



THE MAB

READING GUIDE



Stories can be magic, allowing almost anything to happen. **The Mab** is a re-imagining of the stories which form **The Mabinogion**. The stories are some of the oldest British stories and as with many old stories were originally told orally, with people sharing them by word of mouth. The stories were first written down in Welsh and are taken from two surviving manuscripts which date back to 1300-1400s. Many of the stories are from different genres and they have been used as the base for art, drama and new fiction. Perhaps you might like to explore telling your own versions? Which form will you choose if so?

This guide features general discussion points to encourage thought around the book as a whole and also some questions and activity ideas which are specific to each story in the **The Mab**.



Discussion Points



Freedom

Many of the stories are about freedom. Which characters are free and which are not in **The Mab**?

Quests

A lot of the stories feature quests or challenges. Which do you feel is the most challenging challenge of all?

Stories

The Mab is built up of eleven stories and stories feature a lot in them. Do you have a favourite out of each of the stories in **The Mab**? Are there any that took you by surprise? Perhaps you could tell your own story featuring favourite characters from **The Mab**.

Landscape

The stories are set in different areas, you can use the map to try to locate these and could even think about taking a trip to visit some of the places featured in the stories. Can you find anything out about the places mentioned in the stories? You might like to create a map of the area where you live.

RHIANNON, PWYLL AND THE HIDEOUS CLAW

Pwyll Prince of Dyfed has adventure trousers. Do you think different clothing ever affects how we feel or behave? Can you think of examples of different clothing you have worn which has altered how you have felt?

Simon suggests he and Pwyll should take a trip up the hill, Gorsedd Arberth when they are bored. What do you do to pass the time when you are bored?

The story tells us that a 'hideous monstrous claw, attached to a hideous monstrous arm, reached through an open window...' (p4), what kind of creature do you think the hideous monstrous claw and arm might be attached to?

Pwyll Prince of Dyfed is three-time winner of the South West Wales Most Extraordinary Trousers competition. Design your own pair of adventure trousers. You might like these to be wild and wacky, you might feature different designs, patterns, materials, gadgets or special powers and function. You might like to create your adventure trousers using an old pair of trousers but make sure you check with an adult first!

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Matt Brown, why not try:

- Compton Valance: The Most Powerful Boy in the Universe
- Aliens Invaded my Talent Show



BRANWEN AND THE CAULDRON OF REBIRTH

Branwen's mother advises her '*If you ever feel unsure... then open your heart and listen to the wisdom of the birds.*'(p19) Think about times when you have felt unsure, write some top tips that you could share with Branwen.

The starlings advise that '*War will bring great sorrow*'(p19), what kind of sorrows do you think war can bring? You might like to think of ordinary people who are caught up in conflict as well as those who are fighting.

Branwen thinks that love and kindness is the best way to avoid war. Plan a kind act for somebody in a difficult situation. What will you do?

The survivors look up into the sky and listen to the wisdom of the birds when they want to remember Branwen. What would you say if you could speak to animals? You might like to write a conversation between you and your favourite animal.

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Sophie Anderson, why not try:

- The House with Chicken Legs
- The Girl Who Speaks Bear



Happily Ever After

'That's how stories end, isn't it? Happily Ever After.' (p37) Can you think of any stories that don't end happily ever after? How do they end and how does this make you feel? You might like to think of stories in books, films, comics or on television when answering.

Queen Rhiannon warns, *'You see, you can take your freedom, Cigfa, but it has a price.'* (p38) What do you think the price of Rhiannon's freedom is? Do you think it is worth it? What freedoms do you have and are there any you would like?

The Throne of Arberth is described as an ancient mount *'where the wall between the worlds is thin.'* This means *'It is easy for things to slip through.'* Draw a picture of something you think might slip through from the world of Other. What do you think it is and what would it intend to do?

'real life is much more interesting than happy ever after, don't you think?' (p44) Do you agree that real life is much more interesting than happy ever after? Think of an interesting story from your own life, what happened and who to? Tell the story to a friend or classmate.

