

Miguel and King Arthur

A Reading A-Z Level X Leveled Book

Word Count: 2,355

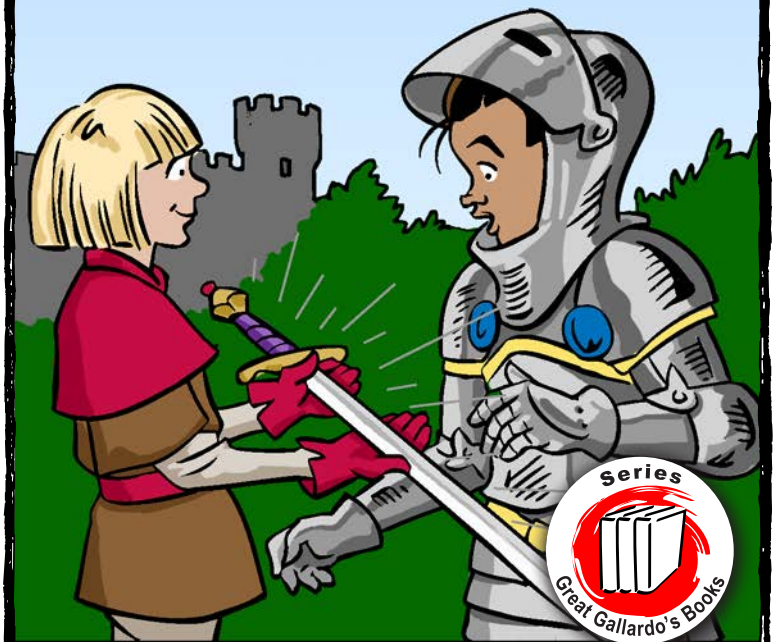


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LEVELED BOOK • X

Miguel and King Arthur



A Great Gallardo Book Written by Lori Polydoros
Illustrated by David Cockcroft

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Glossary

- disappointment** (*n.*) a feeling of sadness or a feeling of being let down because someone or something has not fulfilled your hopes or expectations (p. 4)
- duel** (*n.*) a one-on-one fight over a matter of honor (p. 13)
- jealousy** (*n.*) a mean feeling toward someone because he or she is more successful or happy than you (p. 5)
- joust** (*n.*) a competition that involves two people on horseback fighting with lances (p. 13)
- judgment** (*n.*) the ability to make informed decisions, opinions, or guesses (p. 21)
- kinsman** (*n.*) a male person who is somebody's relative (p. 13)
- loyalty** (*n.*) the quality of being loyal, or committed, to someone or something (p. 14)
- opponent** (*n.*) person who is on the other side in a game, fight, or discussion (p. 10)
- regret** (*n.*) a feeling of sadness or guilt about a past action (p. 14)
- righteous** (*adj.*) considered correct according to a moral code (p. 22)
- swindle** (*n.*) an act of obtaining something by lying or other deception (p. 15)
- tournament** (*n.*) a series of games or competitions that determine a final champion (p. 11)
- treachery** (*n.*) an act of being disloyal or dishonest (p. 16)

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Note: The Great Gallardo's Books is a continuing series written by Lori Polydoros. Travel with Miguel Ventura as he experiences a classic adventure inspired by Thomas Malory's *Le Mort d'Arthur*.

Miguel and King Arthur
Level X Leveled Book
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At the batting cages, Trevon stood tall with a wide stance. His fan club was nowhere in sight.

Miguel watched and waited.

Trevon swung at his last pitch, missed, and then turned and saw Miguel.

"I'm sorry," said Miguel.

"What for?" asked Trevon, kicking the end of his bat with the toe of his shoe. "I was the jerk. And I needed to be told I was being a jerk."

"I'm sorry I let my jealousy keep me from being happy about what a great hitter you are."

"I'm sorry too," Trevon said.

"Apology accepted," said Miguel.

"Yeah," said Trevon. "You want to take some practice swings? I'll give you a few pointers."

