

# Monty Python's Spamalot Young@Part

**Fridays & Saturdays at 7:30 pm**  
**Sundays at 3:00 pm**

Monty Python's Spamalot, lovingly ripped off from the classic film comedy *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*, retells the legend of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, and features a bevy of beautiful show girls, not to mention cows, killer rabbits, and French people—Oh, and did we mention the bevy of beautiful showgirls?



Bursting with unforgettable songs, absurd humor, and zany characters, this musical is a rollicking celebration of all things Monty Python. The 2005 Broadway production won three Tony Awards, including Best Musical, and its success continued with two West End runs and a recent Broadway revival.

With its laugh-out-loud moments and unforgettable anthem "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," Spamalot is a gloriously entertaining journey that will leave audiences in stitches from start to finish.

## About the Thalian Association

Thalian Association Community Theatre is a non-profit, membership organization that's dedicated to enhancing the rich artistic environment of the Cape Fear region. Tracing its roots back to 1788, the Thalian Association Community Theatre was founded to provide arts education and bring the excitement of the performing arts to Wilmington, North Carolina. Today the Thalian Association Community Theatre produces five major productions annually on the Main Stage at historic Thalian Hall, offers a Youth Theatre program and professionally manages the Hannah Block Historic USO/Community Arts Center for the City of Wilmington. In 2007, the North Carolina legislature named the Thalian Association Community Theatre the Official Community Theater of North Carolina.



## The Legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table

Monty Python's *Spamalot* is a comical retelling of the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

To find out more about *Spamalot*'s connection to the legend of King Arthur, read about the characters below:

### Characters in Monty Python's *Spamalot*

**King Arthur:** The King of England who sets out on a quest to form the Knights of the Roundtable and find the Holy Grail.

**Sir Robin:** A Knight of the Roundtable. Ironically called 'Sir Robin the Brave,' though he couldn't be more cowardly. Joins the Knights for singing and dancing.

**Sir Lancelot:** A Knight of the Roundtable. He is fearless to a bloody fault, but through a twist of fate, does discover his 'softer side.'

**Patsy:** King Arthur's horse and servant. Underappreciated but always longing for King Arthur's approval. Good, funny, physical mover with some tap dancing.

**Sir Galahad:** A Knight of the Roundtable. Begins as Dennis, a lower class 'mud gatherer' who becomes knighted and transforms into the dashing Sir Galahad.

**Sir Bedevere:** A Knight of the Roundtable. An inept scholar.

**The Lady of the Lake:** A Diva. Strong, beautiful, possesses mystical powers. The leading lady of the show.



King Arthur and Patsy in *Spamalot*



The cast of *Spamalot* during a scene

Now, read the following list of characters from the legend of King Arthur and learn how they match up (or don't!) to the Monty Python characters:

### Major Characters in the Legend of King Arthur

**King Arthur:** A British leader or king who is a key figure in Arthurian legends. Some historians believe that Arthur was a real king or military officer that lived in the 5th or 6th century. The figure of Arthur is often associated with the quest to find the Holy Grail, which is the cup that Jesus drank out of at the last supper. Arthur is also the leader of the Knights of the Round Table. Arthur's kingdom is known as Camelot, and is thought to be located in present day England or Wales. Arthur's mythical sword, Excalibur, even has its own legends. Arthur became king after proving his worth by pulling Excalibur from the stone that the sword was embedded in, a task that no one else in the kingdom was able to do.

**Queen Guinevere:** Guinevere was Arthur's wife and the queen of Camelot. Guinevere is a powerful and influential figure in the legends. However, while married to Arthur, Guinevere fell in love with her champion knight, Sir Lancelot, and their forbidden relationship ultimately led to a war in Camelot and caused the destruction of the entire kingdom.

**Sir Lancelot:** While some Spamalot characters, like Sir Robin, are not taken directly from Arthurian legend, many of them are real knights from the tale. Sir Lancelot was famous for being one of the most skilled knights in the court of Camelot. He was Arthur's closest companion, confidante, and, ultimately, the reason that the kingdom of Camelot fell. Lancelot was secretly in love with Arthur's wife, Queen Guinevere, and the revelation of their affair caused a rift in the court and eventually led to a war that spread across the kingdom.

