**Sir Gawain and the Green Knight – Study Guide**

**The Challenge:**

1. When does the romance begin? Where? *The story begins at Christmas / New Year’s at Camelot, the court of King Arthur.*

2. Describe the visitor who interrupts the feast. *The visitor is giant GREEN man riding a green horse. Everything about him is green – his hair, skin, clothes, and weapons. He carries a holly branch and a battle axe.*

3. What is his challenge? *His challenge is the “beheading game”. He will allow one of Arthur’s knights to take a swing at him with the axe he carries, but then Arthur’s knight must allow him to take an exchange blow a year and a day later. Seems like a sure bet considering the Green Knight should die once he is beheaded. How will he ever survive to give the other knight the pay-back blow…….?*

4. Who first accepts the challenge? Who indeed delivers the blow? *Arthur accepts the challenge first because none of the other knights will. They are confused, afraid, etc, and that makes Arthur embarrassed. Finally, Gawain steps forward to take the challenge because it would be inappropriate for the King to risk himself in this sort of game.*

5. What is the consequence of the blow the Green Knight receives? *He loses his head, but he does not die. He simply picks up his head, gets on his horse, and reminds Gawain of their bargain. Then he rides away.*

**The Quest:**

6. When does Gawain begin his quest? *He begins his quest on All Hallows Day, November 1*

7. What is the attitude of his friends when he leaves? *They all assume he is going to die, but they admire his bravery and loyalty to the chivalric code.*

8. In what direction does he travel? (Hint: the answer isn’t NSEW. Think “towards what?” or “into what?) *Gawain doesn’t know where to go, so he simply rides into the forest in search of the Green Chapel.*

9. What especially troubles Sir Gawain on Christmas Eve day? *He needs to find a church so he can attend Christmas Mass and pray. This is a Holy time for the good Christians of the middle ages. Gawain desperately wants to adhere to his religious vows, so he’s upset that he has no church service to attend. He prays to God for help in the matter.*
10. How are his prayers answered? A castle appears before him. He never noticed it before. It seems to appear magically out of nowhere.

11. Who inhabits the castle? A friendly King, his beautiful young wife, and an old woman who is always with the queen. There are other helpful servants there, as well.

12. When Gawain prepares to resume his travels on St. John’s Day, what does he learn from his host? The Green Chapel is only a two hour ride so Gawain doesn’t need to hurry off.

13. What bargain do Gawain and his host make? The host is going hunting. Gawain is staying home to rest. Whatever the King gets hunting, he will give to Gawain. Whatever Gawain receives during his day at home, he will give to the King.

The Three Temptations:

14. While the host hunts deer, what befalls Gawain? The young queen comes to his room, flirts with him, and gives him a kiss. Gawain then gives a kiss to the King that night because that was their bargain; however, Gawain won’t tell the King where the kiss came from.

15. What happens the second day while the host is hunting? The young queen tempts him again and gives him 2 kisses. Gawain gives the King two kisses that night.

16. What is Gawain's gift on the third day? What is different about the game on the third day? Gawain gets a third visit from the queen, 3 kisses, and a magical green girdle (belt, sash, scarf). He promises the queen not to tell the King about the girdle. He gives the King the 3 kisses, but keeps the girdle for himself. That means he keeps his promise to the queen breaks his promise to exchange “gifts” with the King. The main reason he keeps the girdle is because it supposedly protects the wearer from any harm by man or magic. That could come in handy when he faces the Green Knight.

The Exchange Blow:

17. What is the guide’s advice to Gawain as they approach the Green Chapel? The guide tells Gawain to run away, start his life over in a new land. It’s too dangerous to face the Green Knight; Gawain will never survive. The guide promises not to tell anyone if Gawain decides to leave. Gawain refuses because he doesn’t want to be a coward and break the code of chivalry.

18. Describe the Chapel. It’s an old ruin, more like a mound of earth covered in grass and other foliage. There is a hole in the mound making it look like a cave. A small stream runs alongside.

19. What strange sound comes from the vicinity of the chapel? Gawain can hear the whirring sound of someone sharpening a blade.
20. How many times does the Green Knight swing the axe? How does the Green Knight explain each? He swings the axe 3 times. The first time he doesn’t draw blood because Gawain faithfully gave him (the Green Knight / King in disguise) the 1 kiss on the first hunting day. The second blow is harmless because Gawain faithfully gave him the 2 kisses on the second day. The third blow Gawain receives a knick for being dishonest about the magical green girdle. The Green Knight says he didn’t kill him because overall, Gawain was the truest knight around. He kept his word every time but one, and who could blame him for that? Who doesn’t want to protect his own life?

21. What does the Green Knight reveal about his identity? How does he explain his being green, etc.? The Green Knight is actually the King of the castle that Gawain found in the forest. He is green because of the sorcery of Morgan le Fay, who sent the Green Knight to Camelot to frighten Guinevere and test Arthur’s knights.

22. Why is Gawain both ashamed and angry? He is angry about being tricked by the Green Knight/King and Morgan le Fay. He is angry AND ashamed of himself because he failed the code of chivalry – being a coward, dishonest, etc.

23. How is Gawain greeted when he returns to Camelot? They celebrate his return and listen to his story. Arthur forgives Gawain’s deviation from the code of chivalry, saying it was a human mistake and enough punishment had been given. They are more proud of Gawain for following through with the challenge in the first place.

24. What does the green girdle symbolize for the people of Camelot? For Gawain? The people of Camelot start wearing little swatches of green cloth to symbolize their love for great adventure and the honor that Gawain showed. Gawain, however, wears the green girdle for the rest of his life to symbolize his own DISHONOR. He uses it as a reminder of the time when he failed the code of chivalry. He hopes that will prevent him from making that mistake again.