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Teacher's Edition  
**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, Teacher's Edition*

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

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# 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!

# INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

## *Dear Teacher,*

A writer and an editor, both teachers, worked together to create the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection. Author Hannah Eagleson grew up loving the books featured in these guides, but she has also had the chance to study them academically and teach them. After teaching them for a number of years at various levels, she became aware of the repeating themes and deeply shared concerns of these writers. It is truly remarkable that they had such commonality, given that their interests were not only vastly different, but even opposed to the governing literary interests of their own period (modernist). Two Inklings, J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, attended Oxford as students and also taught there (and met there); several members exchanged letters (collected in volumes); they encouraged one another's work; they were all writing both non-fiction and fiction as well as scholarly work and poetry. This is highly unusual. Many writers write in only one genre, and if they do cross genres, they do not tackle the same ideas there. Tolkien, Sayers, and Lewis all wrote down their ideas in both fiction and nonfiction. This is why we have included essays by each writer, as well as fiction. The fiction includes dramatic literature, short fiction, long fiction, epistolary satire, and allegory. We strongly encourage you to take the year and use this course as a twentieth-century British literature course. If you don't have the time for that, teaching through one guide will tide you over until you can invest more time.

The guides share a similar style and elements, though these are slightly tailored to the literature itself. For instance, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Man Born to Be King* are slightly different in their goals, means, and materials; hence we have tweaked the template slightly according to the book we are studying. We have, in our teaching method, instructed students in taking notes in their books, keeping notes (quotes and page numbers) book-wide on the themes and motifs, answering reading questions (which help them to pay attention to important particulars as they read), and answering discussion questions that tend toward more thematic material. We have taught them to create their own questions, to memorize important quotations, and to write essays after thoroughly digging into the book over the course of several weeks. We have encouraged creative enrichment activities for individuals and groups. Sometimes we cross-reference other books in the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection in sidebar comments. So you'll see that we believe we are teaching, through these guides, how to read both carefully and syntopically, how to think and make connections, and how to write. But we are also concerned that these books would impact the way your students live—their virtue not only as students, but as human beings.

## Modify the Workload

As you approach the questions and assignments, please keep in mind that we have tried to supply you with all you need, but **you are always free to modify or reduce the workload according to the level of your students** or the amount of time that you have to spend on these books. You may reduce the number of questions they answer, and you have the final say on which questions they write answers for and which ones they engage orally. You also are free to assign final projects that fit your needs.

## Adapt Your Expectations

**We expect your students' answers to these questions to be far less developed than ours, but we also believe that they will be educated critically as they read ours.** Hence we see the process of answering the questions and reading our answers as educative. You will probably need to encourage them and to make your expectations clear in terms of how long and developed their answers should be. These expectations will vary according to the level of your students. We wrote these hoping that students as young as seventh grade and as old as twelfth grade would equally benefit, but **the level of each of your students will require you to adapt the expectations accordingly.**

We have designed these guides with several types of questions. There are reading questions for which answers will certainly be written down as a kind of accountability for students. There are discussion questions that may well only be entertained in conversation, but for which you may also want to sometimes require a written answer as a way of observing what students can build and synthesize on their own in answer to one of these more complex and thorough questions. We have allowed space after discussion questions for students to take some notes and record bullet points and page numbers as they prepare for a discussion of these subjects. We encourage you to require them to be prepared so that they are ready to contribute to fruitful discussions. Also, while students have been given space in the books to respond to questions, they are encouraged to keep a three-ring binder (or to use the computer) to take notes and muse on the material. They are also encouraged to keep a journal of their responses to the life questions for use in meditative contemplation and a journal of new vocabulary words and definitions.

