

BOOKNOTES

READERS GUIDE

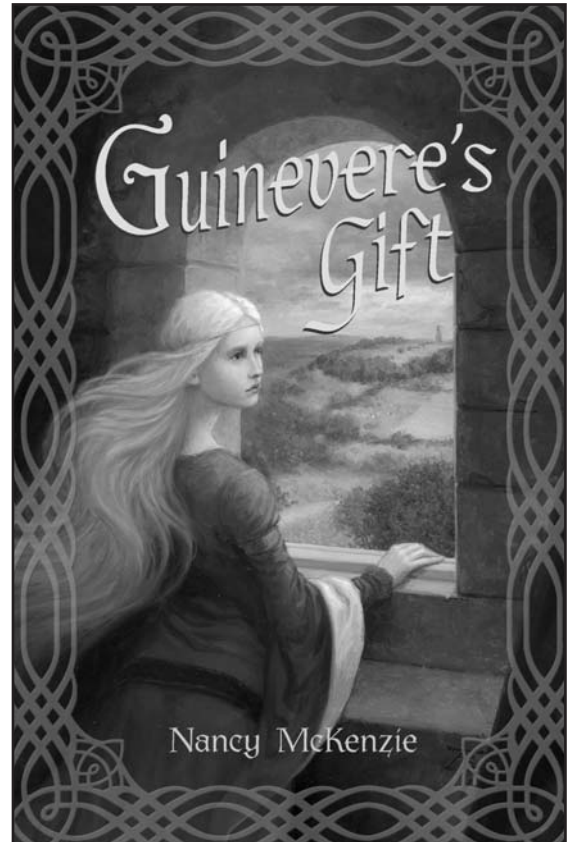
thematic connections

Myths, Legends & Folklore
Coming-of-Age
Fate • Family

Grades 5–9

about the book

Guinevere has found a home in the court of King Pellinore and Queen Alyse following the death of her father. Life is not easy at the castle with Pellinore gone to help the new king, Arthur. For one thing, Guinevere stands in the shadow of Princess Elaine. She must be careful and know her place in the palace hierarchy. Queen Alyse knows the prophecy about Guinevere well. Although Guinevere does not hold to this foolish prophecy, she knows it makes those around her uneasy. With Pellinore gone, predators disguised as friends seek to take over the castle and imprison those who live there. Guinevere must demonstrate her courage and intellect to help the people who have come to be her family.



Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-84345-7 (0-375-84345-0)
GLB: 978-0-375-94345-4 (0-375-94345-5)

**The first book in a
quartet about Guinevere—
before she became
queen to Arthur.**

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Alfred A. Knopf



pre-reading activity

The title of the novel suggests that Guinevere possesses some sort of gift. Think about the meaning of this title. What sort of gift might be the subject of the title? Remember that a gift can be some sort of concrete object, but it also might refer to a special talent Guinevere has. Before you read, brainstorm possible gifts that Guinevere possesses and how such gifts could prove useful to the young woman pictured on the cover of the book.

questions for

- Queen Alyse tells her daughter Elaine that “knowledge is power.” (p. 19) As you read the story, note instances that prove this observation to be true. Do you agree or disagree with this quote?
- Several characters must make difficult decisions through the course of the novel. Discuss the choices made by Guinevere and Llyr to go to the Hillmen for assistance, Marcus’s decision to return to Queen Alyse and Regis, and Elaine’s choice to meet Sir Darric in the woods outside the castle. Which decisions are foolhardy? Dangerous? Necessary?
- Guinevere’s name can be translated as “white shadow.” This is a literary device known as an oxymoron, two words that seem to contradict one another and yet are used together. How can a shadow be white? What might this translation of Guinevere’s name mean in terms of the prophecy about her future? What meaning does it have for the life she leads at the castle of Pellinore and Alyse?
- There are many themes that emerge from the tale of Guinevere’s childhood. These themes center on love, revenge, fate, and family. Find examples in the story that illustrate the preceding themes.



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group discussion

- Guinevere observes about Liam that he, like the other servants, could survive only by their non-involvement. (p. 223) What does this observation mean? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- At the beginning of the novel, Guinevere is aware only that there is a prophecy about her future. However, she does not know the full prophecy. How does this lack of knowledge foreshadow Guinevere's ability to make choices without having all the information she needs at hand?
- Many stories that come from traditional sources contain archetypes. What examples of the following can you locate in the novel:
 - An older wiser person who offers advice to a younger one?
 - A young person who is wise beyond her or his years?
 - Someone who poses as a friend but is really a foe?
- Can you think of other stories you have read that also contain some of these archetypal characters?
- On page 248, Queen Alyse prays that she will not have to choose between her kingdom and her daughter. What does this prayer reveal about the true nature of the queen?
- At the end of the novel, Guinevere hopes that one day she will meet the knight who trained her horse. What does this desire portend about Guinevere's future?

journal writing

Chapter 29 tells of the rescue of Elaine from her kidnappers. How would the major characters involved in the rescue relate the story differently? Have students write a journal entry Elaine might have composed describing the events of the rescue. Next, have them write the rescue from Guinevere's point of view. Journal entries could also be written from the perspectives of Llyr and Marcus.

a fresh take on familiar characters

Take the discussion a step further by having students read *Salome* by Beatrice Gormley and *Nobody's Princess* by Esther Friesner.



Compare and contrast the covers of *Guinevere's Gift*, *Salome*, and *Nobody's Princess*. What do these three women seem to have in common? What might separate them?

What commonalities are shared by the main characters from *Salome*, *Nobody's Princess*, and *Guinevere's Gift*? How do Salome, Helen of Troy, and Guinevere deal with all the difficulties that they must face in their childhood and into adulthood?

related titles

by theme

Nobody's Princess

Esther Friesner

Myths, Legends & Folklore
Ancient Worlds • Adventure

Grades 7–11

Random House trade PB: 978-0-375-87529-8 (0-375-87529-8)

Random House HC: 978-0-375-87528-1 (0-375-87528-X)

GLB: 978-0-375-97528-8 (0-375-97528-4)

Salome

Beatrice Gormley

Ancient Worlds • Growing Up

Grades 7 up

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-83908-5 (0-375-83908-9)

GLB: 978-0-375-93908-2 (0-375-93908-3)

Quicksilver

Stephanie Spinner

Myths, Legends & Folklore
Ancient Worlds • Adventure

Grades 7–11

Laurel-Leaf PB: 978-0-440-23845-4 (0-440-23845-5)

Alfred A. Knopf HC: 978-0-375-82638-2 (0-375-82638-6)

GLB: 978-0-375-92638-9 (0-375-92638-0)

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about the author

Nancy McKenzie is the author of several novels based on Arthurian tales. *Guinevere's Gift* is her first novel for young adults. She lives in Danbury, Connecticut.

internet resources

Wikipedia

en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guinevere

This entry contains information about many aspects of the story of Guinevere including her appearance in popular culture.

The Camelot Project

www.lib.rochester.edu/Camelot/guinmenu.htm

An extensive list of texts in which Guinevere appears, works of art depicting her, and a lengthy bibliography may be found here.

The Page o' Guinevere

www.uidaho.edu/student_orgs/arthurian_legend/ladies/gwen/gwen.htm

The Guinevere Home Page is a hypertext document that traces Guinevere in the variations of the Arthurian legend. The text linkages run from 500 CE to the present retellings of her story by contemporary authors.

Arthurian Legend

www.arthurian-legend.com/more-about/more-about-arthur-9.php

Queen Guinevere and her role in the Arthurian legend are described at this Web site. Links include information about Arthur, Lancelot, and the quest for the Holy Grail.