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Nicola Davies, why not try:

- The Selkie's Mate
- The White Hare



Meadowsweet and Magic

The story opens by describing a time '*when wolves roamed the wild and the wild ruled people's lives*' (p55). How important is the wild to our lives? Why not go on a nature walk and see how many wild plants and animals you can spot?

Murders of crows brings the night in. Did you know, a murder of crows is the collective noun for crows, just as a flock is the collective noun for sheep. Can you match the muddled collective nouns with the correct creatures? All of the creature feature in **The Mab**?

Deers	Leap
Eagles	Parliament
Serpents	Murmuration
Owls	Soar
Starlings	Herd
Horse	Nest
Salmon	Stable

Blodeuwedd means flower face. Create your own face from flowers. You could draw these, use petals, or even press flowers to make them.

'Holding his staff aloft, Gwidion stirred the clouds, pulling them into pictures which only he could read.' (p[56]) Why not spend time looking at the clouds and seeing what pictures you can see in them? You might like to use these as the starting point for a story of your own.

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Eloise Williams, why not try:

- Gaslight
- Wilde

Answers

[Deers:Herd Eagles:Soar Serpents:Nest Owls:Parliament Starlings:Murmuration
Horses:Stable Salmon:Leap]



Peredur, the Monster and the Serpent of the Cairn

The Knight's at King Arthur's court did not welcome Peredur because of how he looked. Do you think Peredur would make a good knight, how would you have treated him?

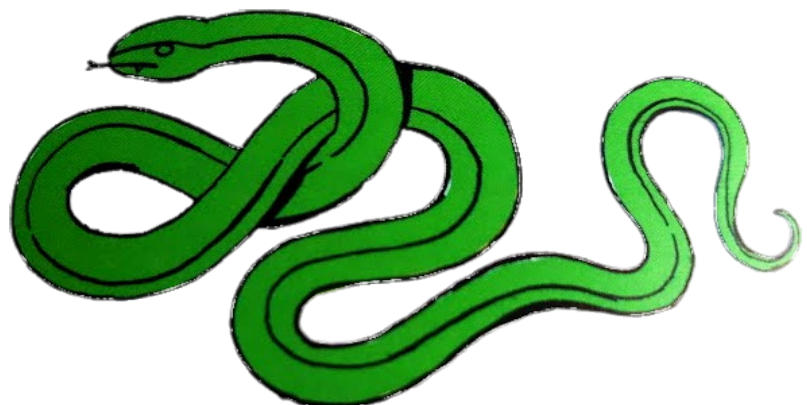
As Peredur becomes more comfortable he tells jokes and makes people laugh. Do you think telling jokes is a good way to help put people at their ease? What are some of the funniest jokes you know? See if you can make others laugh by sharing them.

What things distract Peredur through the story? Can you think of any things that help you keep focused?

The Serpent of the Cairn has a rock on his tail which provides the person who holds it with '*as much gold as he may desire*' (p78). Why not have a game of pin the stone on the snake's tail. Draw your own snake and then cut out a picture of a stone. Blindfold players and take it in turns to try to pin the tail on the serpent to discover if any player will have untold riches!

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Darren Chetty, why not try:

- What is masculinity? Why does it matter? And other big Questions



Follow the Dream

The story opens with a poem about dreams. Can you create your own poem about dreams. You might like to write a poem based on dreams generally or you might choose to focus your poem on a single dream that you have had.

Maxen dreams of mountains, rivers and seas that he has never travelled through. People often describe their ambitions for the future as dreams. What dreams do you have for the future and why do these matter to you and can you think of ways you might be able to help make these dreams become a reality?

Maxen '*knew exactly where to go, like a bee or butterfly in search of a flower.*' (p98) Draw a maze with a secret route that takes Maxen to Elen's castle. Are your friends able to find the path that takes him there?

What do you think might happen to Maxen if and when he returns to Rome?