### Adjust the Schedule

On pages 3–4 we have suggested two versions of a daily reading schedule for your convenience only. **Please feel free to adapt the schedule to your students as well.** We recommend the following Scope and Sequence for the Walking to Wisdom Literature Guides: The Inklings Collection, though you may tailor the order of your reading to your needs and curriculum. Please note that C.S. Lewis read Sayers’s play cycle, *The Man Born to Be King*, each year for the Lenten season.





# 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*,<sup>1</sup> *The Weight of Glory*,<sup>2</sup> *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*,<sup>3</sup> and “Theology in Stories” by Gilbert Meilaender<sup>4</sup>

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

## Dorothy Sayers

Context Essays: excerpts from *Letters to a Diminished Church*<sup>9</sup>

*The Man Born to Be King* (twelve-play cycle integrating the four Gospels)<sup>10</sup>

## J.R.R. Tolkien

- *The Fellowship of the Ring*<sup>11</sup>
- *The Two Towers*<sup>12</sup>
- *The Return of the King*<sup>13</sup>

- 
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](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.<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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/](http://classicalacademicpress.com/online-courses/)).

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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<sup>A</sup>

### 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

<sup>A</sup>Teachers, these reading schedules are meant to be helpful guidelines, but if a different schedule works better for your students, please feel free to adjust. The prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is not required reading, though it is helpful and many people find it fascinating. The written work found at the end of the guide (beginning on page 83) is likely to double the amount of time that you allocate for study.

Note that the length of time it takes to complete the reading and discussion questions will have to do with the age and level of your students and with the depth with which you wish to cover the material.

## Schedule 2

### Book 1

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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.<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup>

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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.<sup>5</sup>

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.”<sup>6</sup>

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](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](http://www.e-reading.ws/bookreader.php/139008/The_Letters_of_J.R.R.Tolkien.pdf)>.

## SUMMARIZE THE CONTEXT ESSAYS

Before you start reading *The Fellowship of the Ring*, you will read and summarize the excerpts we have selected from C.S. Lewis's book *On Stories* that relate to Tolkien's writing. 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 approximately 90 to 180 words. 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 *The Fellowship of the Ring*. 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.

### "Sometimes Fairy Stories May Say Best What's to Be Said" Summary (from *On Stories*, chapter 5, by C.S. Lewis)

Note: The text of this essay can also be found here: <http://apilgriminnarnia.com/2014/01/27/sometimes-fairy-stories/>.

Lewis explains in this essay that there are two reasons for every writing project. One is the reason of the author, which involves the style, the imaginative interest, and the form—in this case, the fairy tale. The other is the reason of the man. Lewis sees that meeting a story under obligation to feel very strongly about it (such as the gospel story) can often freeze our feeling toward it. He wanted to write the gospel disguised in another story to steal past the watchful dragons of obligation. He also strongly believes that we must not write "down" to students, but that we should write stories that we ourselves would like to read. What he calls the "fantastical" or "mythical" mode is one that he thinks is wonderfully suited to the task he set himself to in The Chronicles of Narnia books. He also identifies the fact that he began thinking about this story when he was a teenager and carried around, in his imagination, the pictures of a faun with an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, and a magnificent lion. He wrote it decades later.

### "The Hobbit" Summary (from *On Stories*, chapter 10, by C.S. Lewis)

Note: The text of this essay is also reproduced here: <http://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2013/11/19/c-s-lewis-reviews-the-hobbit-1937/>.

In this essay, Lewis refers to several concepts that are especially dear to him: first, that literature made for children should be of equal interest to adults if it is worthy for children; second, that *The Hobbit* takes place in a world that had established itself long before we entered it and that gives us a new experience because it is a created world;



third, that this is a book with deep sources “in our blood and tradition from which they spring” (OS, 82). Hence he pays this book a series of large compliments.

### “Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*” Summary (from *On Stories*, chapter 11, by C.S. Lewis)

Note: Most of the text of this essay is also reproduced here: <<http://www.theonering.com/news/books/the-gods-return-to-earth-c-s-lewis-apos-review-of-the-fellowship-of-the-ring>>.

