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WALKING TO WISDOM

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

Till We Have Faces

C.S. Lewis



by Hannah Eagleson



Inklings Collection



Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: Till We Have Faces

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Editor: Janet Dixon

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WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDE: *TILL WE HAVE FACES*

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INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

Dear Students,

We are excited that you have the privilege of reading *Till We Have Faces* alongside a mentor (the writer of this guide) who will lead you “further up and further in” (C.S. Lewis’s words in *The Last Battle*). We aim to give you a delightful experience with this book and, in the process, to share practices that we have learned that will help you become a good reader:

- reading carefully
- taking time to absorb a book
- paying attention to details as well as to great ideas over the whole book
- learning to mark up a book
- taking a few notes while reading
- learning to ask and answer good questions
- synthesizing those questions together in a piece of writing or an engaging project

If you spend a year doing all of the Inklings courses, you will not only collect some of the most important books and thoughts, but you will also have increased your abilities and pleasures as a reader.

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Dorothy Sayers (three members of the Inklings whose work you will study in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection) wrote nonfiction as well as fiction, and we begin your reading of fiction with a few select nonfiction essays they wrote on topics that overlap with the topics in the book you are reading. Part of their remarkable legacy is that they wrote about many of the same great ideas in stories, plays, and poems and in nonfiction essays. This means that reading the ideas without the stories in these nonfiction works, or “context essays,” will be a significant help to you in understanding them and in fully exploring the characters, plot, and imagery. American writer Flannery O’Connor said, “Our response to life is different if we have been taught only a definition of faith than if we have trembled with Abraham as he held a knife over Isaac.” This is what stories do—they give us an experience of certain knowledge, which is why how we feel about the book is part of what the book is teaching us. We have kept these things in heart and mind while making this guide for you.

We have suggested two reading schedules—one that allows twenty-eight days to study the book and another that allows fifty-six days. Feel free to adjust the schedule or add even more time for writing and enrichment activities (found on page 148). Your teacher will know what is best for your schedule.

We have provided you with some space for answering questions, but we recommend that you also keep your thoughts, notes, and musings in a three-ring binder (or on the computer). For the Life Questions, you may want to keep a separate journal for meditative contemplation. We would like you to have as much room as you need, because you will find that the Inklings writers require a lot of space! It is highly recommended that you look up unfamiliar words found in C.S. Lewis’s *Till We Have Faces* and keep a journal of these new vocabulary words and definitions as you work through the book and the guide.

You have the option of studying one guide or a few, or taking a year to study them all to fulfill your British literature requirement for high school English. Enjoy the study!

SCOPE AND SEQUENCE FOR THE WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDES: THE INKLINGS COLLECTION

C.S. Lewis

Context Essays (selections from these are read at the beginning of each guide): excerpts from *Mere Christianity*,¹ *The Weight of Glory*,² *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*,³ and “Theology in Stories” by Gilbert Meilaender⁴

- *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*⁵
- *The Last Battle*⁶
- *The Screwtape Letters*⁷
- *Till We Have Faces*⁸

Dorothy Sayers

Context Essays: excerpts from *Letters to a Diminished Church*⁹

The Man Born to Be King (twelve-play cycle integrating the four gospels)¹⁰

J.R.R. Tolkien

- *The Fellowship of the Ring*¹¹
- *The Two Towers*¹²
- *The Return of the King*¹³

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1. The Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection is keyed to the following editions listed in these footnotes: C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 2. C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 3. C.S. Lewis, *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1966).
 4. Gilbert Meilaender, “Theology in Stories: C.S. Lewis and the Narrative Quality of Experience,” *Word and World* 1/3 (1981): 222, http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/1-3_Experience/1-3_Meilaender.pdf.
 5. C.S. Lewis, *The Chronicles of Narnia* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001).
 6. Lewis, *Chronicles*.
 7. C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).
 8. C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt, Brace, & Co., 1980).
 9. Dorothy Sayers, *Letters to a Diminished Church* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2004).
 10. Dorothy Sayers, *The Man Born to Be King: A Play-Cycle on the Life of Our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, Written for Broadcasting* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943). Reprinted with permission by Classical Academic Press, 2014.
 11. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
 12. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).
 13. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (Boston: Mariner Books, 2005).

THE INKLINGS

The Inklings was an informal literary discussion group associated with the University of Oxford, England, for nearly two decades between the early 1930s and late 1949.¹ The Inklings were writers, including C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Dorothy Sayers, and Charles Williams, who shared a love of similar stories and a remarkable commitment to ideas they shared. Their literary philosophies tended to depart from the period in which they were writing (modernist, 1900–1950), as did their cultural values. They liked to walk together and meet regularly to read their work aloud to one another.

“Properly speaking,” wrote Warren Lewis (brother of C.S.), “the Inklings was neither a club nor a literary society, though it partook of the nature of both. There were no rules, officers, agendas, or formal elections.”² While Dorothy Sayers did not attend the meetings herself, partly because she didn’t live in the same town or teach at Oxford, she is often claimed as an Inklings, as a friend of Lewis and Charles Williams. Her correspondence with both was avid and their work concerned with many of the same subjects, characters, and plots. They were a great encouragement to one other. Lewis even read Sayers’s play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King* (which is included in our literature guide series), each year during the Lenten period.

Readings and discussions of the members’ unfinished works were the principal purposes of meetings. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis’s *Out of the Silent Planet*, and Williams’s *All Hallows’ Eve* were among the first novels the Inklings read to one another. Tolkien’s fictional Notion Club (see *Sauron Defeated*) was based on the Inklings. Meetings were not all serious; the Inklings amused themselves by having competitions to see who could read notoriously bad prose for the longest without laughing.³

Until late 1949, Inklings readings and discussions usually occurred during Thursday evenings in C.S. Lewis’s college rooms at Magdalen College. The Inklings and friends were also known to gather informally on Tuesdays at midday at a local public house, The Eagle and Child.