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Alex Wharton, why not try:

- Daydreams and Jelly Beans



Three Graces

How do you think your area would look if, like Londinium, it was made '*dark with dust. Bust and broken.*' (p109). Think about the buildings which might be broken, what would people do and how would it feel to live there?

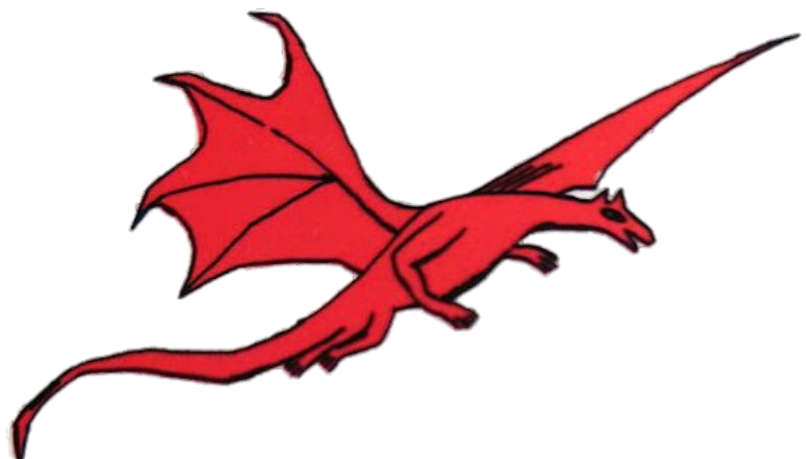
Why do you think nobody dares to speak in Londinium? What do you think they might be afraid of?

Llud speaks to his brother Llevelys through a special pipe. Make your own special speaking device by using two paper cups and a piece of string. Pierce a hole into the base of the paper cups (an adult can help you to do this) and thread the string through the cups tying a knot at each end of the string. Give a friend one cup and you take another, walk away from each other until the string is stretched out. One person should hold a cup to their mouth and the other holds the other cup to their ear, you can whisper secret messages to one another.

'The creatures you speak of that blight your land have been formed by your need for progress and power. They will choke your existence 'til you cannot breathe.' (p111) Can you think of ways that people's progress and power have caused problems for the environment. Can you think of ways that progress can help to change things for the better?

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Zillah Bethell, why not try:

- A Whisper of Horses
- The Shark Caller



Luned and the Magic Ring

'The court liked nothing more than a good story and they settled down in front of the fire to hear Kynon's epic tale.' (p129) Do you and your friends like stories? What kind of stories do you enjoy and is there somewhere special you enjoy hearing them?

Can you invent some sound effects to go alongside Kynon's story? Which parts will you use sound effects for? You might choose the hailstones, or the sound of horses hooves. Think about what noises you will use and the items you will create these with. You might like to use musical instruments or to get creative and use things that might normally be thrown away like rusty crisp packets or ice-cream containers!

Luned's ring and stone have magic powers that help Owain to escape. Can you think of any other ways he might be able to use their magic?

Do you think Owain would make a good guard for the well? What do you think might make him good, or bad at the job?

If you have enjoyed this story and are an older reader you might enjoy other books by Rhian Ivory, why not try:

- The Boy who Drew the Future



Geraint, Enid and the Big Knight Fight

Geraint is on the trail of a small, angry bearded man when the story starts. What makes you angry and why? Are there things you can do to help make you feel less angry? Discuss this with friends and see what ways people have to prevent themselves feeling angry.

Gwenhwyfar wants to find out whether the knight is a friend or foe. Thinking about the characters in this story and in **The Mab** as a whole, which would you say are friends and which are foes? Why do you think that way and is there one you'd particularly like as a friend, who is that and why?

Cardiff is described as not 'much to shout about – just a tiny walled settlement with a castle by the river.' See what you can find out about Cardiff. Are there any famous buildings? What jobs do people do there? How do you think it has changed since Geraint visited?