Miguel smiled, and retrieved his helmet.

"C'mon, let's bat."



“I will not govern alone,” Arthur stated. “I need men around me who are willing to be patient, tell me when I am being unfair, and forgive me when I choose the easy path over the **righteous** one.”

Arthur placed his hand on Miguel’s shoulder, as Miguel kneeled before him, placing Excalibur in his hands.

“All hail King Arthur!”



Merlin stood behind them. “To King Arthur!” He raised his staff.

One glance in the wizard’s eyes, and suddenly Miguel was back at the loft. He scrambled down the ladder and grabbed his favorite bat out of his bag.



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The King's Diamond

Ninth inning. One out. Bases loaded.

Miguel Ventura stood at bat. Two strikes. He had to make contact.

Sweat trickled down Miguel's face, and his shoulders ached. He called time, and sunlight reflected off the bat, creating a burst of color like a million tiny rainbows. He took a deep breath.

It was time. Now or never.

Back at home plate, Miguel cranked the bat up into the air. A fastball sailed toward him. He swung. *THUD!* The ball hit the catcher's mitt as the rival team roared their approval.

Miguel couldn't hide his **disappointment** as he jogged to the dugout. The other team needed one more out to win the game. He had pictured himself hitting the winning home run and his teammates lifting him high into the air after he crossed home plate. The imagined roar of the crowd was ringing in his ears still. He barely noticed Trevon as he walked toward home plate.

Trevon held his bat high like a marvelous sword. The first pitch hurtled toward home plate. Trevon swung. *SMACK!*

Share the Wealth

The center of Sir Ector's castle garden held a labyrinth, and all around flowers and vines grew into swirling, curving structures. Leaves rustled ahead of him, leading Miguel into the maze.

"Arthur?" he called out.

Dark clouds rushed in overhead. The air chilled. Excalibur sizzled next to him.

He traveled deeper into the maze, following voices that seemed to come from its center. The day grew darker. Spookier.

Miguel wanted to turn back, but he knew this story would never end unless he moved forward. The time had come to end this game. Now or never.

"Arthur, you must become king," he said. "It is the only way."

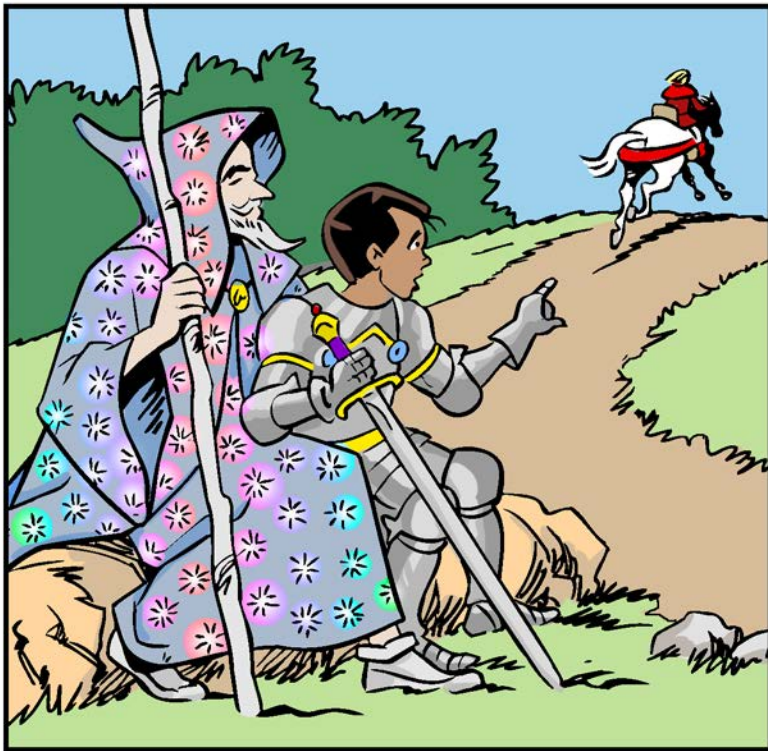
"And face men like you, who will always chase glory and steal and lie to achieve their ends?"