**Sir Galahad:** In Arthurian legend, Sir Galahad is the son of Sir Lancelot. While Lancelot is depicted as flawed and human, Galahad inherited all his father's good qualities but none of



Arthur drawing the sword from the stone as depicted in Henrietta Elizabeth Marshall's *Our Island Story* published in 1906



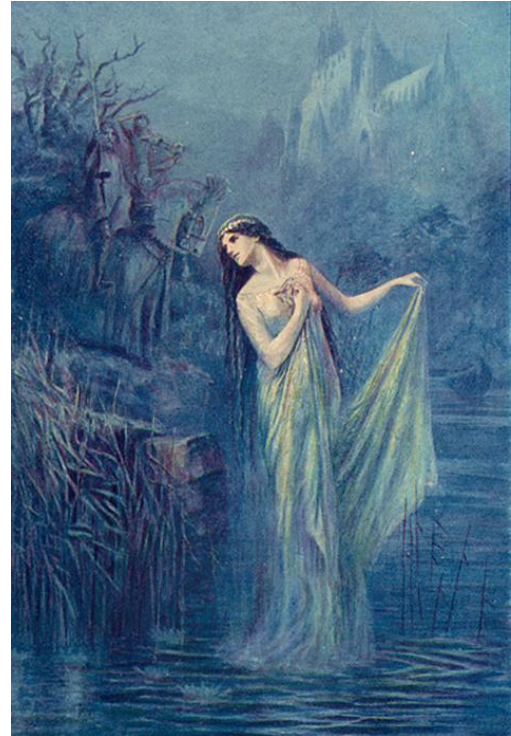
Raimund von Wichera's *Guinevere and the Court at Camelot* painted around 1900



his bad traits, making him the 'perfect' knight and answering the prophecy by Merlin to become the Good Knight. After Arthur and his knights struggled for years to find the Holy Grail, Galahad eventually completed the quest and found the grail, ultimately succeeding where his father Lancelot had failed.

**Merlin:** Merlin is a mysterious figure in Arthurian legend. Merlin acts as an advisor to King Arthur, and some believe that Merlin engineered Arthur's ascension to the throne by arranging it so only Arthur could pull Excalibur from the stone.

**The Lady of the Lake:** The Lady of the Lake is a magical being that lives in a lake near the kingdom of Camelot. The lake is actually a portal to a magical realm. The Lady of the Lake serves as a guardian to the men in the Arthurian legends including Arthur and Lancelot. She gifts a magical sword (also called Excalibur) to Arthur in some versions of the legend, and, when Arthur dies, he requests for the sword to be thrown back into the lake, where the Lady emerges to catch it.



### Learn More about the Legend of King Arthur

You have already learned that Monty Python's Spamalot is a funny version of the tale of King Arthur, but did you know the story of King Arthur itself has been told and retold countless times? This is what is known as a **legend**, a story that has been passed down through history. Legends are typically regarded as based in truth but are unable to be authenticated because the events happened so long ago and the legend's author is unknown.

The Lady of the Lake illustrated by Lancelot Speed from James Thomas Knowles' *The Legends of King Arthur and His Knights* published in 1912

Legends like this were typically told orally, meaning they were often recounted during long nights around the fire and passed down through generations from one storyteller to another. While this style of **oral storytelling** created an amazingly rich tale, it also meant that every storyteller added their own embellishments, characters, events, and side-quests, leading to so many versions of the tale that it is hard to separate fact from fiction, especially after hundreds of years and thousands of retellings through the ages.

Though some parts of the Matter of Britain are certainly based in reality, the point of a legend like this is not whether it is true or not. Instead, the goal is to get the audience to

consider the characters and their relationships, choices, motivations, and decisions to gain wisdom and understanding about life.

The **legend of King Arthur** is a well-known story that was first developed in the medieval period and later expanded by countless authors, editors, and compilers. Monty Python plays on this tale and combines ancient characters with modern-day references and absurdist humor.

