

The Book of Three by Lloyd Alexander

Subject: Fantasy—Juvenile fiction

Book Lists: Europe, Grade 6

Props: Pig



The Book of Three is the first in a series of books called The Prydain Chronicles. Prydain is a land that exists only in the imagination. However the magnificent land and legends of Wales served as the inspiration for this adventurous and humorous tale of a boy and his pig. (*Show pig*)

The tale begins as Dallben, the 379-year-old master of Caer Dallben, held in his hands the leather-bound volume called *The Book of Three*. Taran, a strong, long-legged young man, knew this book to be a record of his homeland, Prydain. He had seen Dallben reading from it and writing in it from time to time.

Dallben spoke to Taran, “I am worried for you Taran. Our lands are no longer peaceful. A new and mighty war lord has risen. He wears an antlered mask and is called the Horned King. He is a man of evil for whom death is a black joy. Now, as your master, I have a certain responsibility to see that you reach manhood, preferably with a whole skin. So, because of this new King, you are not to leave my cottage or its gardens under any circumstances. Do not cross the field and do not enter the woods.”

Taran hurried from the cottage, angry and feeling trapped and confined by Dallben’s words. In the garden he found Coll, a round man with a bald head that glowed bright pink and complained, “I think there is a destiny laid on me that I am not to know anything interesting, go anywhere interesting, or do anything interesting. I’m certainly not to be anything at all.”

“Very well,” said Coll, “if that is all that troubles you, I shall make you something. From this moment, you are Taran, Assistant Pig-Keeper.” “I already take care of the pig,” Taran said bitterly. “All the better,” said Coll, “but you know it’s not every lad who can be assistant keeper to an oracular pig, a pig who can tell the future. Indeed, Hen Wen the pig, is truly valuable.” (*Show pig*)

But suddenly their conversation was interrupted by a loud clucking and squawking from the chicken run. The chickens were attempting to fly. The rooster was leading and the

chickens flapped awkwardly through the air, disappearing over the brow of the hill. Then from the stable the oxen bellowed and rolled their eyes in terror. Something was very wrong. Coll moved hastily to the cottage to help Dallben and ordered Taran to watch the pig, “Do not let her out of your sight,” he ordered.

Taran hurried to the pig pen but Hen Wen, who usually slept all day, was digging furiously in the soft earth at the far side of the pen. (*Show pig*) In fact she was burrowing so rapidly she would soon be out. Taran rushed to the pig but in an explosion of dirt and pebbles, she burst from under the fence, heaved Taran into the air, raced across the field, and into the woods.

Taran, the newly appointed Assistant Pig-Keeper, had already failed in his duties. He had lost his charge, the valued pig. Taran had no choice but to follow the pig. As he entered the woods Taran heard nothing but his own footsteps. The forest seemed to be holding its breath. Taran became desperately cold and he felt beneath the silence a growing restlessness. He ran aimlessly unable to keep his mind on the forks and turns of the path until. . . he halted suddenly. Hoof beats thudded in front of him. The forest shook as they grew louder. In another moment a black horse burst into view.

Taran fell back, terrified. Astride the foam-spattered animal rode a monstrous figure with the antlered head of a stag. The Horned King! The figure wore a mask made from a human skull with great antlers rising in cruel curves. The Horned King’s eyes blazed behind the gaping sockets of the whitened bone and he gave the long cry of a wild beast.

As the black horse and rider swept past Taran, many more riders followed. One of them caught sight of Taran. The ugly, grinning warrior turned his mount and threw his sword. The blade hissed in the air like an adder. Taran plunged into the underbrush but he was too late.

To learn what adventures await Taran read (*Hold up book*) *The Book of Three* by Lloyd Alexander.