Lewis classifies *LOTR* in the heroic romance genre alongside the *Odyssey* and *Le Morte d’Arthur* and argues that it has a strong sense of reality partly because it comes from a whole world “with its own theology, myths, geography, history, palaeography, languages, and orders of beings” (OS, 84). It is myth, not allegory, according to Lewis, and yet we meet figures who are “brimming” with life that we have not met before in books. It’s a world that is neither cynical nor unreal, nor optimistic or pessimistic; and it has characters who are neither black nor white in terms of their nature. What’s more, these characters exist not for the sake of plot but in their own right as beings. Lewis restates an idea that he and Tolkien cherished: “The value of the myth is that it takes all the things we know and restores to them the rich significance which has been hidden by the ‘veil of familiarity’” (OS, 90). From the beginning he knew this would be an indispensable book.



# UNIT 1: BOOK 1, CHAPTERS 1–3



## Make Notes in Your Book



## Tracing the Great Ideas<sup>B</sup>

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.

<sup>B</sup>Teachers, remember that your edition contains quotes that you can use to support and instruct your students' efforts in this skill.

### 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*

“ . . . Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. . . .” (69)

“ . . . there was only one Road; . . . every path was its tributary. . . .” (92)

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Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *Individual freedom/choice*

“ . . . Even Gollum was not wholly ruined . . . light out of the past. . . .” (68)

“ . . . I have not much hope that Gollum can be cured . . . but there is a chance of it. . . .”

(74)

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

“That is a chapter of ancient history . . . . not wholly vain. . . .” (65)

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

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



**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.

# Reading Questions

## Chapter 1

1. What is the Hobbit custom regarding gift-giving on birthdays? What does this suggest about their culture?

On a Hobbit's birthday, she will give gifts to other people (32–33). This suggests that generosity is important in Hobbit culture. Tolkien notes that the presents are not usually very expensive, but also that the Hobbits never get tired of them even in areas where they receive close to one a week. Hobbits seem to have the ability to remain delighted with small pleasures and everyday acts of kindness.

2. Revisit the poem Bilbo sings as he sets out again from the Shire (“*The Road goes ever on and on . . .*,” page 44). How do you respond to this poem? Does it make you excited? Sad? Puzzled?

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

I find this poem exciting and a little wistful. I love the idea of setting off on the Road and finding out where it goes. The line about “pursuing it with eager feet” makes me think about setting off with enthusiasm at the beginning of a journey. At the same time, the fact that it ends on a note of questioning makes me feel a bit wistful. “And whither then? I cannot say,” is a line that makes me think about the nature of the journey and the fact that its end is unknown. The line gives me a sense of quiet, unexplained longing for something.

3. List two things we can guess about Bilbo's character from this chapter. Give an example or two from the chapter to illustrate your point.

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

Bilbo would seem to be both generous and mischievous. The fact that he gives away so many gifts with humorous notes suggests his mischief. He clearly enjoys the thought

of teasing Lobelia Sackville-Baggins by giving her a gift of spoons, with the suggestion that she has already stolen some of his (46).

At the same time, he is genuinely kind in the giving of many of his presents, as Tolkien notes. Bilbo gives to those who can use things: “The poorer hobbits, and especially those of Bagshot Row, did very well. Old Gaffer Gamgee got two sacks of potatoes, a new spade, a woollen waistcoat, and a bottle of ointment for creaking joints” (46–47).

He also gives presents that are something of a thank-you for other people’s kindness or hospitality: “Old Rory Brandybuck, in return for much hospitality, got a dozen bottles of Old Winyards: a strong red wine from the Southfarthing, and now quite mature, as it had been laid down by Bilbo’s father” (47).

## Chapter 2

1. Frodo and Gandalf have the following dialogue about the growing power of Sauron and the rediscovery of the Ring:

“I wish it need not have happened in my time,” said Frodo.