The legend has many names, quests, locations, and side characters, but the entire tale is known as the Matter of Britain. It is one of the three great story cycles of western medieval literature, along with the Matter of France and the Matter of Rome. A **story cycle** (or literary cycle) is a group of stories that revolve around the same characters, plots, and locations, and a story cycle that involves an entire country is called a **matter**.

The **Matter of Britain** is a huge body of medieval literature and recorded legends. Remember, this was during a time when stories were typically told orally and passed down through generations by word of mouth. Parts of the tale were first recorded on paper between the 9th and 12th centuries, and many of the authors are anonymous - possibly monks working in a monastery or scribes employed by an aristocrat. Famous medieval authors that draw from or contribute to the legend include Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, which has a story set in the court of King Arthur, and Geoffrey of Monmouth, who wrote down a key part of the legend in his 12th century work *History of the Kings of Britain*. The Arthurian legends were written down in diverse languages including Latin, French, Welsh, and many different dialects of English and German, reflecting the shifting ruling cultures of Britain at the time they were recorded.



King Arthur depicted in a medieval tapestry woven around 1385



A page from the 15<sup>th</sup> century manuscript of *The Canterbury Tales*



## Test Your Knowledge

Answer each question thoroughly using the information you learned from the readings.

1. Who was King Arthur according to the legends? Why was he such an important figure?

2. What is meant by the Matter of Britain, and what is a story cycle?

3. What is the tradition of oral storytelling? How and why is this different from a written story?

4. Why does the legend of King Arthur have so many different authors, and why was it written in many different languages and dialects? What do these things tell us about the legend?

5. Why is this story regarded as a legend instead of fact? Does this change the moral of the story or how important its themes are? Why or why not?



"Arthur Leading the Charge at Mount Badon" illustrated by George and Louis Rhead from Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* published in 1898



A jousting tournament at Camelot illustrated by George and Louis Rhead from Alfred Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* published in 1898

## Become a Knight and Join the Quest for the Holy Grail

1. Flip a coin to find out if you are worthy to join King Arthur's Knights of the Round Table on the quest for the Holy Grail:

Heads - You are worthy to join the quest and have proven yourself as a knight.

Tails - You are not yet worthy to join the quest and must spend more time practicing jousting, horseback riding, sword fighting, and studying the chivalric code of knighthood.

2. Once you have been proven worthy to join the Knights of the Round Table you must then find out your knighthood name!

Follow the instructions and write your knighthood name in the template provided below:

First, write out your name phonetically by putting dashes in between the syllables and capitalizing the letters that are emphasized when you speak the name out loud. It helps to say your name aloud and clap to count the syllables!

Example: If your name was Adam Anderson, phonetically you would say it like this:

Aa-Dam An-Der-Son

Then, take the first two syllables of your first name and write it in the first space on the template below.

Example: Aa-Dam

Now, take the last syllable of your middle name (or last name) and write that in the second space on the template.

Example: Son

Finally, add "Sir" to the beginning and say it aloud to find out your knighthood name!

Example: Sir AdamSon

**Your Knighthood Name:**

Sir \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. Complete the quest and find the Holy Grail!

The Holy Grail has been hidden for centuries, and the Knights of the Round Table are the only ones pure of heart enough to discover it. Now that you have joined the quest as a Knight of the Round Table, you must help complete the quest to find the Holy Grail by solving the maze below and defeating the obstacles in your path!