"I was wrong. I let the power of Excalibur eclipse my **judgment**. You are the true king." Miguel said. "It is your special gift of leadership that this country deserves."

"I am not the true king!" Miguel shouted to the wind as Arthur rode off.

"I know, I took young Arthur from King Uther himself. It is his destiny." Merlin was suddenly sitting next to Miguel.

"Then why am I here?"



"Only you can answer that," Merlin said, and with that cryptic statement the wizard vanished, leaving Miguel alone to his own destiny.



Going. Going. Gone! Grand slam!

"Yes!" Miguel yelled, meeting his friend as he crossed home plate.

Miguel's teammates gathered Trevon up onto their shoulders. The crowd roared, and his family rushed out to meet him. The girls in the front row smiled and waved. Miguel felt a twinge of **jealousy**.

Trevon was the golden boy. His life looked good.

On the way into the pizza parlor, Miguel said, "I need some batting tips, Trevon." He pushed past a brown-haired girl from the front row.

Trevon glanced back, but Miguel ushered him on. "I've struck out ten times in the last three games. Coach is going to bench me unless I get some help."

"Ask Leo," Trevon said. "He's got a decent batting average."

"Not like you," Miguel said. "You're the king." Miguel grabbed four slices of pizza off the table. "It's time for the king to share his wealth. Let's meet at the batting cages every day this week."

"Share my wealth?" Trevon said. "If I'm coaching you every day, when am I going to practice?"

"You've got your glory," Miguel said. "Now you can spread it around."

The brown-haired girl waved again. Trevon waved back.

"So, is it a deal?" Miguel asked, thinking that being the star of the team would feel mighty good.

"I've got homework, and I have to babysit my cousin."

The white horse slowed.

"You will rule in a powerful kingdom called Camelot."

Arthur stopped.

"You will be most respected by all your knights." Miguel stopped too.

"Have you seen the future, Brother?"

Miguel smiled. "Sort of."

"But you are my brother, not the son of Merlin," Arthur said. "You do not know my future, for as only one man, I would never desire the responsibility of governing an entire kingdom. Now go become king; it's what you seem to desire most."



One Man's Glory

Miguel looked out into the crowd. He could not deny that this respect felt great. But Merlin's eyes pierced into him, and his thoughts of glory fizzled like bubbles disappearing down a drain.

"Wait!" he cried. "I am not king!" He glanced around the crowd, but Arthur was nowhere to be found. "Where is my brother?"

"Arthur has begun the journey home to notify the kingdom," Sir Ector said.

"NO!" Miguel ran toward the royal procession. A long line of horses flowed along a dusty road, and the rightful king rode a white horse to lead the way.

"Arthur!" Miguel screamed, but he was too far away.

Miguel hopped into the driver's seat of a carriage, grabbed the reins, and rode hard. Soon Miguel approached Arthur. "Wait, please," he cried. "You are the rightful king!"

"I have no desire for that title," he said.

"You will become the mightiest king in all of England," Miguel said.



"Since when have homework and babysitting come before baseball?"

"He's a star," Leo pointed to the girls smiling at Trevon. "And he wants to stay one."

Miguel swallowed. "Is that true?"

Trevon couldn't find the words to explain.

"See?" said Leo. "C'mon, Miguel. We're not royal enough for this table. Kings aren't a part of any team."

The Destiny of the Sword

At Saturday's game, Miguel struck out twice but managed one base hit. Trevon hit two doubles and a triple, and now had a whole fan section in the front row. He seemed not to care that Leo and Miguel hadn't been speaking to him since last week.

"Since when did the three *amigos* become two?" Miguel's sister, Teresa, asked.

Miguel shrugged, placing his bat into his bag and walking toward the field.

"Aren't you coming for pizza?" she asked.