We hope that you will keep the spirit of the Inklings alive in your own study of this guide by working out your own responses to their work in community and conversation as well as laboring over your writing and sharing it with fellow travelers seeking to walk a similar path. Consider studying this course online at Scholé Academy (classicalacademicpress.com/online-courses/).

-
1. Clyde S. Kilby and Marjorie Lamp Mead, eds., *Brothers and Friends: The Diaries of Major Warren Hamilton Lewis* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1982), 230.
 2. Bruce L. Edwards, *Apologist, Philosopher, and Theologian*, vol. 3 of *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007), 279.
 3. “War of Words over World’s Worst Writer,” *Culture Northern Ireland*, May 9, 2008, <<http://www.culturenorthernireland.org/article/1739/war-of-words-over-world-s-worst-writer?search=inklings&prg=1>>.

DAILY READING OUTLINES FOR C.S. LEWIS'S *TILL WE HAVE FACES*

Schedule 1

This schedule allows you to finish the book quickly. However, you will need significant time each day to devote to this heavier workload. This schedule also allows you to spend more time on final theme essays and enrichment activities when you finish the book.

Day 1: Context essay excerpt from *The Weight of Glory*: “The Weight of Glory”

Day 2: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “We Have Cause to Be Uneasy,” “The Great Sin,” and “Charity”

Day 3: Context essays: “Appendix B: Lewis and Tolkien’s View on Myth, and Myth Become Fact” on page 174; “Note” (the myth of Cupid and Psyche) at the back of *Till We Have Faces* (311–313); “Is Theology Poetry?” excerpt from *The Weight of Glory* for grades 10–12 or summary of the essay in the teacher’s edition for grades 7–9

Day 4: Chapter 1 of *Till We Have Faces* (Part I)

Day 5: Chapter 2

Day 6: Chapter 3

Day 7: Chapter 4

Day 8: Chapter 5

Day 9: Chapter 6

Day 10: Chapter 7

Day 11: Chapter 8

Day 12: Chapter 9

Day 13: Chapter 10

Day 14: Chapter 11

Day 15: Chapter 12

Day 16: Chapter 13

Day 17: Chapter 14

Day 18: Chapter 15

Day 19: Chapter 16

Day 20: Chapter 17

Day 21: Chapter 18

Day 22: Chapter 19

Day 23: Chapter 20

Day 24: Chapter 21

Day 25: Part II, Chapter 1

Day 26: Part II, Chapter 2

Day 27: Part II, Chapter 3

Day 28: Part II, Chapter 4

Schedule 2

Days 1–2: Context essay excerpt from *The Weight of Glory*: “The Weight of Glory”

Days 3–4: Context essay excerpts from *Mere Christianity*: “We Have Cause to Be Uneasy,” “The Great Sin,” and “Charity”

Days 5–6: Context essays: “Appendix B: Lewis and Tolkien’s View on Myth, and Myth Become Fact” on page 174; “Note” (the myth of Cupid and Psyche) at the back of *Till We Have Faces* (311–313); “Is Theology Poetry?” excerpt from *The Weight of Glory* for grades 10–12 or summary of the essay in the teacher’s edition for grades 7–9

Days 7–8: Chapter 1 of *Till We Have Faces* (Part I)

Days 9–10: Chapter 2

Days 11–12: Chapter 3

Days 13–14: Chapter 4

Days 15–16: Chapter 5

Days 17–18: Chapter 6

Days 19–20: Chapter 7

Days 21–22: Chapter 8

Days 23–24: Chapter 9

Days 25–26: Chapter 10

Days 27–28: Chapter 11

Days 29–30: Chapter 12

Days 31–32: Chapter 13

Days 33–34: Chapter 14

Days 35–36: Chapter 15

Days 37–38: Chapter 16

Days 39–40: Chapter 17

Days 41–42: Chapter 18

Days 43–44: Chapter 19

Days 45–46: Chapter 20

Days 47–48: Chapter 21

Days 49–50: Part II, Chapter 1

Days 51–52: Part II, Chapter 2

Days 53–54: Part II, Chapter 3

Days 55–56: Part II, Chapter 4

For both schedules, you will need to add time for essay writing and enrichment activities at the end.

ELEMENTS IN THE LITERATURE GUIDE

Make Notes: Possess the Book

Becoming a reader is all about learning to pay attention and gather the details to relish and realize the significance and unity of what you are reading. Try using the following symbols or making up your own system that covers the same basics. Underline interesting passages. Write in the margins so that you can go back to reference what you wrote to make your Great Ideas Quotes pages, answer questions, hold discussions, and support points you make in your writing assignments. Here is a simple marking system that we have found effective:

- * This is important or delightful.
- ? I have a question.
- ?? I'm confused.
- ! This is surprising or exciting to me.
- T This could relate to one of the themes or motifs of the book.
- ✓ This relates to something else I have read.
- X This is part of the conflict or the problem of the story.
- C This is significant in defining this character.

Tracing the Great Ideas

In each chapter you will see there are several great ideas chosen for you on which to take notes. (Please remember that you are welcome to find your own great ideas themes in addition to ours.) You will find that the great ideas begin to gather momentum and take shape as you trace them intermittently in each chapter. Write them in the Great Ideas Quotes sections in each chapter. See the first chapter (page 19) for an example of how to record the quotations. At the end of the guide you will reflect upon the themes of the course and choose a writing prompt from which you will develop an argumentative essay. In the teacher's edition we have included sample student essays developed in response to the prompts so you can see how other students have written about *Till We Have Faces*. You may also use our great idea definition for your essay's thesis or create a thesis of your own.

