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WALKING TO WISDOM

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

The Fellowship of the Ring

J.R.R. Tolkien



by Hannah Eagleson



Inklings Collection



Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Fellowship of the Ring

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WALKING TO WISDOM LITERATURE GUIDE: *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to Students	v
Scope and Sequence for the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides:	
The Inklings Collection	1
The Inklings	2
Daily Reading Outlines for J.R.R. Tolkien's <i>The Fellowship of the Ring</i>	3
Elements in the Literature Guide	5
Introduction to J.R.R. Tolkien and His Writings	9
For Further Biographical Study	10
Summarize the Context Essays	11
Unit 1: Book 1, Chapters 1-3	13
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	13-14
Reading Questions	15
Discussion Questions	19
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	22
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	23
Unit 2: Book 1, Chapters 4-6	24
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	24-25
Reading Questions	25
Discussion Questions	30
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	32
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	32
Unit 3: Book 1, Chapters 7-9	33
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	33-35
Reading Questions	35
Discussion Questions	37
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	40
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	40
Unit 4: Book 1, Chapters 10-12	41
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	41-42
Reading Questions	42
Discussion Questions	45
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	47
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	47
Unit 5: Book 2, Chapters 1-3	48
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	48-50
Reading Questions	50
Discussion Questions	54

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	57
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	58
Unit 6: Book 2, Chapters 4-6	59
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	59
Reading Questions	59
Discussion Questions	63
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	65
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	65
Unit 7: Book 2, Chapters 7-8	66
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	66-67
Reading Questions	67
Discussion Questions	69
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	71
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	71
Unit 8: Book 2, Chapters 9-10	72
Make Notes • Tracing the Great Ideas • Tell It Back	72-74
Reading Questions	74
Discussion Questions	76
Life Questions—Journaling Assignment	77
Write Your Own Discussion Questions	77
Quotation Identification	78
Enrichment Activities	82
Essay Writing	83
Sample Essays	88
Alternative Writing Projects	92

INTRODUCTION TO STUDENTS

Dear Students,

We are excited that you have the privilege of reading *The Fellowship of the Ring* 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 (two members and a friend 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 (pages 3–4)—one that allows twenty-one days to study the book and the other that allows twenty-seven days. Feel free to double that or add extra time for writing and enrichment activities (these begin on page 82). 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 J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Fellowship of the Ring* 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

-
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, 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, some have called her an Inkling based on her friendship with 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 another. Lewis even read Sayers’s play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King*, each year during the Lenten period. Therefore, although Sayers was not an “official” member of the Inklings, but rather a close friend of Lewis and Williams, we have included her in the *Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection*, considering her an Inkling “in spirit,” which is to say that she shared the same ideas and aspirations and engaged in similar writing projects. Had she lived in Oxford, we suspect she would have attended the informal meetings of this remarkable group.

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: Praegar, 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&rpg=1>>.

DAILY READING OUTLINES FOR J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*

Schedule 1

Book 1

- Day 1: Context essay excerpts from C.S. Lewis's *On Stories*: "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said," "The Hobbit," and "Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*"
- Day 2: Chapter 1—"A Long-expected Party"
- Day 3: Chapter 2—"The Shadow of the Past"
- Day 4: Chapter 3—"Three is Company"
- Day 5: Chapters 4–5—"A Short Cut to Mushrooms" and "A Conspiracy Unmasked"
- Day 6: Chapters 6–7—"The Old Forest" and "In the House of Tom Bombadil"
- Day 7: Chapters 8–9—"Fog on the Barrow-downs" and "At the Sign of The Prancing Pony"
- Day 8: Chapter 10—"Strider"
- Day 9: Chapter 11—"A Knife in the Dark"
- Day 10: Chapter 12—"Flight to the Ford"

Book 2

- Day 11: Chapter 1—"Many Meetings"
- Day 12: Chapter 2—"The Council of Elrond"
- Day 13: Chapter 3—"The Ring Goes South"
- Day 14: Chapter 4—"A Journey in the Dark"
- Day 15: Chapter 5—"The Bridge of Khazad-dûm"
- Day 16: Chapter 6—"Lothlórien"
- Day 17: Chapter 7—"The Mirror of Galadriel"
- Day 18: Chapter 8—"Farewell to Lórien"
- Day 19: Chapter 9—"The Great River"
- Day 20: Chapter 10—"The Breaking of the Fellowship"
- Day 21: Catch up

