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English 11:8
Guerrilla Teaching

Guerrilla Teaching: Le Morte Darthur

I thought Le Morte Darthur would be an interesting topic, considering it included the chivalry of the Knight's Tale with the Knights of the Round Table, an amazing, popular group of legends, but after I began researching, I realized my memory of King Arthur and his travels was not very complete or clear. Before reading up on the actual manuscript of Le Morte Darthur, I spent a few hours on wikipedia reacquainting myself with the stories and characters, from Arthur to Ywein. Only then could I adequately and intelligently discuss the specific collection I was assigned.

I subsequently researched the manuscript on the wiki and on the first few google search results. I realized that the 507 chapters was too much to read, but that I could use the summaries provided by the site run by "Lugodoc". Considering that this man claims he is a "druid" and has no visible degrees or reputation as a good source I did not fully trust his insight, though it seemed valid. I cross referenced the parts I needed from Lugodoc's site with the Modern English and original versions of Malory's work in the works cited. Since that time, his page has been posted on wikipedia, meaning that others believe he is a reputable source.

I had much more information than two pages worth. Remembering that students in some classes last year read a number of Arthur tales, I decided to

concentrate more on the significance of Malory's work as it applies to the Lore of Arthur and its history, rather than summarizing its over 300,000 words into a mere 1000. I then began to convert this material into a powerpoint presentation. Though I knew Ms. Dudley did not love that form of expression, Victor's went over well since he did not read straight from it and Zoe's interaction with her lecture was provoking. I knew that my presentation, however, would have to be even more dynamic than the predecessors to keep the attention of my classmates. I have tutored one on one on many occasions and struggled to lengthen the attention spans of my tutorees, but this is the first experience engaging an entire class. I have to take every precaution that will prevent them from losing focus. This means that I would have to try not to rehash what they already know about Arthur and attempt to throw in some humor. I thought this was completely successful until I attempted to teach my lesson to my mother.

I began the lesson by telling my mother that she should not hold back any questions or comments. I made sure she knew that anything that she believed was wrong or confusing should have been brought to my attention because it would not only help her understanding but also improve my presentation. I was happy at first; she laughed at my opening joke, that sir doesn't truly precede my name. The next comedic piece, however, didn't quite work since it required a real teacher and real class. Instead of impossibly trying to trick my mother into thinking I was going to give her a test, I asked her if she thought the joke would be effective. I trust her in this matter, since her teaching experience is much

greater than mine. She thought it would work well, but only if I plan it out with Ms. Dudley in advance.

Moving on to the first question, my mother was offended! It originally had said “You better get this one right!” since it I had presented his name on the first page. My mother, however, had already forgotten, and was very embarrassed of her short memory. To prevent this from happening to my students, she advised me to change it to its present state: “Starting off easy.” This should be a nicer way to tell the students that they ought to know the answer.

I moved through the lesson without stopping my lecture until the interruption of Question Two. Though my mother claimed this part describing Malory’s life was interesting, I could tell she was a little disinterested. When I tricked her with Question Two, however, a spark of life flashed back into my mother’s eyes. Perhaps I should throw in a few more unscheduled questions because that seemed to engage my mother to give her fullest attention. Question Three could not have the same effect on her, however, because she is not studying Chaucer like the class and does not know about the setting of the Canterbury Tales. Eighth Period will definitely appreciate that slide more. My mother does, however, have a good basis of knowledge on the medieval era and seemed interested on the relationship between the time periods that were a millennia apart. She still didn’t ask questions, but I decided to pursue the topic further and recalled examples from my reading to share. When I asked her for

another name for the Medieval Times (the Dark Ages), after a few hints, she made the connection between the time periods I attempted to convey.

My mother seemed amused by the phrasing of Question Four, but not by the humor in the lack of knowledge of puce and indigo. “You know indigo! It’s in ROYGBIV!” I attempted to explain to her that it was another joke, but she was still indignant that I “didn’t know” that color. That is the only suggestion of my mother that I don’t plan to follow. After this outburst, she remained quiet throughout the rest of the lesson.

At the end of the presentation, I asked my mother why she made so few comments and questions. Finally, she began to express her opinions! She thought that most of my content sounded good, but had no way to judge it accurately because she knew so little about Arthur. She suggested that I should add more introductory material about some of the stories I reference, because it seemed that I assumed the class should already have knowledge of them. My attempt to keep the presentation only cover fresh information backfired! I gave too much substance without background. When I looked at my presentation to confirm my mother’s claim, I also realized that I hardly even described what Le Morte Darthur was before jumping into the heart of my presentation.

To solve this lack of preliminary data, I added a prologue notecard to address during my first slide. First I would describe the basics of Le Morte Darthur, that it was a big compilation of Arthurian tales rather than wait until the center of the presentation to reveal this fact. Then, to gauge the class’

proficiency in the lore of Medieval Times, I plan to ask questions regarding the major characters in the stories. Hopefully this will generate a discussion that will enlighten those who know as little as my mother and give those who are well-read a chance to showcase their knowledge. This also increases interactivity, which I thought was lacking in my one on one presentation.

My lesson to my mother was not a great success, but that will hopefully not reflect in my class presentation performance. She offered some tips and an outside perspective that should help me relate to the needs of the learner better. Also, much of my humor and a little content requires prior experience in Ms. Dudley's class. This large section that went over the head of my mother should unify my presentation in the eyes of the class studying Chaucer and keep them attentive. Finally, the goal of my questions, more than interact with one person, is to generate a class discussion on the topic that extends beyond my notes. This will allow me to share some of the innumerable factoids I absorbed in my research and for others to add their own perspectives and details. My mother couldn't do this by herself. I hope a large participating class will make my lesson even more informative.