Great Ideas

Nature of gods: The nature of the gods is one of the great questions of the novel. They are described in many ways—as cruel and unfair, as simply beyond human fathoming, as metaphors for rational thought rather than actual beings, and as real and strange and beautiful and satisfying to some deep human desire.

Glome's religion: Glome's religion is a system of pre-Christian sacrifices and beliefs. It is bloody and strange to modern ways of understanding the world, mysterious and often irrational. But it grasps that relationship with the divine is only possible through sacrifice.

Greek wisdom: Orual's tutor, the Fox, teaches Greek wisdom, which for him is rationalistic and Stoic. His Greek wisdom is doubtful of the supernatural, although it sees legends about the gods as useful in teaching ethical lessons and providing metaphors for beauty and virtue.

Nature of beauty: Beauty is a central idea of the book, and it hints at an understanding of the gods that is beyond either the sacrificial system of Glome or the Stoicism of the Fox. Because the main character is considered ugly, and her half sister Psyche is beautiful, much of the book deals with what it is to be perceived as ugly or beautiful. Beyond the literal, this idea also applies to having a beautiful soul or being desirable to the gods. Further, there is a kind of beauty that Psyche describes the gods as possessing which fulfills a deep human longing.

Longing: Longing is also connected to an idea of the divine beyond either Glome’s beliefs or Greek Stoicism. Like so many of Lewis’s works, this book describes a sense of profound longing for something beyond ourselves. Psyche describes longing for something she does not understand, and sees the gods, especially the god of the Grey Mountain, as fulfilling this longing through a beauty that deeply satisfies the human heart.

Nature of death: Death is understood in many different ways in the book—as an ugly sacrifice necessary to please the goddess Ungit, as something that unites a person to the gods, as something that ends the self as it has always been and allows something else to come in its place. As the book unfolds, the meaning of death changes profoundly.

Nature of love: The novel deeply delves into the nature of love as it probes the state of Orual’s heart. What it means to love is explored through the Greek ethical teaching of the Fox, through the intense feeling Orual has for her sister, and through discussion of the love of the gods.

Hiding/Shutting away the self: Orual spends much of the novel hiding or shutting her true self away, because she cannot face the intensity of longing she would know if she knew herself. She cannot face it partly because she feels that everything she could long for is impossible for her.

Tell It Back

This is a method of narrating the chapters orally, or “telling it back.” It is a wonderful option that allows you to narrate the content of each unit by oral retelling—with or without a partner(s). This is a basic element of learning to read which never loses its delight and capacity to delight others. It also helps to develop a strong mental outlining ability and memory.

(Optional) We like it when people make their own illustrations for a book to enter more fully into the lives of the characters. Feel free to do so as you make your way through the book, as a chapter unit summary exercise, or afterward, when you have finished. How you feel about the book and what you are able to imagine about the book is part of what it is teaching you. Tolkien himself made drawings for many of his own characters.

Reading Questions

Reading questions encourage close reading of the text by asking comprehension questions. All answers are found in the text.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions require you to synthesize the main ideas of the text that may be either explicitly or implicitly stated. Your answers to these should explain Lewis’s perspective, not your own. Depending on your level, learning needs, or preference, the in-depth discussion questions may be written as short answers (one to two paragraphs), discussed with the teacher/fellow students, or simply read to inspire critical thinking.

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

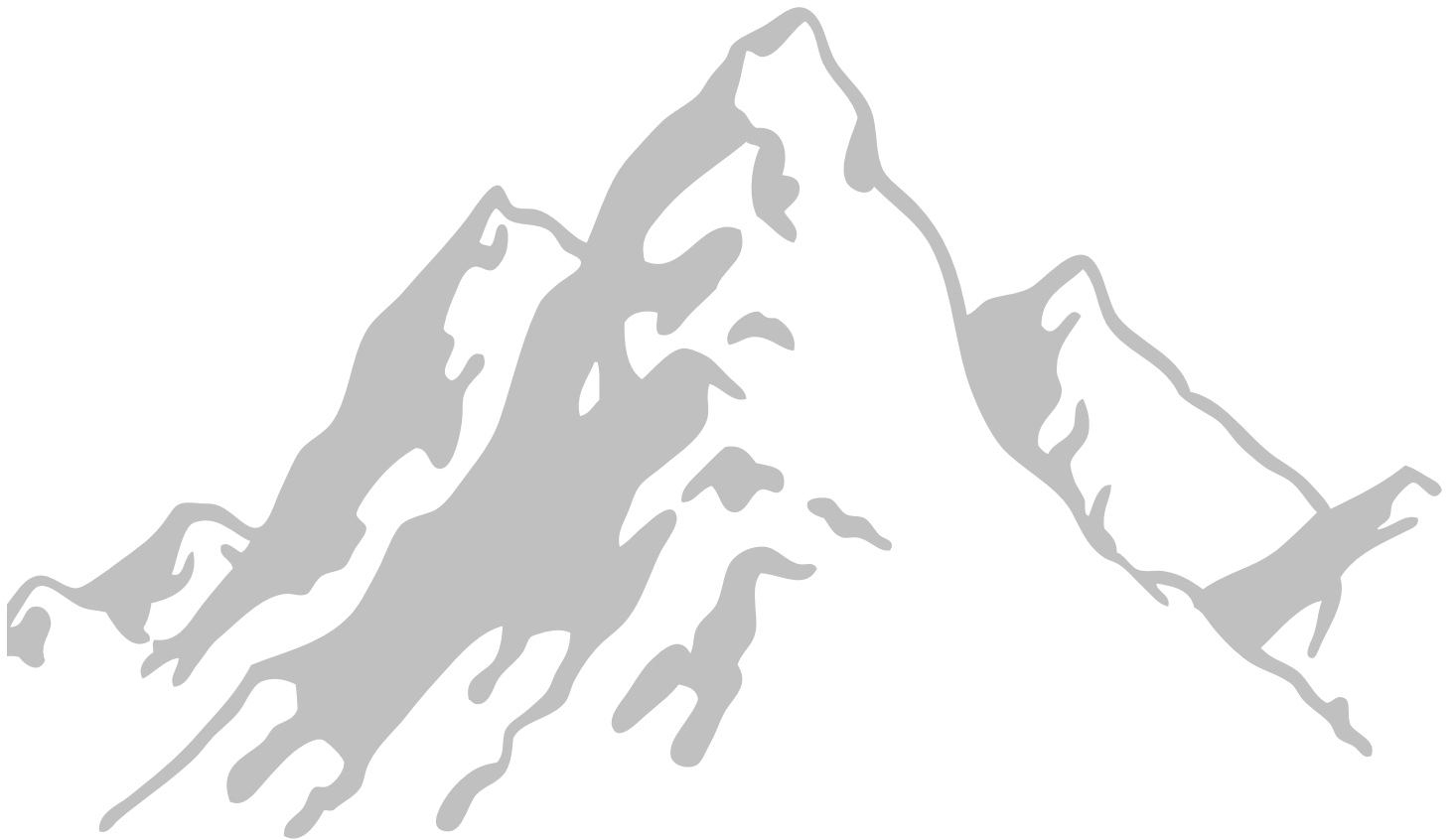
It’s difficult to read any of C.S. Lewis’s writing without thinking about applying his ideas to your own life. *Till We Have Faces* is no exception. After each reading section, several “life questions” help you reflect on your own personal experiences and examine your own life in light of ideas from *Till We Have Faces*. You may write informal responses to the life questions in a separate journal.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