Schedule 2

Book 1

Days 1–2: Context essay excerpts from C.S. Lewis’s *On Stories*: “Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What’s to Be Said,” “The Hobbit,” and “Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*”

Day 3: Chapter 1—“A Long-expected Party”

Day 4: Chapter 2—“The Shadow of the Past”

Day 5: Chapter 3—“Three is Company”

Day 6: Chapter 4—“A Short Cut to Mushrooms”

Day 7: Catch up

Day 8: Chapter 5—“A Conspiracy Unmasked”

Day 9: Chapter 6—“The Old Forest”

Day 10: Chapter 7—“In the House of Tom Bombadil”

Day 11: Chapter 8—“Fog on the Barrow-downs”

Day 12: Catch up

Day 13: Chapter 9—“At the Sign of The Prancing Pony”

Day 14: Chapter 10—“Strider”

Day 15: Chapter 11—“A Knife in the Dark”

Day 16: Chapter 12—“Flight to the Ford”

Book 2

Day 17: Chapter 1—“Many Meetings”

Day 18: Chapter 2—“The Council of Elrond”

Day 19: Chapter 3—“The Ring Goes South”

Day 20: Chapter 4—“A Journey in the Dark”

Day 21: Chapter 5—“The Bridge of Khazad-dûm”

Day 22: Catch up

Day 23: Chapter 6—“Lothlórien”

Day 24: Chapter 7—“The Mirror of Galadriel”

Day 25: Chapter 8—“Farewell to Lórien”

Day 26: Chapter 9—“The Great River”

Day 27: Chapter 10—“The Breaking of the Fellowship”

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, 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

While you read, find quotes related to the given great ideas topics (or themes) for each unit, 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.) Then be on the lookout for how they are worked out in each particular context. Write the quotes in the Tracing the Great Ideas section of each unit. See the first unit (page 13) for examples of how to record the quotations. At the end of the guide you will find these references helpful as you create a thesis. You will reflect upon the themes of the course and choose one from which you will develop an argumentative essay.

The following are brief summaries of some of the themes in the novel and a few questions worth asking as you start to study Tolkien's world. As you read, your definitions of these themes and what Tolkien does with them will grow, so this is only a starting point. Many of these themes are related, and it is useful to ask questions about how they relate to each other. The theme of goodness and the theme of friendship are deeply related in Tolkien, for instance, since part of the nature of goodness in Tolkien's world is to care for relationships with others. However, in this section, we have broken those themes down into separate strands for clarity. As you read and discuss, please feel free to discuss the relationships among the themes. You may also write your final paper about the relationship between two or more themes, if you wish.

Great Ideas

Good and evil

The nature of good and evil is one of the strongest themes in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (abbreviated hereafter as *LOTR*), of which *The Fellowship of the Ring* is the first book. The story is about a vast struggle between those who are seeking good and an ancient and evil foe who is gathering strength again.

Questions to be asking: What is the nature of goodness? What is the nature of evil? What does it mean for a person to be good or evil? What does it mean for a place to be good or corrupt?

Pride and humility

Deeply related to the theme of good and evil in *LOTR* is the theme of pride and humility. Pride in *LOTR* is the temptation to put confidence in and emphasis on the self, to trust one's own wisdom and goodness instead of being open to the learning and strength of others. Pride is a temptation for all beings, even the very good ones, but it always leads to evil in Tolkien if it is not resisted. Humility includes a recognition of one's own limits and a sense of the goodness and wisdom of other beings. Those who continue to choose goodness in Tolkien are deeply humble. They keep making the choice to seek and honor kinds of good found outside themselves.

Wisdom and folly

Related to the themes of good and evil and of pride and humility is the theme of wisdom and folly. Questions to be asking include these: What is the nature of wisdom? What does it mean for a character to be wise? Are there different kinds of wisdom? If so, how might they work together? What are ways wisdom is passed on in *LOTR* (sayings, conversation, example, etc.)? How are wisdom and goodness related? How are humility and goodness related?

Providence

Another strong though subtle theme in *LOTR* is a sense of what might be called providence. In Christian thought, providence is the idea that God is guiding the world and working its events out toward the good. While *LOTR* is not interacting as directly with Christian theology as a work such as C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*, it is a book deeply shaped by Tolkien's Christian theological beliefs. Though *LOTR* does not present a theology of Middle-earth, it does suggest that in some way the events of the world are being directed or guided by something great and good.