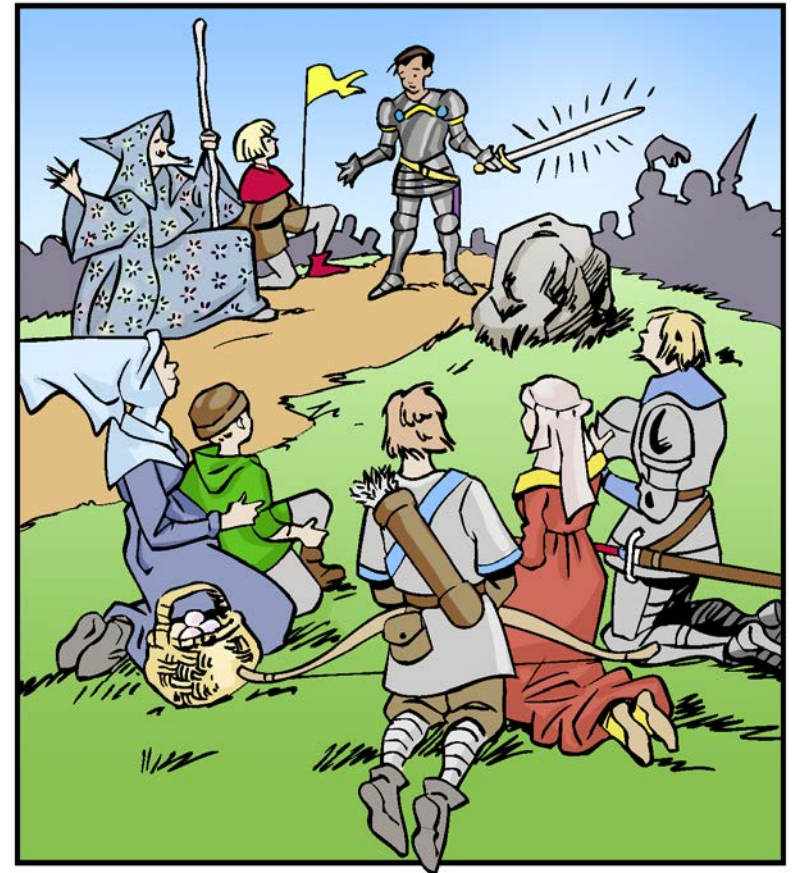
"Nah, I'm going back to the shop."

"To visit the Great Gallardo's books?"

"Just go eat pizza, and I'll see you later."

Miguel and Teresa both had become characters in the Great Gallardo's magic books they'd found in the loft. Leo and Trevon had even traveled inside a book with Miguel once, but Trevon was now probably too busy with his fan club to come along on an adventure.

Up in the loft, a thick purple book waited for Miguel on the enchanted chest. "*Le Mort d'Arthur*," Miguel read. "The Knights of the Round Table!"



"He's done it!" Arthur said. "Sir Kay is the true King of England!"

Every single person crouched down before Miguel, even Merlin.

"Wait."

Nobody heard him.

"All hail King Kay!"

The next morning, following a procession of knights, kings, and their royal courts, Miguel went to the stone. The crowd parted, leaving a tall, bearded man in its wake. Merlin! As he walked forward, his gray velvet cape dragged behind, leaving iridescent swirls in the soil. His eyes were intense, as though Miguel were looking through a microscope into Merlin's soul.

"Sir Kay," Merlin said. "Let us watch the miracle."

Miguel stepped forward, Excalibur clamped tightly in his hands, focusing as though he were at home plate, picturing a home run. *Maybe he could actually pull the sword from the stone!* Before he tugged at the blade, someone shouted, "Intruders! Beyond the hills!"

The knights mounted their horses, and Arthur pointed them east over the hills. Everyone rushed to battle, leaving Miguel and Arthur alone.

"Here," Arthur said, grabbing the sword's hilt, "If you want glory for your **treachery**, take it."

Miguel stared at Arthur and Excalibur.