At the end of each section, create two discussion questions that you think would make for good discussion among classmates, friends, and family. These should not chiefly be questions that have a sentence-long answer, but rather questions that would stimulate a longer exchange of ideas. Use our discussion questions and life questions as guides for writing yours.

Chapter Summaries (Optional)

(This is optional, because you have already done this in oral or illustration form for the Tell It Back section. Whether or not you do it will depend on your teacher.) If your teacher wishes, she may assign the task of summarizing the chapters in writing. After reading each assigned chapter, summarize the main thematic ideas and significant plot details in five to ten sentences. A well-written summary concisely retells the most important ideas and events of the chapter. Avoid directly quoting or simply rephrasing sentences in your summaries. This exercise will strengthen your ability to consistently identify essential information from a text and retell this information without plagiarizing. Because this is a challenging text and it is sometimes difficult to understand what is happening in each chapter, we have created chapter summaries in appendix A (page 157). Check these after you have attempted your own so that you can be sure you have covered the subject adequately. Even if this section is not assigned to you to complete, reading our summaries *after* you read the chapter will support your efforts greatly.



INTRODUCTION TO *TILL WE HAVE FACES*

Note: This novel contains surprises and twists and turns. Many find it difficult. For the fullest experience of it, we recommend reading the whole novel first (reading chapter summaries, located in Appendix A, after you read each chapter and then going through the guide questions) and savoring the story, and then afterwards reading this introduction. However, if you are finding the novel difficult, you may wish to begin with the following introduction, which will give you an overview of what happens and its summary meaning. However, be warned there are spoilers! If you choose not to read the “Plot Summary,” please look ahead and read “Lewis and Myth,” as well as “Worship in Glome, Philosophy in Greece” and “Orual.”

Plot Summary

Till We Have Faces is C.S. Lewis’s last novel, a strange and powerful retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche (see the afterword to the novel [“Note,” 311] for the myth itself). Like many current retellings of myth and fairy tale, this one takes the point of view of someone who is not traditionally the main character. We hear the story of Psyche from one of her sisters, a character who is only briefly present in the original myth and who doesn’t even have a name. Lewis gives her the name of Orual, and tells the novel in first person from her perspective.

Lewis also gives the myth a historical setting, as Doris Myers has pointed out in her book *Bareface*.¹ He places it in a small kingdom named Glome, close enough to classical Greece to have heard of it, but far enough to make Greece a distant place. While the historical time of the novel is not entirely clear, it appears to be a time in which Greece is still a powerful cultural force, and likely a time before the dominance of Rome, since Rome is not mentioned.

Orual is the first daughter of the King of Glome, so she is born into a royal household. She and her sister Redival lose their mother early on to death. Their father is harsh and overbearing, but Orual finds some hope in the kindness of her Greek tutor, the Fox, and eventually in the birth of her half sister, Psyche. Psyche is the person whom Orual loves the most. Since Orual is perceived as ugly, she believes that she will never find romantic love or be a parent. Psyche is the closest thing she will have to a daughter, and Orual cares passionately and deeply about her. The years pass, and Psyche grows from a girl into a young woman.

In a crisis in which everything seems to be going wrong in Glome—famine, plague, political woes—the priest of Ungit convinces Orual’s father that the only way to make things better is to sacrifice Psyche to Ungit. This is done by chaining her to a tree in the sacred part of the Grey Mountain and leaving her there. It is said that a woman sacrificed in this way will become the bride of Ungit’s son, the god who lives on the Grey Mountain. It is also said that the woman will be devoured by the god and that perhaps the loving and the devouring are one.