“So do I,” said Gandalf, “and so do all who live to see such times. But that is not for them to decide. All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us.” (63)

Can you think of a historical time that might have made someone feel this way?

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

It’s very likely that Tolkien’s own time made people feel this way. He lived through two world wars and served in one of them as a young man. Not only the wars but also the process of rebuilding afterward produced great changes, and many things could not remain the same.

2. Gandalf explains that there are other rings of power, though none so strong as the One Ring forged by Sauron. What other rings are there, and what has become of them, according to Gandalf?

As the rhyme says, there are three Elven rings, seven rings of the Dwarves, and nine rings belonging to Men. The lords of the Elves hid the three rings of the Elves from Sauron. Sauron was able to find and take three of the rings belonging to the Dwarves, and dragons devoured the rest. All nine of the rings of Men Sauron gave to Men, bringing their bearers under his power (64).

3. When Gandalf mentions the nine Ringwraiths, the terrible creatures that the Men who took the nine rings from Sauron became, he says, “We will not speak of such things even in the morning of the Shire” (64). Why do you think that Gandalf believes this—that certain things should not be spoken of in the Shire?

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

The Shire is a place both innocent and good, if imperfect. Even speaking of something so terrible as the Ringwraiths sullies the innocence of the place. For Tolkien, words have incredible power for both good and evil. To speak of the wrong thing in a place may bring damage to the place.

### Chapter 3

1. Frodo recites his own version of the poem about the Road (“*The Road goes ever on and on . . .*”). Then he tells his companions what Bilbo used to say: “It’s a dangerous business, Frodo, going out of your door. . . . You step into the Road, and if you don’t keep your feet, there is no knowing where you might be swept off to” (92). Does this seem true for the characters in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, based on what you know so far? Does it seem true in your own experience?

Personal answers will vary. Sample answer for characters in *The Fellowship of the Ring*:

Yes, it does seem true for the characters in this story. Not only did Bilbo have an adventure



he wasn't expecting years before this story begins, but that adventure led to the discovery of a Ring with powers no one expected. That Ring in turn leads to Frodo's setting out on an adventure that he had not been expecting. So it was a very dangerous business for Bilbo to set foot out of his door, leading to all sorts of unpredictable things.

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

Their response is found on page 104, beginning with "But it is not your own Shire," and ending with "you cannot for ever fence it out."

This is an especially moving and powerful thing for Frodo to hear at this moment. Ever since Gandalf told Frodo the story of the Ring, it has been dawning on Frodo that the comfortable life most Hobbits know, enclosed by the Shire and with little interaction with those outside, is not possible to maintain. The wide world is interrupting the quiet world of the Shire, and Frodo at least has to take notice. Gildor's words are a reminder that things must change and that the world of the Shire, which seems so settled and permanent, has been different in the past and will be different again.

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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?

It has already proven true for Frodo that courage is found in unlikely places. He himself has shown unlikely courage by setting out on this quest, and his friends have shown unlikely and unexpected courage by insisting that they will come along.

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## Discussion Questions

Note: Each discussion question entertains at least one theme from the course. For the first unit we identify the themes, but after that they will be noted only in the teacher's edition.

1. Much of chapter 2, “The Shadow of the Past,” consists of Gandalf recounting stories—legends of the past, history he has uncovered, and individual stories that affect both Frodo and the fate of the Ring (Bilbo’s story, Gollum’s story, etc.). Why do you think storytelling is such an important part of this early chapter in the book?

Themes: Story; Good and evil

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

This chapter shows that whatever story unfolds for Frodo, it will be part of much larger stories about Middle-earth. The individual life matters partly because it is intertwined with a vast narrative of history and legend that shapes the experience of many lives. And yet the individual story is important on its own as well. As Gandalf tells the stories of Bilbo and Gollum, he shows interest in both of them as individual people, and hopes that something good may come for them.

