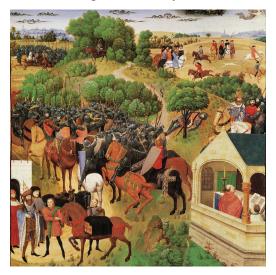## Objectives

- Students will be able to understand the evolution of the English language, and the relationships between plot, characters, and setting in an epic work.

- Students will be able to identify examples of internal and external conflict.

- Students will be able to understand the role of oral tradition in literary history.

- Students will be able to correctly use vocabulary words.

Evolution of the English Language

There are words in this section of *Song of Roland* that are no longer commonly used in Modern English, however, we can still understand their meanings. These words are examples of the continuing **evolution of the English language**. For example, in the phrase "I *pray* you," *pray* means to ask earnestly. "That by my side *doth* sway;" *doth* is an older form of the modern word "does." "Till bloodied o'er you;" *o'er* is no longer used in the form of a contraction. It means "over."

Plot, Characters & Setting

The **setting** is the time and place where the actions in the story take place. The setting provides the scene for the characters to act out the plot. The setting for this section is the border between France and Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains.

The **plot** is the storyline, or the sequence of events that make up a story. The plot includes all of the events of the story, the conflicts, and the resolutions. The plot in this section is that the "Pagans" (who would have been the Muslim Moors that had conquered Spain between: 711 – 718 A.D.) are attacking France in overwhelming numbers. Charles, the leader of the Franks is unaware of this and is leading his forces away from the coming battle. Olivier is urging the hero Roland to alert Charles to turn back by blowing the oliphant-horn, a horn so huge that only the mighty Roland can make it sound.

However, Roland refuses to play the horn and alert Charles to come to their assistance because 1) he wants the glory of a victory over impossible odds, and 2) he does not want to be thought a coward for asking for help to fight the Pagans.

Here, we see a common theme in **epic works**: the ego and vanity of the hero leads to his eventual downfall. Roland does eventually recognize the need to blow the oliphant-horn, but, by then, Charles is far away. Roland has to make the horn sound louder than ever before. He blows the alarm, but it takes such an effort to produce the sound that his temples explode. He dies from the wound. In many, many **epic works** from Homer to Roland to Shakespeare to today, the hero's ego is the tragic flaw that dooms him.

The **characters** in a story are the people who inhabit it and perform the actions. **Characters** are used to act out the **plot** of the story. The main characters are Roland, the hero of the *Song*, and Oliver, the nephew of Charlemagne and Oliver, Roland's friend who is mortally wounded by Margarice. Oliver represents wisdom.

External and Internal Conflict

External conflict occurs when a character is struggling against some sort of external, or outside, force. The force can be caused by another character, society, or by natural forces. External conflict can also consist of a verbal or physical confrontation between two characters.

In this section of *The Song of Roland,* there is **external conflict** between Roland and Oliver. Oliver recognizes the desperation of their position and wants Roland to sound the alarm alerting Charles to turn around and help them in the battle. Roland, on the other hand, refuses. Their disagreement in a type of external conflict:

> "Comrade Rollanz, once sound your olifant!
> If Charles hear, where in the pass he stands,
> I pledge you now, they'll turn again, the Franks."
> "Never, by God," then answers him Rollanz,
> "Shall it be said by any living man,
> That for pagans I took my horn in hand!

Internal conflict is when a character struggles within over a decision. We can understand from his earlier brave words that Oliver is no coward, so he must have struggled before deciding to ask Roland to sound the alarm for help. From the lesson:

> Says Oliver: "Pagans in force abound,
> While of us Franks but very few I count;
> Comrade Rollanz, your horn I pray you sound!
> If Charles hear, he'll turn his armies round."

The Role of Oral Tradition

Oral tradition was the method by which knowledge was passed from one generation to the next before people knew how to read and write. While it is hard for us today to imagine, *The Song of Roland* is about four thousand four lines long, and it was recited completely from memory! Many of the stories and legends that still exist today around the world were preserved by **oral tradition**.

Vocabulary

Being able to understand the vocabulary in *The Song of Roland* will help you better understand and appreciate the story. The following is a list of words from this section that you can use to help expand your vocabulary.

Renown – noun - a state of being widely acclaimed and highly honored; fame

Babe Ruth's *renown* as a great baseball player is well deserved.

Hilt – noun - The handle of a weapon or tool

I took my sword, stabbed the dragon, and shoved the sword into it up to the *hilt*.

Succor – noun - Assistance in time of distress; relief

The US Coast Guard provides *succor* to distressed mariners at sea.

Reproach – verb - To express disapproval of, criticism of, or disappointment in someone

I had to *reproach* Bryan for hitting a student much younger than he.

Vassal – noun - A person under the protection of a feudal lord to whom he has vowed homage and fealty

"Oh my King, as your *vassal,* I have pledged my duty to you! How may I serve?"

Growth & Assessment

1. What is the meaning of the old-fashioned word *doth*?

    a. Does

    b. Dust

    c. Don't

    d. Did

2. What is the cause of the **external conflict** in this section?

    a. The Franks are invading Spain

    b. Olivier attacks the pagans

    c. Charles leaving the battle

    d. Roland refusing to blow the horn

3. Who experiences **internal conflict** in this section?

    a. Roland

    b. Guenes

    c. Olivier

    d. Charles

4. How was *The Song of Roland* passed from one generation to another?

5. What does it mean to "reproach" someone?