Orual does everything she can to prevent this from happening to Psyche, but she is not able to stop the sacrifice. In time she decides that she will at least try to bury Psyche’s bones. But when she goes to the mountain, she finds Psyche alive and very well. Psyche claims that she is living in a beautiful palace, the house of the god, and that he is her husband. He comes only at night and has forbidden her to see him, at least for the present, but she can see the palace. Orual cannot see the palace, so she does not have as much hard evidence as she wants. Because she has always distrusted and feared the gods, she is not sure what to believe. She says that if she could have seen the palace, she would have accepted the situation. Because she cannot, she pressures Psyche into a test: take a lamp and look on the god, to see if he is really a god or some sort of outlaw or terrible creature. Orual is given one glimpse of the palace through the mist in the twilight, but she still resists the impulse to tell Psyche not to go through with the test.

1. Doris T. Myers, *Bareface: A Guide to C.S. Lewis’s Last Novel* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2004).

After Psyche looks on the god, he casts her out to wander. At this point, there is no doubt in the book that the gods are real, no mere symbols but powerful beings. Yet the god of the Grey Mountain is different than Ungit. He is beautiful, and there is little evidence that he is unjust. He judges Orual and tells her, “You also shall be Psyche.” Orual does not know what this means. She expects to die shortly after this, but instead things begin to go very well for her, at least externally. She becomes Queen of Glome, her political endeavors go well, and she becomes wealthier and more powerful by good management. Yet under it all, she is in terrible grief over what has happened, a grief that she tries to bury. As she buries it, she becomes more and more empty, even as her reign is successful.

After many years, Orual comes to a temple in which she hears the story of Psyche, but with a vital change. In the tale told in the temple, both of Psyche’s sisters came to the god’s palace, and they could both see it. They convinced her to look at the god because they envied her and wanted her to be ruined. Orual is furious at this version of the story, which she feels misrepresents the situation entirely. It is this which causes her to tell the story of her life and to accuse the gods.

The novel opens with Orual beginning to recount these stories after she has reigned successfully for a long time. She says that she will write of her quarrel with the gods and accuse them. The first twenty-one chapters of the book tell the story of her life and her quarrel with the gods.

The last four chapters of the novel are a dramatic change, and they turn everything that has gone before on its head. Through a series of events and visions, Orual slowly realizes that she has misunderstood the gods completely. She begins by seeing that her love for someone she deeply cared about was disordered, and that many people’s lives have been made less so that hers can be made more. She wanted to possess and dominate the people she loved, to demand sacrifices of them. In essence, she realizes that she is everything she has hated about Ungit, that like Ungit she has tried to demand the sacrifice of whole lives to her interests. Her only comfort has been that at least she loved Psyche truly all those years ago.

This realization shatters Orual, and she tries to commit suicide by throwing herself into a river. But the god who spoke to her years before on the Grey Mountain speaks again. He says, “Do not do it” (279). Then he tells her that she cannot escape Ungit by going to the land of death, for Ungit is there too. He says, “Die before you die. There is no chance after” (279).

Orual tries to heed his words, to put to death everything bad in her soul and to live a new and better life. But she finds herself unsuccessful. She despairs of becoming something different, but about this time she begins to have visions. In the visions, she is engaged in seemingly impossible tasks, the tasks Psyche must do in the myth of Cupid and Psyche. She must sort a vast pile of seeds, get golden fleece from dangerous rams, and bring the water of death back from mountains in the underworld. In the visions, Orual works toward all these things, bearing anguish and sorrow.

But when Orual comes in her vision to the land of death to bring back water and realizes she cannot climb the mountains, an eagle comes to her. She realizes that she is carrying her book instead of a bowl for the water, and the eagle finds out that she has a complaint against the gods and says her case is to be heard.

When she makes the case to the judge, surrounded by a vast company of all the dead, Orual realizes that she has been wrong her entire life about her love for Psyche. It too was disordered, like her other loves, and she wanted to separate Psyche from the god. Orual thought that she did not believe in the god, or that she thought the god was evil. She now sees that she simply didn’t want the god to take Psyche from her, that she wanted to dominate Psyche and keep her to herself. This realization is even more shattering than the last one.

Yet as she realizes all this, a voice calls out from the assembly of the dead. It is her tutor the Fox, long dead but alive again, and he says that he is to blame for teaching her wrongly about the gods. The two are reunited, and he takes her to a beautiful place where there are murals on the walls. The murals come to life and show the story of Psyche’s wanderings, and Orual realizes that somehow she herself bore much of the anguish of the wanderings—her task of sifting in the vision helped Psyche sort the seeds, and so on. But there is a final task: Psyche must go to the land of death and bring back beauty from the queen of death, beauty that can make even Ungit beautiful. Psyche is not allowed to speak to anyone on the way, or she will not be able to come back from the land of death. The people of Glome ask for Psyche’s help, and then the Fox tries to stop her from going to the land of death. Finally an image of Orual herself appears on the wall,

begging Psyche to stay with her. Psyche keeps on somehow, though she desperately wants to heed the Fox and Orual.

After they have seen the living paintings on the walls, the Fox and Orual talk, and then Psyche herself comes, for real and not in a picture. Orual pleads for her forgiveness and says, “Never again will I call you mine; but all there is of me shall be yours” (305). Orual has finally learned what it is to give the self in love instead of to demand the selves of others. Psyche says she has brought the beauty that can make Ungit beautiful, and she gives it to Orual.