This understanding that both vast stories and small ones matter profoundly is evident in what Gandalf says to Frodo about Bilbo and Gollum. Frodo, frightened by the task before him, says of Gollum, “What a pity that Bilbo did not stab that vile creature, when he had a chance!” (74).



Gandalf answers: “Pity? It was Pity that stayed his hand. Pity, and Mercy: not to strike without need. And he has been well rewarded, Frodo. Be sure that he took so little hurt from the evil, and escaped in the end, because he began his ownership of the Ring so. With Pity” (74). It is evident that Gandalf is thinking of Bilbo’s well-being here, and that it matters very much to him that Bilbo has been protected from the evil of the Ring by his initial choices in how it was used.

As the conversation goes on, Gandalf also connects these individual stories to the vast saga of the Ring and its ongoing history. He says, “My heart tells me that he [Gollum] has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not least” (74). Here Gandalf observes that Bilbo’s choice to be merciful, so important for the Hobbit as an individual, may have vast effects for other people as well. It is also a reminder that Frodo is in the same story, and he will likely partake in the results of Bilbo’s choice so long ago.

Stories matter here because they give an account of how individuals affect each other, sometimes very directly and sometimes over vast spans of time. They also set in place the understanding that each choice may affect all the history of Middle-earth, and it is very hard to see in advance how significant a moment of a life might be.

In addition to showing the importance of choices and the interconnectedness of history and individual lives, stories also provide a model of how one might face difficult times. As Gandalf describes the way that the Elves and the Men of Westeros took the Ring from Sauron long ago, he says: “That is a chapter of ancient history which it might be good to recall: for there was sorrow then too, and gathering dark, but great valour, and great deeds that were not wholly vain” (65).

2. Gollum’s possession of the Ring began with murder (66), and his original nature has been badly twisted through that action and the power of the Ring over time. What does Gandalf believe about Gollum’s nature at present and his future?

Theme: Individual freedom/choice

Gandalf believes that Gollum was not wholly ruined, even by possessing the Ring for so long. Gandalf thinks that when Gollum and Bilbo met, something good was still alive in Gollum: “There was a little corner of his mind that was still his own, and light came through it, as through a chink in the dark: light out of the past. It was actually pleasant, I think, to hear a kindly voice again, bringing up memories of wind, and trees, and sun on the grass, and such forgotten things” (68). Gandalf says here that there is little hope that Gollum can be cured, but not no hope.

Later, Gandalf says also, “[Gollum] is bound up with the fate of the Ring. My heart tells me that he has some part to play yet, for good or ill, before the end; and when that comes, the pity of Bilbo may rule the fate of many—yours not least” (74). Even with all the evil in his past and all the twisted power of the Ring, there is hope that Gollum might still choose good and be healed after the long burden he has borne. And there is hope that in some way he will do something good before the end.

3. Reread the passage on page 75 in which Frodo contemplates the Ring (beginning with “Frodo drew the Ring out of his pocket again and looked at it,” and ending with “he found that he had put it back in his pocket.”). He has announced that he would have destroyed it if he had known what it was, and Gandalf tells him to try.

By this point in the chapter, both Frodo and the readers of the novel know that the Ring is terribly dangerous. Why do you think Frodo finds it so beautiful and compelling here?

Themes: Good and evil; Longing

In Tolkien, many beautiful things are good, and many good things are beautiful. But evil has the power to counterfeit beauty and to make itself seem compelling and attractive. The power of evil is such that it can deceive people into seeing it as beautiful, even though in the end it is always ugly.

Second Corinthians 11:14 says that Satan can appear as an angel of light. While evil is often ugly and directly terrifying in Tolkien, it sometimes appears beautiful, and that is one of the ways that it tempts people.

4. Revisit the section in which Gandalf refuses the Ring (76). How does Gandalf describe the way that the Ring tempts him? What does this temptation suggest about the nature of evil in Tolkien’s world?

