

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

Men of Iron

by

Howard Pyle

Book Information

Howard Pyle, Men of Iron
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This novel of pomp, pageantry, and chivalry tells the story of young Myles Falworth and how he vindicated his father and won the favor of King Henry IV.

Topics: Countries/Regions, England; History, Middle Ages/Medieval

Main Characters

Earl of Mackworth Lord Falworth's kin and former comrade, who takes Myles as a squire

Gascoyne a fellow squire who quickly befriends Myles and remains loyal to him

Lady Alice the niece of the Earl of Mackworth whose hand Myles wins

Lord Brookhurst/Earl of Alban the enemy of Myles's father and Lord Mackworth, whom Myles defeats

Lord Falworth Myles's blind father, who falls from the King's favor and must rely on his son to redeem him

Lord George a knight in the Earl of Mackworth's castle who trains Myles for knighthood

Myles Falworth the young son of a fallen Lord who, while squiring for a kinsman, becomes legendary in restoring his family's honor

Prior Edward the prior at St. Mary's in Crosbey-Dale and a friend of the Falworth's

Sieur de la Montaigne a French knight who Myles defeats in his very first joust as a knight

Sir James Lee a knight serving the Earl of Mackworth as the head of the squires and who helps Myles develop

Walter Blunt the leader of the bachelors, the highest level of squires, whom Myles dislikes

Vocabulary

boon something asked for or granted as a favor
gisarm a medieval weapon consisting of a long pointed blade sharpened on both sides and set at the end of the shaft
ignominious marked by personal disgrace
impudent lacking discretion
livery the last meal of the day; any uniform provided for servants
mutinous participating in revolt against authority
portend to foretell or signal something in the future, as an omen does
protege a person under the patronage or care of someone interested in his or her career or welfare

Synopsis

Myles Falworth's father, Lord Falworth, leaves his estate and wealth behind when a traitor to King Henry IV is found hiding in his castle. Myles is a young boy at the time and so is raised in a humble farm-house in the town of Crosbey-Dale with his parents at the St. Mary's Priory. There he is schooled in many things including the French language, and he learns the skills needed to be a squire.

Soon after Myles is squired, he is accepted on the staff of the Earl of Mackworth, a kinsman and former comrade of Lord Falworth. There Myles quickly asserts his personality and demonstrates the strength of his character by challenging the abuse of power of older squires, the bachelors. In his battles with the bachelors, he gains the attention of the Lords and Earl of Devlen Castle. The strength of his nature and promise it holds prompts the Earl to train him for knighthood and to have him knighted by the King at a very young age. By defeating the greatest knight in France, Myles earns even more respect and the right to challenge any knight.

During his training, Myles learns that his father has an enemy and is considered an outlaw by the King. The Earl of Mackworth tells Myles he must fight his father's enemy, the Earl of Alban, in order to restore

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the Falworth estate. Myles agrees, but later learns that many people wish to see the Earl of Alban defeated and that his battle is to benefit more than just his family.

When the time arrives to challenge the Earl of Alban, Lord Falworth approaches the King to demand the right to prove he was wrongly accused of betraying the King. A tribunal meets and determines that, indeed, he should be able to challenge his accuser and that Myles may fight in his place, since he is blind. The King makes it known to Myles that he must win the battle or die. Myles graciously accepts this and does manage to defeat the Earl of Alban. By doing so he restores his family's good name and wins the right to ask for the Earl of Mackworth's neice's hand in marriage. He marries Lady Alice and, after the King dies, his family returns to live in the castle they once occupied.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

Soon after Myles enters Devlen Castle and makes the acquaintance of Gascoyne, he impulsively buys Gascoyne an expensive and beautiful sword. He does this as a sign of his gratefulness for Gascoyne's friendship. At that time Myles and Gascoyne do not know each other very well, but Myles feels sure they will stay friends. Have you ever given a gift to a new friend because you got along with them so well and believed it would be a lasting friendship? Is it foolish to do this so quickly, or is it helpful to the friendship?

Some would say it is foolish to give gifts early in a friendship, some would not. One thing to consider in the debate is how valuable the gift is to the giver and the nature of the friendship.

Literary Analysis

Some would describe Myles as a brave and confident young man. Others may say he is foolish and impulsive. Which would you say he is? Support your answer with passages in the book.

Myles is brave to stand up to his fellow squires, the bachelors, since they are basically his equals, or peers. He is also brave to take on new challenges as a squire and knight. However, he is impulsive and foolish when dealing with the Earl and Sir James. He is just a young man and does not have enough life experience yet, nor does he know the whole story behind his father's life.

Inferential Comprehension

Myles's conflict with Walter Blunt centers on Blunt's demand that younger squires fetch water for the bachelors' baths. Though this is not an outrageous request, Myles is deeply upset by it. Why is Myles so bothered by this, and is his reaction justified?

Myles is disturbed by this request because he feels the bachelors are fellow squires and, therefore, no other squires should be made to serve them. He feels it is demeaning and, that if allowed to continue, would no doubt lead to more requests for service.

Constructing Meaning

As Myles enters the presence of the King for his knighthood ceremony, it is stated that Myles "felt rather than saw the restless crowd of faces upon either side." What does the author mean by this? Have you ever had that "feeling" of having many eyes upon you? What was the occasion? What did you do to cope with it?

Most people at one point have felt this sensation of all eyes being on them. Even children confront stress at occasions such as birthdays, religious celebrations (first communion, bar mitzvah, etc.), musical concerts, etc. One way to reduce self-consciousness would be to focus on a spot above the heads of the audience; however, just concentrating on the task can help.

Teachable Skills

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Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Many times in the story, the author mentions that Myles's training and upbringing are prescribed by the rules of the day and, as a knight, are controlled by the rules of chivalry. Research chivalry. Find out what the guidelines state, and discuss whether they would be appropriate for today's society. Discuss how our society would be different if all the principles of chivalry were still practiced today.

Recognizing Feelings When Myles enters Devlen Castle, he is alone and friendless. Very quickly, however, he becomes close with Gascoyne, who supports him from the very beginning. Think about your own friendships, either current or past friendships, and list what you both gave and received from those friendships. Write about one particularly strong friendship you have had. Note how it grew and developed.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The bulk of this story is written in a form of English that is unfamiliar to many readers, yet it is not difficult to understand the story. Find a short passage in the book, a few paragraphs or so, and analyze them for their structure and vocabulary. Compare the style to that of modern English or another language. Translate a portion of the story into modern English.

Responding to Literature At one point the author describes the crumbling, or breaking up, of Myles's childhood. Myles endures a series of events that quickly puts an end to his childish ways and thoughts. Think of your own life and development. List the signs that a person is passing from childhood into adulthood. List the new responsibilities that go with adulthood. Discuss how these changes can be managed and the advantage of the new adult life. Now identify things from childhood that will be missed. Share your own feelings on maturing and leaving childhood behind.