See what you can find out about jousting. You and your friends could have your own ticklesticks jousting contest. Choose a range of different tickling items these might be feathers, dusters, wispy fabric. Play in rounds of two, whoever makes their opponent laugh first is the winner of that round, who will be the ultimate ticklesticks winner?

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by P G Bell, why not try:

- The Train To Impossible Places
- The Great Brain Robbery



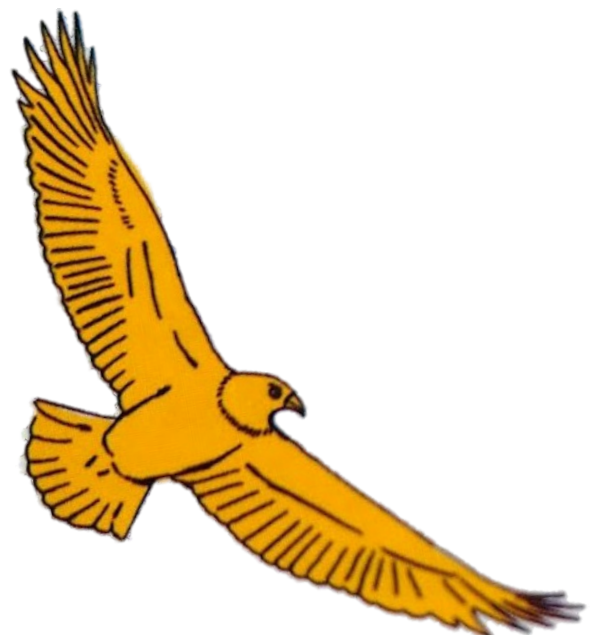
The Amazing Eight

Culhwch means pig shed. See if you can find out what your name means?

Each of the Amazing Eight have different skills. Is there one of these whose power you would most like to have? Which is it and why?

Ysbaddaden the Bad one lists forty fiendish tasks with each being more difficult than the last. Can you be a taskmaster and create a list of four fiendish tasks?

Olwen says 'Your bravery shows that anyone, whatever their name is or wherever they were born, can be a hero.' Do you agree with this? What is the most heroic act you have ever carried out? Compare these with those of your friends. Who do you think is the most heroic character in **The Mab**?



The Strange and Spectacular Dream of Rhonabwy the Restless

Create a wanted poster for Iorwerth the bandit and his gang. Will you offer a reward for their capture? If so, what will this be?

Rhonabwy is named as the Restless because he is so poor at sleeping. What do you do when you cannot sleep? Talk to friends or family and put together some advice for Rhonabwy.

The house of the bandits smells terrible and is compared to mouldy cheese, toilets and sweaty armpits. Make a list of the top five worst smells you can imagine. Do you think the bandits house would smell worse or better than these? What suggestions could you make to make the house smell better?

'A Story is supposed to have a proper ending.' (p186) Do you agree with Iorwerth? What's the best ending for a story you have come across? Thinking about each of the stories in **The Mab**, is there one whose ending you particularly like? Which one is it and why?

If you have enjoyed this story you might enjoy other books by Claire Fayers, why not try:

- The Accidental Pirates: Voyage to Magical North
- Storm Hound



FURTHER READING

If you enjoyed **The Mab**, you might like to try reading some of the books each of the authors of the stories has written. You may also like to try

- Alan Garner **The Owl Service**

This book is also based on **The Mabinogion**, it won the Carnegie medal, the UK's book prize for books for children and young people.

- Claire Fayers **Welsh Fairy Tales, Myths and Legends**

This collection of eighteen fairy tales and myths draws together the myths, magic, history and heritage of Wales.

- Nicola Davies **Mother Cary's Butter Knife**

This illustrated story is inspired by traditional folk stories and tells the tale of Keenan, the youngest of three brothers who set sail fishing at sea.

- Philip Reeve **Here Lies Arthur**

King Arthur features in several of the stories of **The Mab**, you might like to try reading this very unusual take on Arthurian legend.