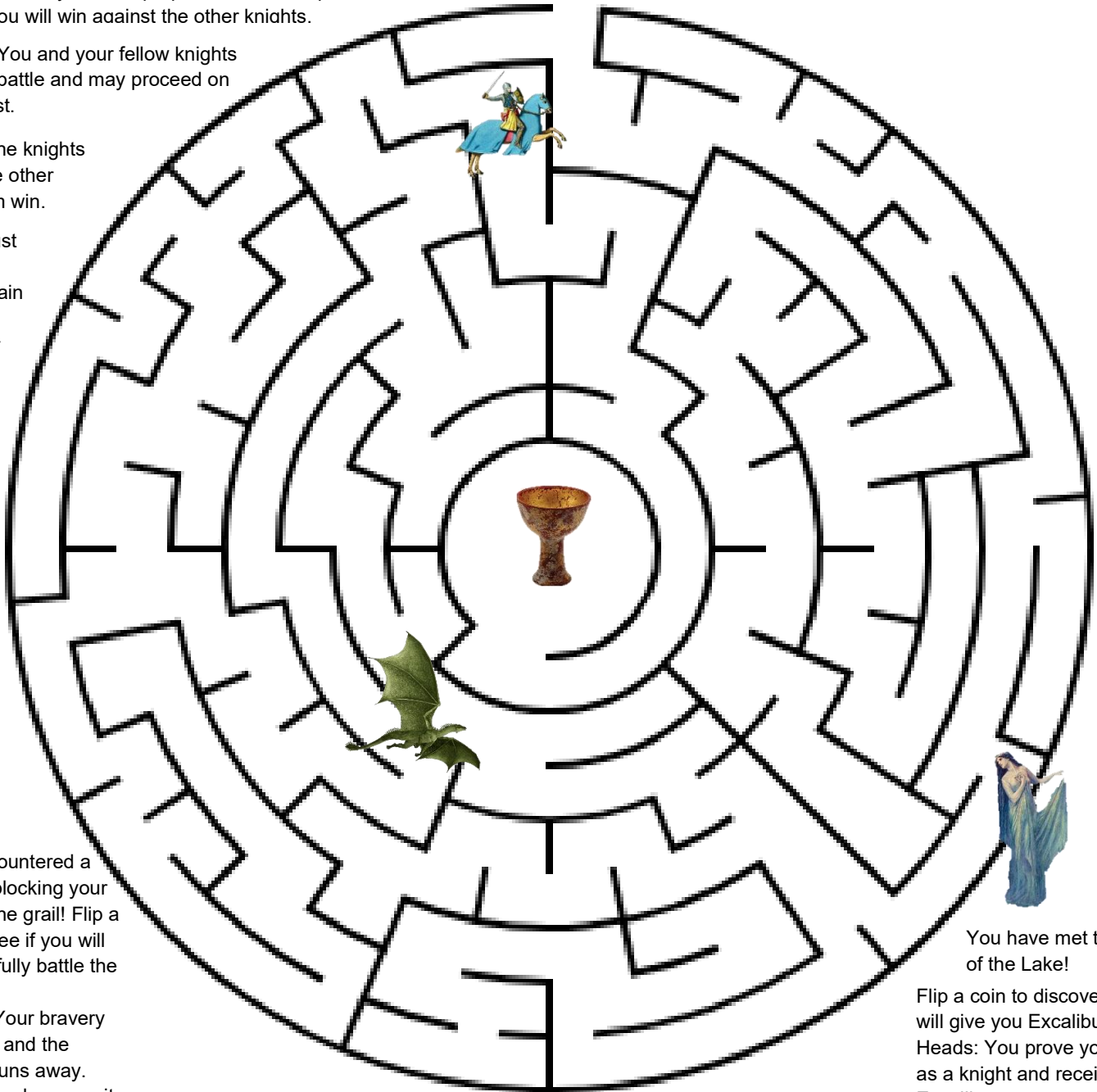
Another kingdom has also sent knights in search of the grail and now you must prepare to battle! Flip a coin to see if you will win against the other knights.

Heads: You and your fellow knights win the battle and may proceed on the quest.

Tails: The knights from the other kingdom win.

You must flip the coin again or find another path!

Start your quest here



You encountered a dragon blocking your path to the grail! Flip a coin to see if you will successfully battle the dragon.

Heads: Your bravery prevails, and the dragon runs away.

Tails: The dragon spits fire at you. You must flip the coin again or find another path!

You have met the Lady of the Lake!

Flip a coin to discover if she will give you Excalibur.

Heads: You prove your worth as a knight and receive Excalibur.

Tails: You fail to get the sword and must flip the coin again or find another path!