

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander

Book Information

Lloyd Alexander, The Book of Three

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Interest Level: MG

Taran sets out with some strangely assorted companions to save his beloved land.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts

Topics: Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Recommended Reading, Oprah's Book Club - Kids Reading List; Series, Chronicles of Prydain

Main Characters

Achren an evil enchantress who lives in Spiral Castle and associates with Arawn

Arawn the evil King of Annvin, the Land of the Dead, who wishes to conquer Prydain

Coll a man who works at Caer Dallben; he is in charge of Taran's education

Dallben an old enchanter who is the master of Caer Dallben

Doli a member of the Fair Folk who helps lead Taran and the others to Caer Dathyl

Eilonwy the young niece of Achren who is being trained as an enchantress but wishes to escape from her evil aunt's castle

Fflewddur the king of a small kingdom who prefers travelling and barding

Gurgi a hairy creature who is neither an animal nor a human; he speaks in rhyme

Hen Wen an oracular pig that lives in Caer Dallben; Taran has been given the responsibility to take care of her

Medwyn a man who lives in a peaceful valley which only animals can find

Prince Gwydion the son and war leader of the High King of Prydain

Taran a young boy who works as the Assistant Pig-Keeper at Caer Dallben and dreams of becoming a warrior

the Cauldron-Born the evil warriors of Arawn who cannot be killed

the Horned King an evil war lord who has joined forces with Arawn

Vocabulary

barrow an ancient burial site

brandished waved threateningly in the air

crestfallen disappointed

foraging raiding or searching in order to find provisions

leagued united or having joined forces

oracular able to give advice and foresee the future

Synopsis

Taran is a young boy who is being raised by the hero Coll and the enchanter Dallben at Caer Dallben in the Land of Prydain. Taran dreams of becoming a great warrior like Prince Gwydion. To appease the boy's desires, Coll names him the Assistant Pig-Keeper of Caer Dallben. Although this is not a glorious title, it does mean Taran must care for and keep track of Hen Wen, an oracular pig. Hen Wen has the power to communicate, through letter sticks, with those who know how to ask.

One day Dallben warns Taran that King Arawn, the Lord of Annvin, has a new evil war lord, the Horned King. The Horned King has entered Prydain and Taran must not leave Caer Dallben for any reason. Later that day the bees begin to swarm and the chickens fly away. Something appears to be amiss at Caer Dallben. Taran quickly runs to get Hen Wen and finds the pig frantically trying to dig itself out of its pen. When Hen Wen gets loose, Taran chases after her.

Despite his effort to catch Hen Wen, Taran is too slow and becomes lost in the woods. He then sees the Horned King and his men in the forest. Taran hides in the underbrush where Prince Gwydion finds

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him. Taran tells Gwydion that he was searching for Hen Wen. Gwydion is disappointed because he had come seeking Hen Wen also. Gwydion agrees to allow Taran to travel with him but warns him not to hinder his effort. The two head out seeking Hen Wen while trying to avoid the Horned King and his forces. Along the way they come across Gurgi, a hairy, smelly creature who has knowledge of happenings in Prydain. Gurgi joins them and the three travel on. It is not long before Arawn's spies, the gwythaints, spot them and try to attack. Based on the reports of the gwythaints, Arawn's Cauldron-Born warriors capture Taran and Gwydion and take them to Spiral Castle, the home of the evil enchantress Achren.

Achren separates Taran from Gwydion and puts him in a cell in the castle. While in the cell, Taran is visited by Achren's playful niece Eilonwy. Eilonwy, knowing the layout of the tunnel system under the castle, helps Taran escape. As they are leaving, they discover an old barrow of jewels, robes, jars, swords, and weapons. Eilonwy takes a sword from the pile, and no sooner do they exit the tunnels than the castle crumbles and collapses.

Outside the castle ruins, Taran discovers that Eilonwy has saved a man named Fflewddur from the cells of the castle, mistakenly thinking he was Gwydion. Believing that Gwydion must have perished in the castle's collapse, Taran decides to head for Caer Dathyl to warn the Sons of Don that the Horned King is headed their way. By allowing Melyngar, Gwydion's horse, to lead the way, they reach Medwyn, a man who can communicate with all the animals of the kingdom. Medwyn allows the group to stay the night with him and in the morning gives them directions to find Caer Dathyl.