Individual freedom/choice

While *LOTR* has a sense of something good and powerful directing events and working them out toward some end, it also has a strong sense of the necessity and power of individual choices. Individual freedom is a major theme of the book, as well as the value of specific choices freely made by each person. Some great good is directing events, but it takes into account individual choices rather than overriding them.

Fellowship/friendship

What it means to be in friendship and in fellowship is another major theme of the book. The word *fellowship* in the title of the novel comes to have a very deep meaning by the end of the book. It means a deep participation in the same central quest, a sense of shared suffering and celebration, and a sense of intense concern for others; the knowledge that experience is shared and that the experience of others in fellowship with you is deeply intertwined with your own. Friendship is an important aspect of that fellowship.

Heroism

Another question that is centrally important to the novel is, What is the heroic? In much pre-Christian myth and legend, Greek as well as Anglo-Saxon, an individual hero seems to be centrally important. Single characters such as Beowulf or Odysseus are the main focus of the epics they inhabit, and the plot of the book pivots on their choices and actions. *The Fellowship of the Ring* embraces some of the natural virtues of the pagan hero and expands them, but it also challenges them. This book begins with the choosing of a fellowship, not the choosing of an individual hero. Frodo Baggins is appointed to the central task of the novel, but he is not appointed to it alone.

Questions worth exploring include the following: What does it mean to be a hero? How does Tolkien affirm or challenge traditional notions of the hero? How is heroism intertwined with fellowship for Tolkien?

The transcendent

LOTR is full of a sense that beings can confront something beautiful, astonishing, and beyond themselves, and can be moved or changed or often completely undone by that thing. They see its beauty and are moved to longing or wonder. Encounters with the Elves, especially great leaders among them, often bring about this experience in other beings. In Tolkien's work, the transcendent might also be experienced

through song or story, or through particular places. Experience of the transcendent is elusive and astonishing and beyond control. The transcendent opens up the experience of those who encounter it and transforms them.

Longing

Tolkien's characters (and his readers) often experience a sense of a vast longing, a deep desire for something almost beyond naming or understanding. Frequently characters in *LOTR* experience this when encountering the transcendent. This longing at its best is always a real response to something genuinely good. However, there is also a counterfeit desire produced by things that seem to be beautiful but are in reality dangerous. Evil cannot produce real longing or real transformation, but it can craft objects of great power such as the Ring, and they can sometimes briefly offer a substitute desire that seems something like the real thing. As you read, look for differences between real longing and the desire produced by evil.

The everyday

Another important category in *LOTR* is what might be called the everyday. Tolkien celebrates the virtues and pleasures that make everyday life satisfying—neighborly good will, the quiet humor of those who have known each other over years, the value of treating those around you well in unspectacular ways. Tolkien also recognizes the small troubles and minor irritants of everyday life—the possibility of boredom, the disagreements among neighbors, etc. But on the whole, everyday life is something to be celebrated and cultivated in Tolkien's world.

While the experience of the transcendent sometimes seems entirely removed from everyday life, Tolkien seems to have a sense that they are more closely related than is often recognized. The everyday gives roots to and balances the experience of the transcendent, and the transcendent makes the everyday richer and deeper.

Sorrow/loss

In an imperfect world, loss will always be involved in the effort to seek good, and Tolkien has a strong sense of how deep that loss can be. Tolkien's world has hope, but it also has a profound recognition of the sorrow in the world.

Story

Story is another central theme of Tolkien's world. The telling of narratives provides pleasure, solace, and wisdom. Most of the stories in Tolkien's world have some claim on historical truth within that world—they tend to be stories from personal history, or stories from legend or history that have some basis in reality within that world. They offer examples of other people who have experienced situations similar to those the characters are going through. In identifying with those who have experienced circumstances like theirs (or sometimes even harder ones), the characters find courage and comfort.

Language

Language is centrally important in Tolkien's world. Languages reflect reality. Words are not just signs indicating a thing, though they are that. They also somehow are the expression of a thing's essence. Because of this, words are very different depending on the place where they take shape and the culture that speaks them. Words spoken by the Dwarves in the tunnels under the mountains express the essence of that place and culture, while words spoken by the Elves in the forests of Mirkwood will likely be quite dissimilar. Language holds the memory of a culture as well as some key to understanding things in themselves.

