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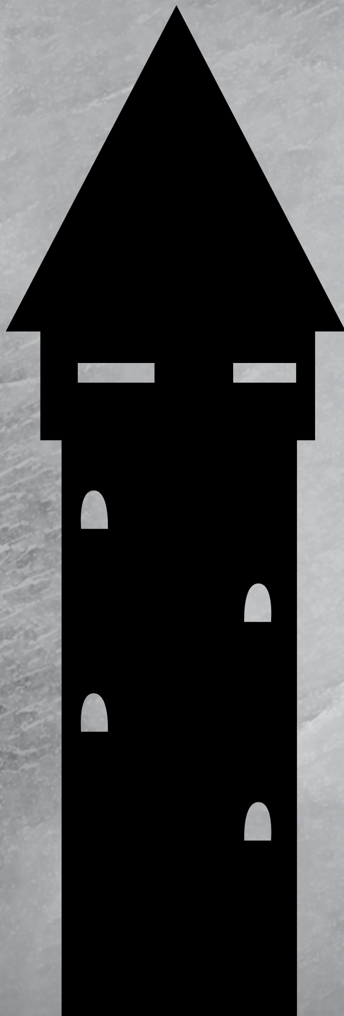
Teacher's Edition

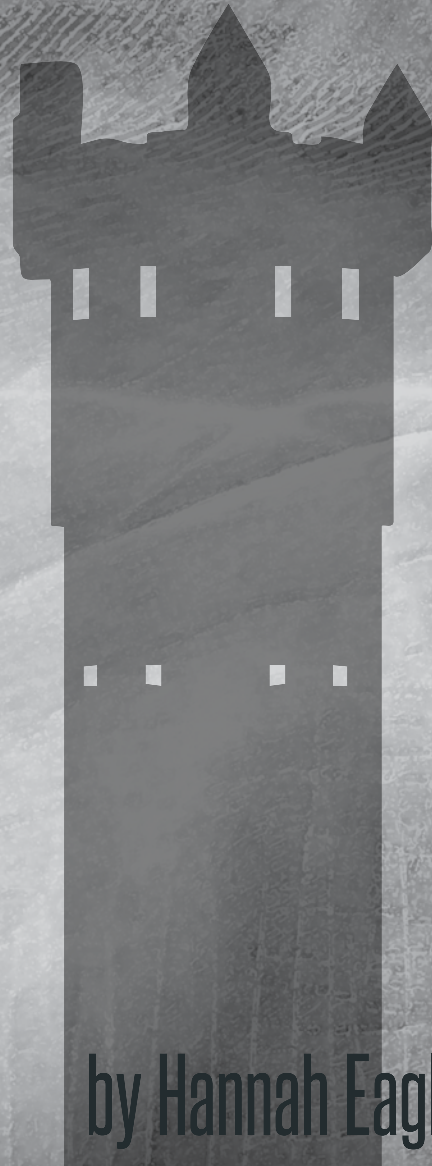
WALKING TO WISDOM

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

The Two Towers

J.R.R. Tolkien





by Hannah Eagleson

Inklings Collection

Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Two Towers, Teacher's Edition

© Classical Academic Press, 2014
Version 1.0
ISBN: 978-1-60051-267-4

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Classical Academic Press
2151 Market Street
Camp Hill, PA 17011

www.ClassicalAcademicPress.com

Series Editor: Christine Perrin
Editor: Janet Dixon
Cover Design: Kristin Roach
Interior Design: Lenora Riley
Illustrations: Gretchen Nesbit

Permission to photocopy the Great Ideas Quotes pages (pp. 67–68) is granted as long as the copies will not be used for resale, for use with more than one classroom of students, or for reworking into another product.

PGP.11.14

Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: *The Two Towers*

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Introduction to Students

Dear Students,

We are excited that you have the privilege of reading *The Two Towers* 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 (page 3)—one that allows sixteen days to study the book and another that allows twenty-two days. Plan to double that or add extra time for writing and enrichment activities (these begin on page 69). 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 in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Two Towers* 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 nonfiction 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 which 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.