The group again sets out, following Medwyn's directions. On the journey the group tries to cross a lake and thus shorten their trip. In their attempt they are all sucked into a whirlpool that brings them to an underground world, the Kingdom of the Fair Folk. The leader, King Eiddileg, does not want to let them go but eventually agrees when Eilonwy calls him selfish. Before they leave, the group learns that Hen

Wen is also in the Kingdom of the Fair Folk. They persuade King Eiddileg to let Hen Wen go with them. King Eiddileg sends Doli, a Fair Folk, to guide them to Caer Dathyl.

The group travels for a day and, the next morning, finds an injured young gwythaint. Taran feels sorry for the animal and decides to make a cage and take the bird along with him. Taran awakes the next morning to find the bird is gone. The group then sets out again and come upon the Horned King and his men. Determined to warn Caer Dathyl of the Horned King's presence, Taran and Eilonwy try to rush through the armed encampment. They fight bravely until they encounter the Horned King himself. Taran then tries to unsheath the sword Eilonwy had taken from the barrow in Spiral Castle. He is injured by a curse on the sword and, before passing out, sees the Horned King burst into flame.

Taran awakes to find himself at Caer Dathyl. The others come in to tell him the results of the battle. Prince Gwydion reveals that after he escaped from captivity, he destroyed the Horned King by using the king's secret name, which Hen Wen had revealed to him. Gwydion rewards all the travellers for their valor. He gives Taran his choice of rewards. Taran chooses to return to Caer Dallben. Prince Gwydion then takes him home. When they arrive, Taran seeks permission to invite Eilonwy to stay at Caer Dallben and Eilonwy accepts the offer.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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Initial Understanding

Medwyn is very similar to Noah from the Bible. What details does the book mention that indicate Noah may be the inspiration for Medwyn's character?

Taran sees a partially exposed structure in the side of the valley, far from water, that resembles the ribs of a ship. Medwyn says he is keeping the valley safe for the animals. Only animals know where his valley is located. Taran mentions the story of a man who built a ship and took two of every animal aboard to save them from a great flood.

Literary Analysis

The Book of Three is clearly a fantasy, or a fictitious story that includes many things that could not happen. What are some clues from the book that indicate this is a fantasy?

There are many instances of impossible ideas, events, or people. Dallben is said to be 379 years old, and Hen Wen is said to be able to communicate with humans. It is said that the Cauldron-Born cannot be killed. Spiral Castle is destroyed because a sword is removed from it. Gurgi is described as half-human, half-animal. The Horned King is destroyed by Gwydion using his secret name. There is an underground land of dwarfs. Dallben, Gwydion, and Eilonwy are said to have the powers to cast spells, etc.

Inferential Comprehension

When Taran returns home he is troubled because he feels like a stranger in his own home. Dallben explains to him that it is because he has grown bigger, not because his home has grown smaller. What does Dallben mean by this? How will this adventure change Taran in the future?

Taran has experienced a great adventure. He has learned to make decisions and to think of more than just himself. He seems to have learned that being a warrior and travelling to distant places is not what he had envisioned them to be. Taran will likely be more appreciative of his home. He will probably take his job more seriously and try to listen and learn more from Dallben and Coll.

Constructing Meaning

Taran is disappointed when he first meets Prince Gwydion because the prince is not wearing fancy clothes. Can you relate to this experience? When have you been disappointed by a first impression? Why were you disappointed?

Students will have varying answers to this question. They may share an experience of disappointment when they met a movie star, sports star, or other famous person. Often these people are not as glamorous or magnificent as the student envisioned they would be.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Characterization The author gives very clear descriptions of what most of the characters look like. The descriptions are intended to build clear images in the reader's mind. Have the students reread the author's descriptions of his characters. Then have them apply this to their own writing by having them practice writing character descriptions. Have students choose famous people to describe and then exchange descriptions to determine if their classmates can identify the person based on the description.

Comparing and Contrasting The author's note mentions that his story is based on some legends, primarily Welsh mythology, but that it is still fictitious. Have the students research the heroes and deities of Welsh and Celtic mythology and compare them to the characters in the story. Have the students make a chart comparing the heroes and deities from these legends to the characters in the story.

Recognizing Feelings A song that Fflewddur plays on his harp makes Eilonwy and Taran think of and long for their homes. Music can often elicit strong feelings from a listener. Have the students listen to a variety of musical pieces and ask them to express how it makes them feel. Ask the students to share some of their favorite music and explain how it makes them feel or what it

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makes them think of.

Responding to Literature After the adventure is over and the Horned King is destroyed, King Math bestows a gift upon each of the people who helped save his kingdom. Ask the students to share what they might wish to receive as a reward for a good deed. Have them assess their idea and write a one-page paper explaining why they chose what they did.