

## The Once and Future King: Easy to Read Versions

Kids never tire of the tales of chivalry, castles, knights and derring-do that have made Arthurian legend an enduring part of literature. There are dozens of versions of the basic tales, but for kids eight to twelve who favor heavily illustrated versions (due in large part to the visual nature of learning these days), the series illustrated by Hudson Talbot is top-notch. He's done King Arthur: The Sword in the Stone and King Arthur and the Round Table as well as Excalibur (all published by Books Of Wonder, an imprint of William Morrow, \$16). The stories are well told, the illustrations heavily detailed, and the allure of these versions is irresistible. Picture books are NOT just for little kids; they're for all of us who love the beautiful artwork that surrounds us thanks to the efforts of highly talented artists like Talbot (who has also done illustrations and designs for the MOMA, the Metropolitan Opera Guild and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as the wildly popular We're Back! A Dinosaur's Story).

Kids will also enjoy the Time Warp Trio and their nutty adventures full of wordplay, understated humor, and irreverent observations of history in Knights of the Kitchen Table which includes fire-breathing dragons vs. noble knights who want to make shish-kebobs, all in a Back to the Future meets Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court kind of easy reading novel. For all ages, there is a terrific pop-up, fold-out, play-action castle

with hidden objects, three-dimensional adventure, and hours and hours of playtime fun in The Great Castle Mystery (HarperCollins, \$17.95) which also includes 38 press-out figures and a 24- page book to teach why castles were built and who lived in them and how. The whole thing fits on a 9x16inch surface, making it a terrific plane-trip toy because nothing can roll under the seat to the back of the airplane!

Last but not least, I must recommend King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table written and illustrated by Marcia Williams (she also did Greek Myths and Robin Hood in the same series) in a large (11x16") picture book format with thousands of tiny detailed illustrations with two or three sentence captions. There are hours and hours of reading, detailed browsing and captivating retelling of the stories of King Arthur, Excalibur, Morgan Le Fay, Guinivere, Lancelot, Galahad, the Grail quest, and Camelot. You cannot read this all in one sitting, so heavily detailed is it. It also would make a terrific airplane-trip book because it draws the reader of any age back into the stories again and again.

©2005 Gwynne Spencer, PO BOX 121, Mancos CO 81328

gwynnespencer@aol.com