Then, in a passage so beautiful that summary seems impossible, the god himself comes. Orual realizes that “the most dreadful, the most beautiful, the only dread and beauty there is, was coming” (307). As he comes, Orual sees a reflection of herself and Psyche in a pool. Yet they are both Psyche, not completely alike, but both beautiful. The god says, “You also are Psyche” (308). This is the culmination of the novel. Orual becomes beautiful. She ceases to be Ungit, to be the person who demands to consume the selves of others, and she becomes Psyche, the soul who is beloved by the god and therefore free to love others.

Lewis and Myth

The novel is a powerful working out in story of Lewis’s beliefs about myth. Lewis believed that the mythology of various cultures pointed, imperfectly but truly, to the coming of Christ. As author Christine Perrin reminds us in the *Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lewis saw great continuity between the pagan world and the Christian world—he believed that paganism was the forerunner to Christianity. He said it this way: “I think the thrill of the Pagan stories and of romance may be due to the fact that they are mere beginnings—the first, faint whisper of the wind from beyond the world—while Christianity is the thing itself.”² Lewis rejected the social science approach to mythology, which essentially argues that myth is simply a product of the childhood of mankind, that they are the stories that people made up before there was science, that we now know better. In modern times, collectively we are grown up and we don’t believe in that babyish stuff anymore. Lewis felt that myth is fundamental to the human imagination and human experience—that we were made to see the world as a fairy tale (in all of its evil as well as enchantment), that myth will never pass away but rather that it encompasses our deepest beliefs, convictions, and commitments as human beings. In his view, Christianity is the birth of myth into fact—all the myths that came before were in some way pointing to Christ, asking for Christ, preparing for Christ. When Christ came, mythology came true and walked upon the earth. Christ is the fulfillment of the dying god myth (many cultures had the figure of the god who dies to redeem mankind)—all those myths about gods who die were prefiguring (just as Jonah in the belly of the whale prefigures Christ in the belly of the tomb) Christ’s literal entry into time and space.

Because Lewis believed so deeply in the power of myth to point to truths about Christ, he is able to tell a pagan myth and hope that the reader will learn more about reality, and thus about Christ, through it. This is what he does in *Till We Have Faces*, weaving a story about Orual’s relationship to the pagan gods of Glome. Lewis believed the story would have the power to illuminate something about Christ. That is, there are things about the myth that resemble things which are true of Christ, and things about Orual’s relationship to the gods that resemble the human relationship to the true God.

Because most people read the Narnia tales as allegory, a mode of storytelling in which one thing stands symbolically for another (Aslan stands for Christ, a character named “Charity” stands for that virtue, etc.), and because Lewis clearly does notice resonances of the Psyche myth that are similar to truths about Christ, it is easy to read *Till We Have Faces* as an allegory. But myth and allegory are different, as Lewis and Tolkien both argued, and as Thomas Howard has emphasized in the Mars Hill Audio Conversation “*Till We Have Faces* and the Meaning of Myth.”³ Lewis says in his review of *The Lord of the Rings*, “A myth points, for each reader,

2. David C. Downing, *Into the Wardrobe* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 109.

3. Thomas Howard, “Mars Hill Audio Conversation 14: *Till We Have Faces* and the Meaning of Myth” (Charlottesville, VA: Mars Hill Audio), June 1, 1998.

to the realm he lives in most. It is a master key; use it on what door you like.”⁴ For Lewis, allegory points at a specific meaning and is less applicable to other narratives. Myth points very deeply to many different things, and each reader may find it illuminating different things in his life. If you try to read *Till We Have Faces* as an allegory, certain things don’t work—characters turn out not to stand for anything specific, events turn out to have strange theological implications, etc. Rather, the book should be read as a myth, which might apply to many true things, the most important one being the relationship of human beings to the true God.

Since the book is a telling of a myth, it is not concerned to lay out a clear and carefully delineated system of theology, though Lewis spent much time elsewhere on the importance of theology. Instead, the novel tells a story and allows the reader to find points at which the story illuminates something true about the reader’s relationship to the true God. There are many other true things the story illuminates as well, and the reader is welcome to attend to whichever elements of the myth she finds most compelling. Lewis believed that myth has an incredible power in our lives because of its ability to invite us into a story that can illuminate many different things about our experience.

One of the greatest powers of myth in Lewis’s understanding is that it wakes and describes a deep longing for something beyond the world as we currently know it. Lewis describes this longing in the essay “The Weight of Glory” as the inconsolable longing that we all have for an object we aren’t entirely sure of. Lewis often uses the German word *Sehnsucht* to try to describe this longing; he calls it a “desire which no natural happiness will satisfy,” not yet attached to its proper object.⁵ This desire points forward to God in much the way myth does, and it is often wakened by myth. In *Till We Have Faces*, we see it in Psyche’s longing for the Grey Mountain, which points to her eventual love for the god of the mountain.

One of the chief tensions of the novel also has to do with myth. The main character is offered two main models of understanding the world, one a rationalist model that sees myth as symbolic of merely natural events, and one a deeply mystical model that sees myth as conveying profound truths about supernatural beings beyond human understanding. Orual’s Greek tutor tries to teach her to be rationalistic and Stoic, to understand the world through naturalistic explanations that depend on human reasoning and the ability to discipline one’s emotions. Almost everyone else around her holds a very different view of the world, steeped in the pagan religion of Glome. This religion sees the gods as profoundly real and deeply mysterious, difficult to understand but incredibly powerful. The gods are numinous. The word “numinous” comes from a word meaning “spirit” or “god,” and it refers to a category of beings that are beyond human experience. Often the word is used to refer to something that is so far beyond human beings that it is terrifying; people who confront it are often completely undone by it. Myth is one of the few ways anyone can talk about the gods in this understanding, because its imagery conveys something that is true, if very difficult to grasp. In Glome, worship of the gods also includes blood sacrifice, usually of animals, but sometimes even of human beings.