This understanding of language is probably one reason that poetry, sung or spoken, is such an important part of *LOTR*. Poetry is important because it is one way the variety and beauty of language approach the essence of things. The range of possible ways of expressing oneself is expanded by poetic language, and the wider range of language possible in poetry allows people to express the world more fully.

Geography/place

Places and landscapes and their inhabitants—plants and animals—matter very much in Tolkien. They have a life and a vibrancy of their own, and often a power. Things such as plants or earth have something close to personality in Tolkien; they are often more like characters than settings. Watch for this sense of the

presence and power of place in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Places can also be deeply affected by good or evil, and the way that they are affected often lasts for centuries.

Making

What it means to make things is also an important theme in Tolkien. To craft something and to care for it is an important role in Tolkien's world, and the objects produced often have great power and beauty. *Making* matters especially to the cultures of the Elves and Dwarves.

Tell It Back

This is a summary exercise, 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 chapter by oral summary—with or without a partner(s). A basic element of learning to read that never loses its delight and capacity to delight others, telling it back also helps to develop a strong mental outlining ability.

(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 Tolkien's perspective, not your own. Depending on your level, learning needs, or preference, the in-depth discussion questions may be discussed with your teacher/fellow students or simply read to inspire critical thinking, or your answers may be written as short answers (one to two paragraphs).

Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

It's difficult to read any of Tolkien's writing without thinking about applying his ideas to your own life. *The Fellowship of the Ring* 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 *The Fellowship of the Ring*. 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 these.

INTRODUCTION TO J.R.R. TOLKIEN AND HIS WRITINGS

J.R.R. Tolkien lived in the imaginative world of Middle-earth—the setting of *The Lord of the Rings*—all his life, at least from the time that he was a teenager. Humphrey Carpenter, in his biography of Tolkien, describes the way in which story was a part of the Tolkiens' family life. Tolkien often told his children stories for all sorts of occasions. Once, for instance, he wrote a story to console his son on a holiday when he lost his toy dog on the beach. He told Christopher that the lost dog had initially been turned into a toy by a wizard. After being lost on the beach, he is turned back to a real dog by another wizard and proceeds to go on many adventures. Tolkien often wrote stories surrounding the family's life together, and he sometimes even illustrated them, along with his own poems. When he translated the great epic poem *Beowulf*, he wrote poetry to go with it and sang it to his children.

Tolkien's poems tended to be mythic and full of legend. As a philologist he studied languages and was particularly drawn to northern or Nordic languages. He wrote poems in alliterative verse (an Anglo-Saxon verse form). His creative work tended to be in two streams—that which he did for children and that which was lofty and mythic. In *The Lord of the Rings* (divided at the request of the publisher into three books: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*), it appears that these separate and distinct streams finally came together. He was able to create something bound up with myth and language but also full of childlike pleasures and stories. He said about himself:

I am in fact a hobbit in all but size. I like gardens, trees, and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like, and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats. I am fond of mushrooms (out of a field); have a very simple sense of humor . . . ; I go to bed late and get up late (when possible); I do not travel much.¹

These Hobbit-like qualities are beloved to readers of Middle-earth and its world. In addition to loving comfort, Hobbits turn out to be quite brave. Another clue on this subject of the courage displayed by small creatures comes in the form of a comment Tolkien made about World War I, in which he fought: "I've always been impressed that we are here, surviving, because of the indomitable courage of quite small people against impossible odds."² He shared with the northern (Nordic) peoples a sense that we are all fighting a long defeat, but the only shameful act is not to fight. Winning is not everything; fighting against evil is.

His own life started in 1892. He was born John Ronald Reuel to Mabel and Arthur Tolkien in South Africa, where his father worked as a banker. His father died in 1896 when J.R.R. was only four. He moved with his mother and younger brother to the English countryside (Sarehole near Birmingham), where the natural world as well as the human world of the small village had an enormous impact on his imaginative life. Even when his mother began to educate her sons, his favorite subject was language. She started with Latin and French (after English), and he was drawn as much to the sounds and shapes of the words as to their meaning. Looking back on this time, which ended when he won entrance to King Edward's School at the age of seven, he called it "the longest-seeming and most formative part of my life."³ It was also during this time that his mother entered the Roman Catholic church and remained steadfast despite great opposition from her family. Sadly, Tolkien's mother had diabetes, and in 1904 she died.