As though the stone were butter, Arthur slid Excalibur from its home and knelt down before Sir Kay, just as the crowd returned.

He opened the book to page 98, and stars appeared in his eyes as he whispered aloud, "I could become King Arthur!"

"WHOSO PULLETH OUT THIS SWORD FROM THE STONE THAT SAME IS RIGHTWISE KING BORN OF ENGLAND," Miguel read, but the words hopped around the page. "*gaze at people Many sword marvel came on to the and its beauty.*"

The silence disappeared, and Miguel found himself surrounded by a group of knights, clanking swords around his head. He ducked, knocking his heavy helmet into another knight.



“Sir Kay!” the knight roared. “Do you challenge me?”

Miguel shook his head. “No, sir.” But his words were lost in a loud clash of metal upon metal. His massive **opponent** wore a suit of midnight black armor.

Miguel tried to escape, but the bulky armor weighed him down like an elephant on his back. The black knight raised his humongous sword high in the air. Out of instinct, Miguel lifted his arm, surprised to find that he, too, held a sword. His blade trembled, glistening in the sun as he gripped it with all his might.

“It is time for the great Sir Kay to fall,” shouted the black-armored knight.

The words made Miguel’s body quake.

The knight slashed Miguel’s sword, slicing it in half as though it were a blade of grass.

“Sir Kay!” From the crowd, a young man rushed forward.

Miguel stared, dropping what was left of his weapon.

“Shall I fetch you another sword, Brother?”



Weary from the day’s tournament, Sir Ector retired early, and Miguel basked in the glow of his admirers as knights celebrated around campfires that night. Word had rapidly spread that he had pulled the sword from the stone and would do so again in the morning. Arthur watched from the edges of the fire’s circle, now realizing the importance of the sword and the **swindle** Kay was trying to pull.

"Where did you get the sword?" Sir Ector demanded.

"I brought it to him, Father," said Arthur. "I couldn't find another blade, so I thought of the sword I saw stuck in the stone near the cathedral. I pulled on it, and it came out with marvelous ease."

Arthur had no idea what he had done.

Miguel felt a twinge of **regret** deep in his stomach as he faced Arthur, but he plunged ahead anyway.

"It was I who pulled the sword from the stone, Father," Miguel lied, knowing deep down the sword did not belong to him. "Arthur just fetched Excalibur for me."

"I do not understand why you dishonor yourself and our father with lies, Kay," Arthur challenged. His feelings about doing what was right dominated the **loyalty** he felt toward Sir Kay.

"Enough!" roared Sir Ector. "Whichever of you pulled the sword from the stone will be able to repeat the task tomorrow morning. For tonight, we will celebrate Sir Kay's victory in the duel and wish him well in the joust."

Dazed, Miguel nodded, and off the boy ran.

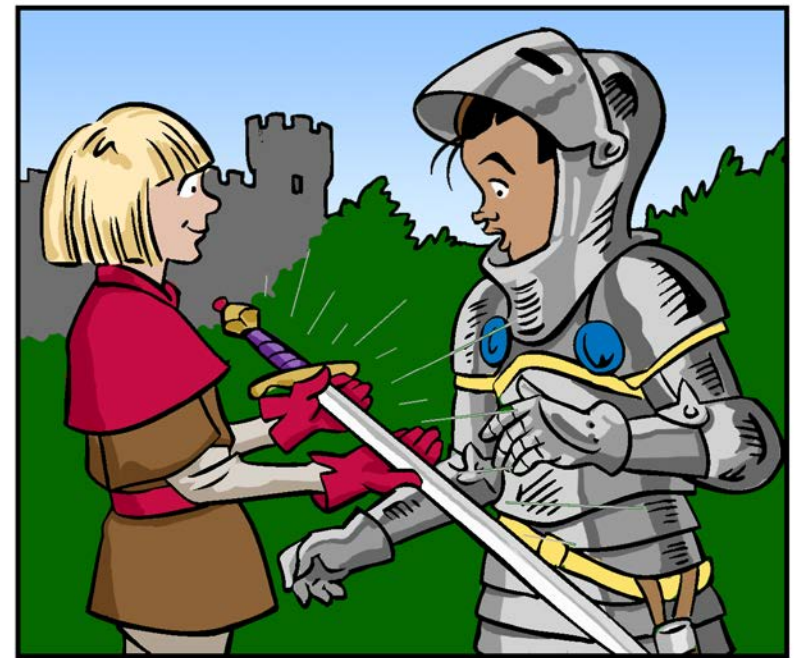
Miguel's thoughts churned. This must have been a **tournament** between the great knights in celebration of the sword in the stone. And if he was Sir Kay, then the young man who ran to get him another sword was . . .

