story Chart



The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander: Story Chart

