QUESTIONS

1. “Big Question” Quickwrite: What is your ultimate loyalty?

One of the most important components of the medieval code of chivalry was the requirement that a knight be loyal to his king and country. In *Le Morte d’Arthur*, Sir Launcelot, King Arthur’s most exemplary knight falls in love with the king’s wife and faces a crisis of loyalty of epic proportions.

Loyalty is still a highly valued human quality, one that sometimes requires personal sacrifice. Make a list of individuals or groups to whom you owe some loyalty. Review your list, then write a paragraph to explain which person or group is the one you would not abandon under any circumstances.

2. Read the background information on page 246-247. Imagine that you are directing a movie about the main characters: Sir Gawain, Sir Launcelot, and King Arthur. Based on the background information provided, what traits would you want the actors playing each character to be able to portray?

Sir Gawain
Actor:
Traits:

Sir Launcelot
Actor:
Traits:

King Arthur
Actor:
Traits:

3. Conflict: Reread lines 1-6 and the background note. How have Launcelot’s past actions set the stage for his current conflict with King Arthur?

4. Revisit the “Big Question”: In lines 22-33, how do Launcelot and Arthur show mutual loyalty, even when they are at war against each other?

5. Conflict: What internal conflict does Arthur reveal in lines 34-42? How does it motivate his decision?

6. Analyze Viewpoints: Note Gawain’s declaration “Surely our honor demands that we pursue this war to its proper conclusion” (38-39). Discuss the merits and limitations of Gawain’s view, including modern instances in which such a view has been debated.

7. Synthesize: Gawain does not challenge Launcelot until six months after Arthur’s forces first laid siege to the city (64-80). Why does Gawain make the challenge at this point?

8. Revisit the “Big Question”: How does Launcelot display loyalty to King Arthur during the fight scene in lines 110-117?

9. In what ways does Launcelot exemplify the ideals of chivalry in lines 138-148?

10. Conflict: The conflict between Modred and the Archbishop of Canterbury (lines 170-178) can be seen in thematic terms as a conflict between worldly (secular) and religious (sacred) power.
A. Why side seems more powerful? Why?
B. What contemporary conflicts exist between the secular and the sacred?

11. Analyze Visuals: William Morris was a designer and artist who was heavily influenced by medieval arts and crafts. What details in this image (page 255) suggest Gwynevere’s emotional state?

12. Revisit the “Big Question”: In lines 161-174, what irony might readers detect in Queen Gwynevere’s show of loyalty to King Arthur, which is supported by the Archbishop?

13. Interpret Arthur’s dream (255-260) and subsequent vision (262-271). Consider the following questions when making your interpretation: What is the significance of the well, of Arthur’s fall into it, and of the creatures that tear him apart?; Why does the vision include ladies whom Gawain has championed?; Why is Gawain an appropriate messenger of important news for Arthur?; By including the dream and the vision, what is Malory telling the reader?

14. Conflict: What motivates Arthur’s decision to fight Modred despite Sir Bedivere’s advice?

15. Analyze Visuals: What elements of the image on page 259 help convey the ferocity of the battle between Arthur and Modred?

16. Conflict: What internal conflict does Sir Bedivere experience in lines 343-360? How does he ultimately resolve it?

17. Explore the roles that chance and choice play in Le Morte d'Arthur by creating a two-column chart.

Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Chance” Events</th>
<th>“Choice” Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A snake bites a soldier.</td>
<td>Modred agrees to a truce.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18. Analyze and Evaluate: Medieval romance features larger-than-life or idealized characters; exotic settings; the supernatural; hidden or mistaken identity; and heroes motivated by love, faith, honor, or a desire for adventure. In contrast, realism shows people and situations more as they might be in real life. Review the scenes of the final battle and its aftermath.
A. Which elements of these scenes are romantic?
B. Which elements are realistic?
C. Is the mixture of realism and romance effective? Explain.

19. The end of Le Morte d'Arthur implies that Arthur someday will return to lead England to greatness – although the narrator explicitly says that he does not believe it. Consider the function and effect of this prophecy:
A. What does the prophecy contribute to the ending? What would the ending be like without it?
B. What is there about King Arthur that makes him appropriate as the subject of such a prophecy?
C. Malory obviously wanted to include the prophecy; why, then did he add a statement of disbelief? Does that statement make the ending less effective, or more so?

20. Critical Interpretations: One critic has suggested that when “confronted by a need to make a decision in a moment of crisis,” Arthur “invariably chooses the wrong course of action” because he is unable or unwilling to see the situation as it really is. Think about the various conflicts, both internal and external, that Arthur struggles with in the selection, and consider the important decisions he makes. Do you agree or disagree that he “invariably chooses the wrong course of action”? Cite evidence from the text to support your opinion.