"Arthur!"

"I'm here, Brother."

Miguel turned to the young man, who held a beautiful, glistening sword.

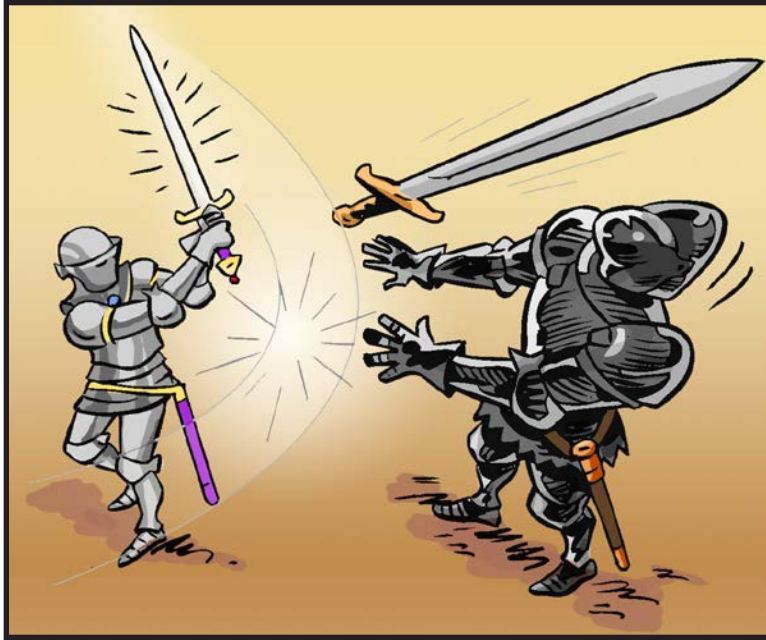
"Excalibur!"



All Hail the True King of England!

The magnificent sword electrified Miguel's hands as he turned to face the black knight once more. *Merlin's magic!* He felt renewed. Energy coursed through his veins as, clang for clang, he met the black knight's blows with Excalibur. Soon the black knight faltered; Miguel saw his opening and swung Excalibur, connecting with the knight's sword as though it were a baseball and Excalibur were a bat. The black knight's sword flew out of his hands as though Miguel had just hit a grand slam.

The crowd roared and clapped its approval.



Miguel grinned broadly behind the faceplate of his helmet. The black knight bowed his head toward Miguel before turning to make sure his squire retrieved his sword. Miguel acknowledged the act of respect with a tilt of his head.

Arthur ran up to congratulate his brother.

"My brother, you courageously faced near-defeat as a true nobleman and took victory. I am honored to be your **kinsman**."

"As am I," stated Sir Ector, whom Miguel remembered was Sir Kay's father and the man who had raised Arthur as though he were his own son.

"You will be unbeatable in the **joust**, my son."

"But what is this sword?" Sir Ector inquired, shock and puzzlement twisting his features.

Miguel knew with certainty it was the sword from the stone—the sword that made whoever could pull it from the stone the king of all England. However, he held his tongue. The glory and adoration of being king tempted Miguel. He had tasted Excalibur's power in the **duel**. *King Arthur was beloved by all the knights of the Round Table; why then could they not love King Kay just as much?*