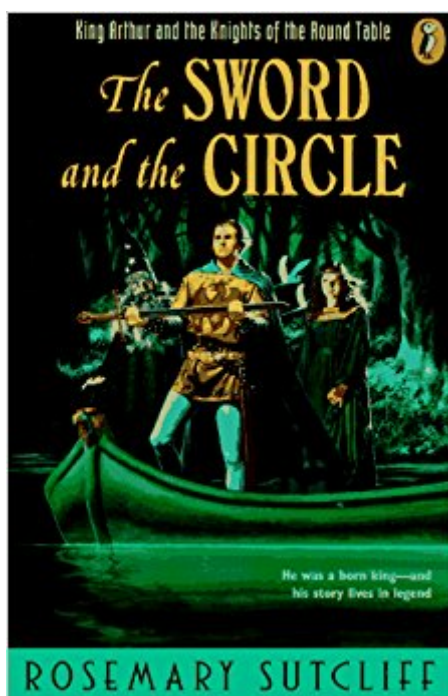


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# The Sword And The Circle: King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table



## Synopsis

His kingdom was magical, his knights were loyal, and his life was filled with adventure. . .

. . . Young Arthur Pendragon became High King of England the instant he pulled the mysterious sword from within the stone. He unlocked the magic within the sword Excalibur, and won the heart of the Lady Guenever. At his side through quests and adventures were the Knights of the Round Table—among Gawain, who faced certain death at the hands of the Green Knight; Percival, who learned that it took more than a victory on horseback to win a place at the Round Table; and Lancelot, who daily felt a passion he was forced to hide. And over them all ruled Arthur, true King. . .

"Stands far beyond any Arthurian collection for young readers."—Times Literary Supplement  
"Other than Malory, I can think of no better introduction to the whole sweep of Arthurian stories."—School Library Journal, starred review

## Book Information

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Age Range: 10 and up

Grade Level: 5 and up

## Customer Reviews

Rosemary Sutcliff wrote more than 40 historical novels for young adults—including *The Eagle of the Ninth*, *The Silver Branch*, *The Lantern Bearers*, *The Sword and the Circle*, and *Black Ships Before Troy*—five adult novels, and several books of nonfiction.

Well we needed this for an in-depth literature class, and the book itself is fine, it's just that the printing of the cover went haywire, so part of the top is cut off and the bottom has a white area- like it was shifted up during printing.

There are countless retellings and adaptations concerning the life and times of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and I'm not even close to having read all of them. Therefore, it's impossible for me to say that Rosemary Sutcliffe's version is the definitive Arthurian retelling. However, it's certainly one of the best. Told in Sutcliffe's graceful prose that is both epic and intimate when need-be, and the tricky subjects like incest, adultery and bloodshed are conveyed without being either too prudish or overly graphic. This first installment in her "King Arthur trilogy" is thicker than the next two books combined, and Sutcliffe draws on a wide range of sources with which to build her own narrative. Beginning with Merlin's boyhood and his activities at Tintagel, Sutcliffe goes on to the circumstances of Arthur's birth as outlined in Geoffrey Monmouth's *The History of the Kings of Britain*, giving us her account of his birth, fosterage, and eventual crowning when only just fifteen. From Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur* she brings in the love triangle between Arthur, Lancelot and Guenever, Arthur's struggle to establish peace in Britain, and the forming of the Knights of the Round Table. From this point, Sutcliffe moves into several other stories concerning the Knights of the Round Table, including Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (the most famous translation by Tolkien: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Pearl, Sir Orfeo) the Kitchen Knight (also one of my favourite picture books by Trina Schart Hyman: *The Kitchen Knight: A Tale of King Arthur*) and perhaps the best rendering of the tale of Tristan and Iseult there is (it almost deserves to be its own book). Merlin and Morgan le Fey drop out of the story surprisingly quickly, and most of it is concerned with knight's errands and love stories, most of which can be read out of order, for this is not a novel so much as it is a compilation of stories. It can be rather difficult at times to keep track of all the interwoven stories that double-back and twist about and get steadily more complex as each chapter goes on. "The Sword and the Circle" is followed by two sequels, "The Light Beyond the Forest," which recounts the search for the Holy Grail, and "The Road to Camlann" which concludes the trilogy with the destruction of Camelot and the disbandment of the Knights of the Round Table. I'd recommend tracking down the three-in-one version: *King Arthur Stories*. The amount of story that Sutcliffe is trying to get across means that characterization beyond broad brushstrokes is minimum, and often motivation is completely lost, but what she still manages to skillfully convey the depth of human emotion that is so prevalent in these legends: the longing for the divine, the pain of love, and the mindlessness of hate. Arthur is perfectly portrayed as