Theme: Good and evil

Gandalf says, “Yet the way of the Ring to my heart is by pity, pity for weakness and the desire of strength to do good. Do not tempt me! I dare not take it, not even to keep it safe, unused” (76–77). Just as evil can appear beautiful, it can also appear good. Gandalf sees the good he could do with more power, and much of the temptation to take the Ring lies in that knowledge; but he also sees that more power would take him beyond

the limits of goodness and turn him into something like Sauron. Gandalf is a merciful person, as we know from his earlier conversation about Gollum, and he wants to have mercy on Frodo and take the burden of the Ring away from him; but he also knows that course would be disastrous and that he has to avoid the temptation to take the Ring, even if it comes by way of a good impulse. In Tolkien, evil frequently tempts through a twisting of good. It appeals to the right impulses but in the wrong way.

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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

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

Gandalf says of the Ring's coming to Bilbo and then to Frodo: "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought" (69).

Gandalf does not say what else there is at work, but he expresses some belief that something great and likely good is guiding events.

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## 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?

Answers will vary. Students may answer any or all of these questions.

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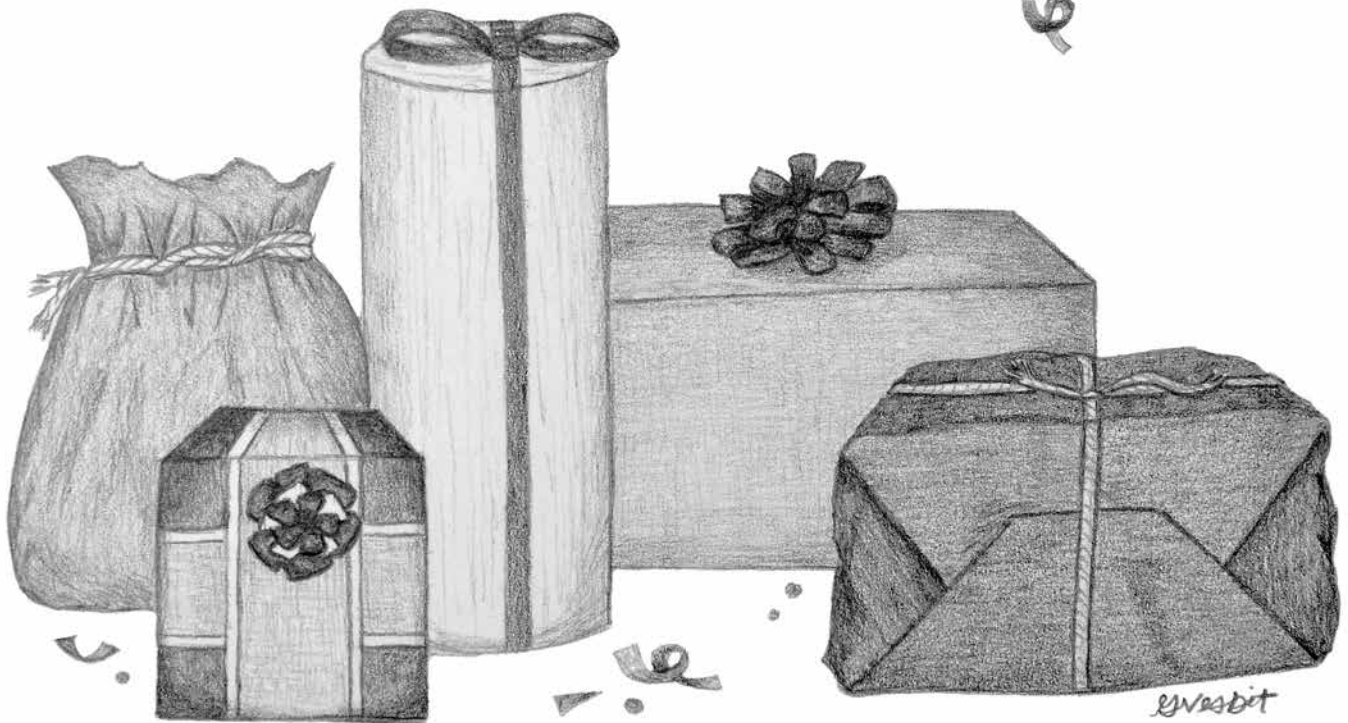
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## Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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2. \_\_\_\_\_





