

Unit focus: Myths And Legends
Text focus: Narrative (1000L)

STAGE 6

The Faithful Hound

Centuries ago, when knights were strong and brave, there lived a man named Llywelyn the Great. Llywelyn was benevolent to all who met him and was a doting father to his son. His son wasn't the only priority, though. The brave knight adored hunting and was often to be found running his famous hunting dogs in the vales and valleys of Wales. Above all others, Llywelyn favoured one particular dog: Gelert.

For many years, Gelert hunted at his master's side and was often entrusted with some of the most important jobs around the house. It was said that, when Gelert wandered the grounds, he carried himself proudly with his head held high and his fur glossy and groomed.

That was until one fateful day in the middle of an unusually cold winter. Bitter winds and biting frosts had ravaged the land for many months, and food was growing scarce. Llywelyn the Great decided that he would lead a hunt out into the forest in the vain hope of bringing back some meat for his young family. Normally, it would have been inconceivable to head out in such weather, but desperation leads men to do desperate things, and Llywelyn was no exception. Fearing for his families safety whilst he was out, the knight left his trusty companion to guard his only heir.

For many hours, the pack traipsed through knee-deep snow. The going was tough, and the horses complained the entire time, but still, Llywelyn drove them on. He knew that without food, his family couldn't survive much longer. It wasn't until the weak, mid-winter sun reached the zenith of its arc that they finally spied a young buck frozen behind a shield of auburn foliage.

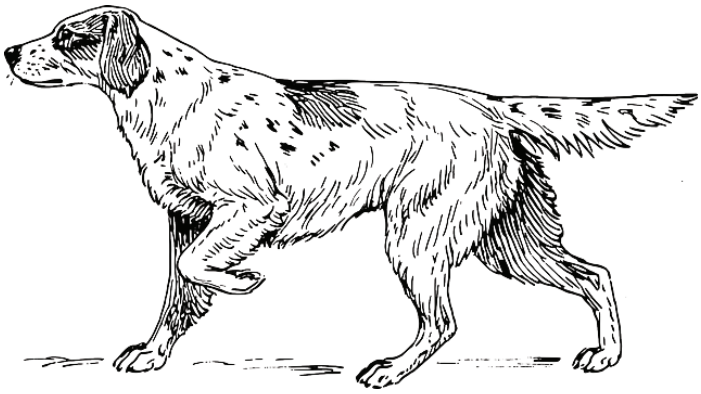
Fighting against his hunger, Llywelyn peered through the mist that formed with every shallow breath. It took all of his strength to draw back the heavy, yew bow and nock an arrow. He paused. He held his breath and said a silent prayer. For a split second, it seemed as though the deer would notice them and bolt, but it was frozen in place. Slap! The sound of the bow-string hitting the wood echoed through the silent forest, and only the dull thud of the arrow hitting the animal's hide drowned it out. The entire party let out a sigh of relief, and Llywelyn made sure to say a prayer of thanks for the fallen beast.

The mood on the journey back to the house was jubilant and seemed to pass in no time; even the snow seemed less bothersome, and some of the more youthful hunters even took to throwing snowballs at each other. It seemed like nothing could sour the mood and yet when they approached the vast front door of Llywelyn's stately house, the visage that met them did just that.

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There on the front steps was Gelert, the faithful hound. His teeth were bared, and his snout dripped with fresh, red blood. A sense of dread swept over Llywelyn, and he felt his veins fill with ice. In haste, he raced into the house and straight to his young son's bedroom. Though his crib was empty, the floor and walls were smeared with blood. There was no question in the brave knight's mind what had happened here.

Without stopping to consider the situation, Llywelyn strode back down to the front porch and approached his most trusted companion. With tears streaming down his cheeks, he drew his sword and plunged it into the dog. Despite his overwhelming grief, he fell to his knees and hugged the hound tightly while whispering sobbed apologies to both the day's victims.



From the edge of the woods that bordered the house, one of the huntsmen cried out that he had found the missing boy. Scrambling through the snow, Llywelyn raced to the trees and let out a heart-wrenching cry at what he saw. There in front of him was his son, unharmed but for a few scratches. Next to him and very dead was a large wolf, the likes of which had been killing sheep in the fields throughout the winter. As it dawned on Llywelyn what happened and, moreover, what he had done to Gelert who had remained faithful to the end, all happiness drained from his life. It is said that from that day forward, he never smiled again.

RETRIEVAL

1. How long ago does the story take place?
2. How is Gelert's fur described?
3. What is Llywelyn's bow made of?
4. What had attacked his son?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V What does "jubilant" mean?

I How do you know how Llywelyn is feeling when he kills his dog?

E Explain what noise Llywelyn made when he found his son.

S Summarise the key events of the story.

V What is a companion?

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Answers:

1. Centuries

2. Glossy and groomed

3. Yew

4. A wolf

V: Happy and carefree

I: He sobs and hugs the dog

E: A loud and painful cry or sob

S: Ensure relevant key points are summarised

V: A friend or ally

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