

Questions to consider: Is Might Right? What are the obligations of the powerful or the “haves?” What is the duty of an individual to the community? What is the duty of the community to the individual?

Texts: White, TH. The Once and Future King
Carter, Jimmy. Palestine: Peace not Apartheid
Assorted readings

Overview: Piskor Professor of English Emeritus Thomas Berger, of St. Lawrence University, recently wrote, “Books are fun to hold, to smell and of course to read. Books are also powerful and dangerous. Some would say gunpowder, some would say the A-bomb, but moveable type—ink on paper—has been and remains a more effective agent for change than either of those.”

With Professor Berger’s notion in mind, this course is based on T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King*, from both a literary and geopolitical perspective. Students will gain an appreciation of White’s text from a literary perspective, and then they will apply the philosophical underpinnings of the novel—especially the debate of whether “might is right”—to current events unfolding both at home and around the globe. Through various written assignments, as well as oral presentations and informal class discussions, students will have the opportunity to wonder how they might re-imagine or come to a better understanding of the forces—political, cultural, social, and economic—that shape our lives.

Just as Arthur placed great faith in his knights, America and the world must now look to its younger generation of scholars: i.e. our students. Our hope is that this course will become not only a reflection on literary and historical texts, but also an opportunity for our students to examine their own education and decide to what ends they will put the knowledge they have gained in their time at Cushing. In the truest sense of our new mission as a school, they can assume the title of leaders for the 21st century.

Methods:

Students will be evaluated using a variety of assignments, including journal / blog entries, SPA paragraphs, multi-media presentations (to the class and possibly to larger school groups), and essays.

Curricular units:

The first two units covering the American war in Vietnam and the birth of the state of Israel will be closely designed by us. To examine the Vietnam conflict, students will be exposed to primary documents, reminisces of American and Vietnamese participants, short works of fiction, scholarly essays or journal articles, etc. While the examination of the Israeli question will be structured by a discussion of Jimmy’s Carter text, a broad range of supplementary materials will also be provided. The burden for designing the third unit will be passed on to the students so that they can apply the historical knowledge that they have gained to a new set of problems or concerns that they are interested in exploring. This application can take a variety of forms: handouts for the class, PowerPoint presentations, podcasts, multimedia presentations, etc.

- 1) **Vietnam**—students will look at American foreign policy in the 1950s and 1960s, and they will examine how this crucial period of American history shaped our nation's standing and influence in the world today. They can reflect, too, on the ideas promulgated by White, especially that of the "Aristotelian and comprehensive tragedy, of sin coming home to roost" (312). Students will also read selections from Barbara Tuchman's, *The March of Folly*, to guide their understanding of this period.
- 2) **Israel**—students will examine the creation of the modern state of Israel and the subsequent American support of that state. At what cost was the State of Israel created? At what cost has Israel sought to achieve security? At what cost has America assumed the role of Israel's strongest supporter, politically, militarily, and economically? How has this support affected our diplomatic standing in the world? Has there been a backlash due to this support, especially since September 11th? Students can also use the model of Arthur struggling to unite Camelot following the death of Uther Pendragon and his ongoing debate with Merlyn of the relative merits of "might versus right" as they learn about this critical issue. Readings for this unit will include articles from various journals and periodicals, as well as former President Jimmy Carter's *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.
- 3) **Private Means, Public Burden**— who are we to look to for leadership in a time when traditional leadership and governance has failed, politically, economically, socially, etc.? Who should bear the burden for finding solutions to the issues that dominate the headlines? What role must the government play? How about the individual? Where and when ought private America to take a leadership role? As students work on their research, we can discuss the formation of Arthur's Round Table as a metaphor for the redefinition of leadership, moving away from a traditional / vertical approach to a more decentralized / horizontal (or in this case "round") model. Students will assume the burden of designing and implementing their own independent research topics during the last third of term. There are many possible topics that they might explore at this point in the term and they can include but are not limited to: immigration, the economic crisis, the environment and global warming, fundamentalist terrorism, free and fair trade issues, etc.