## UNIT 2: BOOK 1, CHAPTERS 4–6



### Make Notes in Your Book



### Tracing the Great Ideas

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *Wisdom and folly*

“ . . . A lot goes on behind his round face . . . ” (128)

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Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the themes *Providence; Individual freedom/choice*

“ . . . I have something to do before the end. . . . ” (109)

“ . . . *all woods there be must end at last . . .* ” (140)

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Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *The transcendent*

“They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes . . . as it were.” (108–109)

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## Reading Questions

### Chapter 4

1. Pippin is asking Frodo questions about the Black Riders as they eat breakfast after meeting the Elves. They have this exchange:

[Frodo said], “I don’t want to answer a string of questions while I am eating. I want to think!”

“Good heavens!” said Pippin. “At breakfast?” He walked away towards the edge of the green. (108)

This is one of the many examples in the novel of simple, lighthearted Hobbit humor, even in the face of great danger. Why is it sometimes helpful that the Hobbits can joke about difficulty?

Humor is an important way of dealing with difficult things for many people. In the case of the Hobbits, their humor is simple and innocent, like themselves. It helps them to remain who they are in a fundamental way, even as they grow into aspects of Hobbit character that are not as obvious, such as the ability to be brave in the face of danger.

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2. Farmer Maggot turns out to have many virtues, even if Frodo was dreadfully afraid of him as a young Hobbit. Pick one of those virtues and talk about how Tolkien shows it in the text.

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

Farmer Maggot is very courageous. He challenges the ominous Black Rider when the Rider is looking for Baggins (117), and he is still willing to help Frodo and his party cross the river in the dark, even with the risk that the Black Rider might come back and attack them (118–121).

3. How is the basket of mushrooms given to Frodo a particularly generous gift (121)?

Because Frodo had stolen Farmer Maggot's mushrooms as a young Hobbit, and because he had been afraid of Farmer Maggot's wrath for so many years, the present of mushrooms is especially generous. It is a symbol of forgiveness, an "All's well," and an offer of continued friendship.

## Chapter 5

1. Look at the bath song that Pippin sings. What kind of tune would you choose for it? If you can think of an actual tune you know that would fit it, you may want to try singing it. If you can't think of one offhand, you can just describe the kind of tune you would look for. Would it be merry? Fast or slow? Loud or soft?

Answers may vary.

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2. Frodo is quite surprised to find that despite all his efforts at secrecy, his friends still knew that he was leaving the Shire. What allowed them to guess?

As Merry says, the younger Hobbits know Frodo quite well, and they knew Bilbo before that. They have been paying attention to Frodo and trying to understand what he will do for a long time, so they come to understand at least a part of what he has planned (128–131).

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3. What does it say about Merry and Pippin that they insist on coming along?

Merry and Pippin have both courage and loyalty, as well as youthful high spirits. They recognize that it will be a very dangerous journey, but they still insist on coming because they are Frodo's friends (127–131).

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## Chapter 6

1. Look at the number of times the word *willow* appears in the passage beginning with “A golden afternoon of late sunshine lay warm and drowsy upon the hidden land between” and ending with “The air was thick with them, fluttering yellow from the branches; for there was a warm and gentle breeze blowing softly in the valley, and the reeds were rustling, and the willow-boughs were creaking” (144). What effect does this repetition have?