Tolkien's temperament in the years that followed is described as cheerful and irrepressible, with a great zest for life, including good talk, physical activity, and a good sense of humor. However, another strain of his personality was capable of despair, shadowed by impending loss—"Nothing was safe. Nothing would last. No battle would be won forever."⁴

1. Humphrey Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1987), 179–180.

2. Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, 180.

3. Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, 32.

4. Carpenter, *J.R.R. Tolkien*, 31.

It is noteworthy that both he and C.S. Lewis lost beloved mothers at an early age. They both fought in World War I and were disillusioned by the modern world. They both found the literary philosophies of the period in which they were writing (modernist) to be less interesting than those of previous periods which they preferred. They met at Oxford, where they both taught, at a meeting of the Coalbiter's Club, where they read Icelandic myths, often in Icelandic. Soon afterward they were getting together every week, and eventually they agreed that they were going to have to write the stories they wanted to read because no one else was writing them. At the peak of their relationship they got together over three times weekly: on Monday midday, for lunch on Tuesdays with the other Inklings group members, and on Thursday nights to read their work aloud to each other and to offer suggestions.

Academically, Tolkien found himself enchanted with the Old English poem *Beowulf* and the Middle English *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. These initiated his interest in the languages they used, and soon afterward he began inventing his own languages. Tolkien said about himself:

I am a philologist and all my work is philological. . . . It is all of a piece, and *fundamentally linguistic* in inspiration. . . . The invention of languages is the foundation. The “stories” were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me a name comes first and the story follows.⁵

He believed that languages could be intrinsically attractive or repulsive. The Orc language, for instance, is repulsive. When Gandalf uses it in the council of Elrond, “all trembled, and the Elves stopped their ears” (315). Elrond rebukes Gandalf for using the language itself, not for what he says in it. By contrast, Tolkien thought that Welsh and Finnish were intrinsically beautiful, and he modeled his invented Elf languages (Sindarin and Quenya) on their phonetic and grammatical patterns. In *The Lord of the Rings* he has characters speak in these languages, sometimes without bothering to translate them for readers—the point is made by the sound alone, just as allusions to the old legends of previous ages say something without the legends necessarily being told.

However fanciful Tolkien's creation of Middle-earth was, he did not think he was entirely making it up. He saw his work as reaching back to an imaginative world that had once really existed, at least in a collective imagination. He believed that studying words in their original languages could take one back even beyond the ancient texts being studied; that it was possible sometimes to feel one's way back from words as they survived in later periods to concepts which had vanished but which had surely existed, or else the word would not exist. He said once in his letters that he had hoped to make a body of legend, similar to the Grimm brothers' fairy tales, that he could dedicate “to England; to my country.”⁶

It was a grand goal. However, as we look at the influence of these books, it appears that he may have been granted his wish. This book (in three parts) has been consistently voted the number-one read book other than the Bible. It appeals to all kinds of people and has become beloved to many who would have little in common otherwise. Readers and rereaders of this book are deeply grateful for the richness it contributes to their lives. For a self-declared Hobbit who had a hard time finishing the stories and histories he wrote, *The Lord of the Rings* is indeed a remarkable achievement.

For Further Biographical Study

Please see the following resource written by Professor Ralph Wood: <<http://www.leaderu.com/humanities/wood-biography.html>>.

5. “165 To the Houghton Mifflin Co.,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, <http://www.e-reading.ws/bookreader.php/139008/The_Letters_of_J.R.R.Tolkien.pdf>.

6. “131 To Milton Waldman,” *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, eds. Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, <http://www.e-reading.ws/bookreader.php/139008/The_Letters_of_J.R.R.Tolkien.pdf>.

UNIT 1: BOOK 1, CHAPTERS 1–3



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 (we recommend an abbreviated format, as demonstrated in the following examples) and their page numbers in the space provided for 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.