Worship in Glome, Philosophy in Greece

The way Lewis writes about these systems suggests that both have certain aspects of the truth, but both are incomplete. The Greek rationalism and Stoicism recognize important truths about ethics. Orual’s tutor the Fox says that all human beings are part of the whole of nature, and that they must care for each other and live responsibly in the world. He also recognizes that the love men and women give to each other must be free, not forced, and he gives this kind of love to Orual throughout the novel, as a father might. These ethical precepts point to truths in Christian thought as well, to the need to love our neighbor as ourselves and to care faithfully for the world that God has made.

At the same time, the Greek wisdom the Fox teaches is incomplete. It has little place for the truly supernatural, for something that cannot be explained or grasped within human experience. Because of that, it is ill-equipped to explain or deal with the events of Orual’s life, in which the supernatural intrudes whether she likes it or not.

4. C.S. Lewis, “Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*,” *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature* (San Diego: Harcourt Books, 1966), 85.

5. C.S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” *The Weight of Glory* (New York: HarperOne, 2009).

The system of pagan temple worship that Glome practices seems horrific to Orual and to modern sensibilities, but it grasps some truths that the Fox does not. The chief goddess of Glome is named Ungit, and she is a version of Aphrodite, the goddess of love in Greek mythology (Venus in Roman mythology). Ungit is terrifying. She demands blood sacrifices, even sometimes human sacrifices. Her temple is dark and smells like the blood that is spilled there. Ungit seems irrational, unjust, and demanding, and Orual fears her.

This system of belief is obviously lacking as well. In many ways Ungit seems evil, and some of the practices associated with her (such as human sacrifice) are truly horrific. Yet the religion of Glome grasps some things about reality that the Fox does not understand. It sees that life cannot be explained wholly by human reason, and it cannot be lived solely by human effort. It sees also that sacrifice is necessary, that the divine demands everything from human beings, even what is most costly. In Christian thought, too, God asks everything of humanity. The Old Testament sacrificial system points to the ways that God asks us for perfection, and to the sacrifice He expects when we do not give Him our all. Of course, Christian thought also holds that God is wholly just, which Ungit is not. And in Christian thought, it is ultimately God who makes the great sacrifice which satisfies Himself: in the death of Christ, God as man offers Himself to satisfy His own perfect expectations.

Orual

Caught between these conflicting accounts of reality, Orual has to chart a path for her own life. The two ways of being are thrown starkly into contrast when Orual has to make the great choice of how to respond to Psyche's story about the god. Much of the fascination of the novel comes from watching Orual try to forge a way between these challenges. In the end, she finds that both fall short of the reality of the god, and yet both have hints of the truth that she should have seen more fully. At the end of the book, the parts of these beliefs that are lacking fall away, and she stands amazed before the god of the mountain himself, the culmination and fulfillment of everything that was good in both patterns of belief.

Yet as the novel goes on, we realize that this dichotomy between Greek philosophy and the beliefs of Glome, though important, is hiding another tension: between who Orual thinks she is and who she actually is. She often thinks that she is trying to decide between the systems when she is in fact using them (important as they are) to distract herself from the question of what she is really like and what aspects of her soul need to be healed. As she realizes that she is not the person she wishes to be, it becomes clear that she is not generous in the way the Fox's philosophy taught her to be. In terms of the beliefs of Glome, she has accused the gods, but she herself is full of everything that she hates about Ungit—possessive selfishness and demanding expectations. Another major tension of the book is the arc of Orual's hard heart and how it changes as the book goes on.

These tensions of the novel are masterfully woven, and Lewis works with them over the course of the whole book. We will chart them in the great ideas record to see how they develop.

For Further Biographical Study

Please see the following resource: <<http://www.cslewis.org/resource/chronocsl/>>. This website—created by the C.S. Lewis Foundation—suggests and links to a number of other excellent sources.

**SUMMARIZE THE CONTEXT ESSAYS:
THE WEIGHT OF GLORY AND
MERE CHRISTIANITY EXCERPTS**

Before you start *Till We Have Faces*, you will read and summarize the excerpts from *The Weight of Glory* and *Mere Christianity* we have selected. Then cross-check your summaries with ours (in the teacher's edition) to make sure you have covered the topic adequately. Our summaries range from about 50 to 400 words, but your teacher will assign a word count for yours. These "context essays" will help you to understand and gain insight into many of the ideas that arise in *Till We Have Faces*. An important part of becoming a good reader involves being able to summarize your reading in such a way that someone else can understand what you have read.

"The Weight of Glory" Summary (from *The Weight of Glory*, Essay 1)

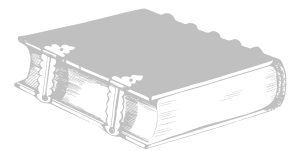
"We Have Cause to Be Uneasy" Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book 1, chapter 5)

"The Great Sin" Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book 3, chapter 8)

“Charity” Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book 3, chapter 9)

“Is Theology Poetry” Summary (from *The Weight of Glory*, Essay #5)

(Please note: this essay is for advanced students, grades 10-12. Younger students will read summary only.)



PART I: CHAPTER 1



Make Notes in Your Book*

Don't forget to make notes in your book!

Tracing the Great Ideas

Remember, as you read, to look for and choose quotes related to the given great ideas themes so that you can trace them all the way through the book. (Please remember that you are welcome to find your own great ideas themes in addition to ours.) Record them and their page numbers in the space provided in each chapter. Then be on the lookout for how they are worked out in each particular context. At the end of the guide you will use these quotes to create a thesis, from which you will develop an argumentative essay. If you are having trouble knowing which kinds of quotes would be appropriate under the given theme, ask your teacher or consult the teacher's edition.