The repetition of the word *willow* helps to create a sense of how thoroughly the place is filled with this kind of tree, much more powerfully than a simple statement that there are many willows. Because the word has a mellow sound, it also helps to create a sleepy effect in the passage, following up the description of the sunshine as “warm and drowsy” and of the river as winding lazily.

2. Places have immense power in Tolkien. What kind of place is the Old Forest? Try to summarize your impressions of the place as a whole, based on your experience of reading the chapter.

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

The Old Forest is strange and fascinating. It is dangerous and has some malicious things in it, and yet it does not seem to be an evil place, or at least not entirely. There is a kind of beauty in it, as strange as it is. It seems like a place that is deeply *other* than what the Hobbits are used to, something that exists for itself in a world they do not understand.

3. Frodo tries to sing a song to keep everyone's spirits up when the Hobbits are lost in the forest, but the trees don't like it and it makes the situation worse (140). What happens when Tom Bombadil arrives?

Tom sings a song that causes Old Man Willow to release the Hobbits.

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## Discussion Questions

1. Frodo asks Sam if he likes the Elves, now that he has spent time with them. What does Sam reply? What does that suggest about the nature of the Elves?

Theme: The transcendent

Sam answers: "They seem a bit above my likes and dislikes, so to speak. . . . It don't seem to matter what I think about them. They are quite different from what I expected—so old and young, and so gay and sad, as it were" (108–109).

The Elves are creatures who share in something beyond mortal experience. Sam recognizes, with both humility and accuracy, that his preferences don't shape who they are. They are themselves, and he honors them, but he doesn't feel any right to judge what they are, only to look at it in wonder. This represents a change in Sam's view as the result of coming into direct contact with them.

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2. In the passage on page 109, Frodo also asks Sam if he still wants to leave the Shire, now that his wish to see Elves has come true already. Reread his answer, beginning with “Yes, sir. I don’t know how to say it, but after last night I feel different” and ending with “I don’t rightly know what I want: but I have something to do before the end, and it lies ahead, not in the Shire. I must see it through, sir, if you understand me.” How does Sam’s way of looking at the question include both a sense of individual responsibility and a sense of belonging to some larger plan? Have you ever felt a similar sense of responsibility or calling to something?

Theme: Wisdom and folly

Personal answers will vary. As for Sam, he seems to have a sense of something beyond personal desires. He feels that he has something to do, not because of what he wants to see but because of something larger. Yet at the same time, he is making an individual commitment to that thing, even though he doesn’t know what it is. He is determined to see it through.

3. Look at the last reading question on page 30. Now answer this follow-up question: What might be some reasons why Bombadil’s song works when Frodo’s doesn’t?

There may be several reasons why Bombadil’s song is more successful than Frodo’s. One is that Bombadil and Frodo have different relationships to the place. Bombadil seems to live there and to be a part of it, while Frodo is an outsider. Also, Tom seems to have a knowledge of the right songs for certain things in the Forest, perhaps because he lives there. He says, “I know the tune for him,” referring to Old Man Willow (150).

The difference in the kind of knowledge both characters possess is illustrated in the difference in their language about the woods. While Frodo generally does like and admire trees, he chooses a song with the line “*For east or west all woods must fail*” (140). Merry says that the trees do not like the references to ending and failing, which seems quite true in the context of the novel. Frodo’s song unintentionally offends the trees.

On the other hand, Tom’s song is followed by words that encourage the well-being of Old Man Willow. While Tom does order the willow to let the Hobbits go, he also says, “Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to





sleep! Bombadil is talking!” (150). These commands are all things that are very good for trees. Bombadil’s understanding of the tree may be what allows him to sing a song that will compel it to free the Hobbits.

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### Life Questions—Journaling Assignment

Which way of being wise most appeals to you—are you more of a Farmer Maggot type, or are you Elven? Or have you not sought to acquire wisdom? If so, does a book such as this stir you to desire wisdom?

Students may answer any or all of these questions.

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### Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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