a man who rises to status of beloved ruler not through physical prowess, but his strength of leadership and his ability to create peaceful resolutions. Yet I got the sense that Sutcliffe was more interested in Lancelot, what with his twisted face and passionate heart. There are probably more pages dedicated to him than any other character in the entire trilogy. She also crafts the unforgettable images of Arthurian legend that seem to be known to everyone: the sword in the anvil in the churchyard, the white hand in the lake clutching Excalibur, the hall of the Round Table, the byre of Elaine floating down the river outside Camelot, Merlin sleeping under the Hawthorn tree...the list goes on, and all of it is encapsulated in her rendering of medieval Britain: the dark forests and cool lakes, standing stones and mysterious wells, castles and hermitages. Sutcliffe has created a very "pure" vision of the Arthurian story, in comparison the revisionist treatments that many authors use on the legends today (usually by giving them a feminist slant). But here we have a sense of the original story, much like the retellings/compilations by Roger Lancelyn Green and Howard Pyle, in which the knights: "take oaths that always they would defend the right, that they would be the true servants and protectors of all women, and deal justly in all things with all men, that they would strive always for the good of the kingdom of Britain and the glory of the kingdom of Logres, and that they would keep faith with each other and with God."

The book "The Sword and the Circle," is about King Arthur and his knights of the Round Table. King Arthur is a young man who was crowned King of Britain at an early age. He is a brown haired boy with a slight build, who became king at age 15. He is a king and courteous person. He was given the Round Table and 100 good-trained knights as a gift from Queen Guenevere's father. This book is mainly about King Arthur and his knights. It is based on the stories of the adventures the knights go on. Every chapter is a different adventure for a different person in the story, but all the small chapters are connected by being part of the "brotherhood," the "knights and King Arthur." I thought one very interesting part was when King Arthur went out on his own adventure and was challenged for a jousting by a knight. King Arthur could not defeat the knight, so the knight gave the High King a chance to live. The deal was if King Arthur could find the answer to a riddle, by the next year, then he would live, but if he did not find the correct answer, he would die. I really enjoyed reading this book because it was very exciting, and it was hard to put the book down. I thought the characters in the book were really admirable. They were fun, and their personalities made the book thrilling. I found the story magnificent because the characters were always going on exciting adventures. They would always come back to King Arthur's Court and share their story with everyone. It was fascinating to learn that King Arthur invited strangers into his castle. He trusted everyone, and

anyone that needed shelter was invited to come into the castle. In conclusion, I really enjoyed this book and I think anyone would if they like adventures. It was a great book!

Rosemary Sutcliff does a good job of telling the individual stories of Arthur's knights in this classic Arthurian legend. The book begins when Arthur is not yet born and ends when he and his knights embark on their infamous "Quest for the Holy Grail." It tells how Arthur came to be king and how he inherited the round table and also how the knights came to sit in their places at the table. It also includes stories like Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Lancelot and Elaine, Geraint and Enid, and The Coming of Percival. Most of the book tells of the individual stories and quests, like the ones I just mentioned, of Arthur's knights as they fight against evil knights and scoundrels. Sutcliff's ability to hold the reader's attention is generally superb, except in several passages in which she rambles on while describing a scene. The individual stories, which make up the majority of and are found in the middle of the book, are generally very interesting and well told. The beginning of the book, before Arthur's birth, was not as interesting but it was not completely boring either. This book is mainly for elementary and middle schoolers and I would not recommend it to someone who is looking for an in depth Arthurian legend. It is perfect, however, for someone who is just learning about Arthur and his knights or for a person who might already know the stories, but might just want a good book to read. I give it three stars because even though it is a good book, there are better ones out there, especially since parts of the book - the beginning and the descriptions especially - were a little dull and uninteresting. As a thirteen year old who knew the stories before I read the book, I found the book to be okay - but it is a very good book to learn the Arthurian legends from.

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