Example quotes and their themes

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of gods*

"I am old now . . . made an answer." (3–4)

"The god of the Grey Mountain . . . our own language." (4)

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Greek wisdom*

"He had all sorts of sayings to cheer himself . . . 'our opinion makes it.'" (7)

"Not that this ever really happened . . . Alone I lie." (8–9)

*You'll see icons at the beginning of each unit as a reminder to do such things as make notes and tell back what you've read.



Tell It Back*

Do an oral summary of your reading on a recording device or to another human being. Narrate the most important events in order while sharing the elements of the characters' development that are important. If you are having trouble with this, take a look at our chapter summary in appendix A (page 157) at the end of the guide.

Reading Questions

1. What keeps the Fox cheerful, according to the narrator?

2. Which goddess does the Fox say Ungit is like?

3. What causes Orual to realize that people see her as ugly?

Discussion Questions

1. This chapter does not give very specific reasons for Orual's complaint against the gods. From what the chapter does say, what reasons might she give for her distrust of the gods?

2. Why do you think Lewis chooses the story of Aphrodite and Anchises as one of the poems that the Fox recites?

3. What view of poetry does the Fox express?

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

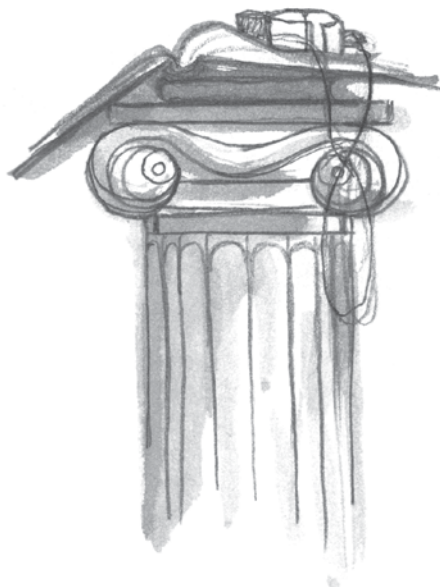
1. Have you ever had a complaint against God or sympathized with the language of the psalmist when he says, “I will complain” and “lament”? Describe your experience and how you worked or are working through it.

2. Reflect on a favorite poem that affects you deeply. If you need some suggestions, look up “A Noiseless Patient Spider” by Walt Whitman or “God’s Grandeur” by Gerard Manley Hopkins.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1.

2.



PART I: CHAPTER 2



Make Notes in Your Book

Tracing the Great Ideas

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of gods*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Greek wisdom*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of beauty*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Longing*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of love*



Tell It Back

Reading Questions

1. Why does everyone in the palace stay awake the night that the queen is in labor with the child?

2. What does the Fox propose to do when he thinks he will be sent to the mines?

3. What kinds of creatures does Psyche tend to love, to Orual's surprise?

Discussion Questions

1. While looking at Psyche, the Fox says, "Helen herself, new-hatched, must have looked so" (21). Why might this be both a stunning compliment and a worrying thought?

2. Find the quotation beginning “As the Fox delighted to say” and ending “missed by some trip of chance” (22). What do you think it means for Psyche’s beauty to be “according to nature”?

3. Orual describes the intensity of her love for Psyche in the passage beginning “I wanted to be a wife” and ending “make her rich” (23). What do you think this passage says about the nature of Orual’s love for Psyche? Is it good to feel this way or bad?

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

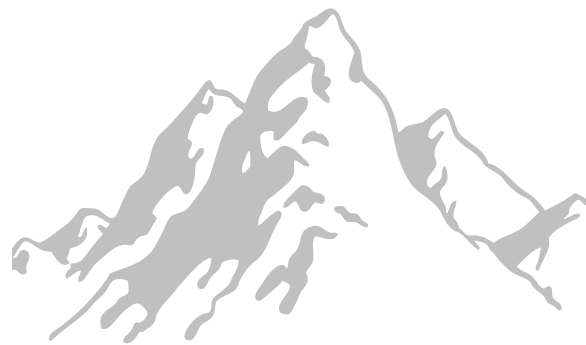
1. Can you identify in your life any disordered loves—that is, loves such as Orual’s that don’t seem to keep the beloved (be it thing or person) in the proper place? Do you love something more than it should be loved, or have you given yourself a role in its life that is too significant and thus greedy, consuming, or self-important? Another way that Christian theology talks about this idea is in the concept of idolatry—putting another object in the place of God.

2. What are some things, people, or experiences that have taken your breath away and caught your attention with their beauty?

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1.

2.



PART I: CHAPTER 3



Make Notes in Your Book

Tracing the Great Ideas

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of gods*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Greek wisdom*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of beauty*

Great Ideas Quotes throughout the chapter for the theme *Nature of love*

Reading Questions

1. Orual describes a moment in which she comes closer to loving her father than ever before. When is that?

2. What does Orual say about the king's treatment of the rebels?

3. What does Psyche talk about when she is delirious with fever?

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that Orual is right that Redival ended the good times? What do you think of Orual's treatment of Redival here?

2. Orual's relationship with her father improves once she starts helping him with administrative tasks. Why might that be?

3. When Orual is writing about whether Psyche has healing powers or not, she says, "Only the gods know if those who recovered were those whom Psyche had touched, and gods do not tell" (33). What does this line show about Orual's understanding of the gods?

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

1. Have you encountered Orual's idea about the gods (or God) before, either in yourself or in someone else? Do you (even as a Christian) feel that God hides or is absent sometimes?

2. What do you think of Orual's unfairness to Redival? Have you ever been unfair to someone out of your own sadness and in doing so created more sadness? Describe the experience.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1.

2.