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *Good and evil*

Example Quotes

“Pity? . . . he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity.” (74)

“ . . . My heart tells me . . . yours not least. . . .” (74)

“Frodo drew the Ring . . . he had put it back in his pocket.” (75)

“ . . . Do not tempt me! . . . too great for my strength. . . .” (76–77)

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *Providence*

2. Frodo tells the Elves that he did not expect to meet danger in his own Shire. What reply do the Elves give him?

3. Gildor tells Frodo: “Courage is found in unlikely places” (105). Is this true in Frodo’s and his friends’ experience? What are some examples?

5. There is a sense in *The Lord of the Rings* that something great and mysterious is guiding events in Middle-earth—guiding them perhaps from a great distance and certainly in a mysterious way, but guiding them all the same. Find an example of this idea in chapters 1–3.

Theme: Providence



Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

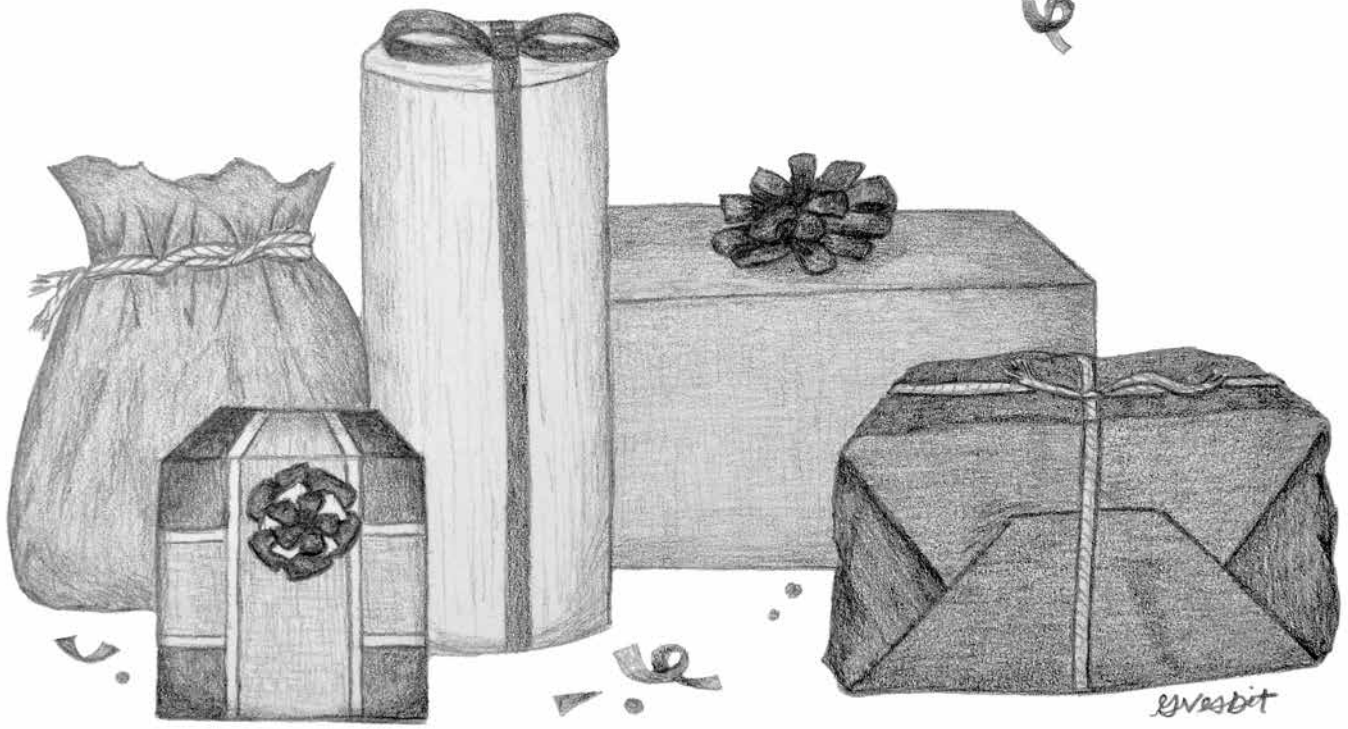
Feel free to respond to the life questions here or to keep them in a separate journal used for meditative contemplation.

Describe a fearful and adventurous time in your own life. How did it feel as you contemplated what that time might be like (if indeed you had the opportunity to do so) in contrast to the actual period in which you undertook it? What did you do to sustain yourself? Is there anything that you see in the book that instructs you in your own experience?

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1. _____

2. _____





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