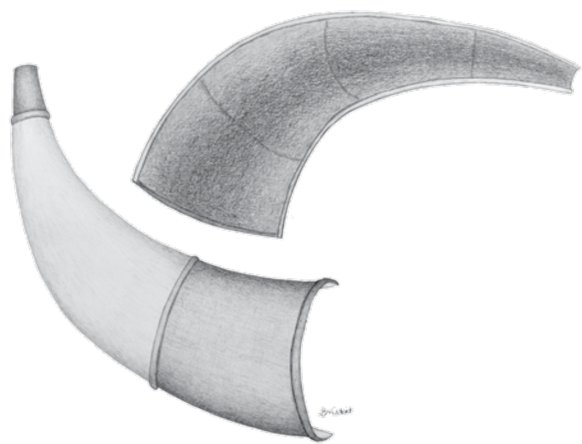
Adapt Your Expectations

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 a 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 page 3 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*,[1] *The Weight of Glory*,[2] *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*,[3] and "Theology in Stories" by Gilbert Meilaender[4]

- *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 novels first read to the Inklings. 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/).

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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 Two Towers*

Schedule 1[A]

Book 3

Day 1: Context essay excerpts from C.S Lewis's *The Weight of Glory* ("The Weight of Glory") and *Mere Christianity* ("Charity"); and Gilbert Meilander's essay "Theology in Stories."
Day 2: Chapters 1–2—"The Departure of Boromir" and "The Riders of Rohan"
Day 3: Chapter 3—"The Uruk-hai"
Day 4: Chapter 4—"Treebeard"
Day 5: Chapter 5—"The White Rider"
Day 6: Chapter 6—"The King of the Golden Hall"
Day 7: Chapters 7–8—"Helm's Deep" and "The Road to Isengard"
Day 8: Chapter 9—"Flotsam and Jetsam"
Day 9: Chapters 10–11—"The Voice of Saruman" and "The Palantír"

Book 4

Day 10: Chapter 1—"The Taming of Sméagol"
Day 11: Chapter 2—"The Passage of the Marshes"
Day 12: Chapters 3–4—"The Black Gate is Closed" and "Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit"
Day 13: Chapter 5—"The Window on the West"
Day 14: Chapters 6–7—"The Forbidden Pool" and "Journey to the Cross-roads"
Day 15: Chapters 8–9—"The Stairs of Cirith Ungol" and "Shelob's Lair"
Day 16: Chapter 10—"The Choices of Master Samwise"

Schedule 2

Book 3

Days 1–2: Context essay excerpts from C.S Lewis's *The Weight of Glory* ("The Weight of Glory") and *Mere Christianity* ("Charity"); and Gilbert Meilander's essay "Theology in Stories."
Day 3: Chapter 1—"The Departure of Boromir"
Day 4: Chapter 2—"The Riders of Rohan"
Day 5: Chapter 3—"The Uruk-hai"
Day 6: Chapter 4—"Treebeard"
Day 7: Chapter 5—"The White Rider"
Day 8: Chapter 6—"The King of the Golden Hall"
Day 9: Chapter 7—"Helm's Deep"
Day 10: Chapter 8—"The Road to Isengard"
Day 11: Chapter 9—"Flotsam and Jetsam"
Day 12: Chapter 10—"The Voice of Saruman"
Day 13: Chapter 11—"The Palantír"

Book 4

Day 14: Chapter 1—"The Taming of Sméagol"
Day 15: Chapter 2—"The Passage of the Marshes"
Day 16: Chapter 3—"The Black Gate is Closed"
Day 17: Chapter 4—"Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit"
Day 18: Chapter 5—"The Window on the West"
Day 19: Chapter 6—"The Forbidden Pool"
Day 20: Chapter 7—"Journey to the Cross-roads"
Day 21: Chapters 8–9—"The Stairs of Cirith Ungol" and "Shelob's Lair"
Day 22: Chapter 10—"The Choices of Master Samwise"

[A]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 written work found at the end of the guide (beginning on page 67) 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.

Make Notes: Possess the Book

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

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

Tracing the Great Ideas Quotes

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 15) 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 explore the relationships among themes. You may also write your final paper about the relationship between two or more themes, if you wish.

Great Ideas in *The Two Towers*

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 Two Towers* is the second 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.

Forgiveness/redemption

Another strong theme in *LOTR* is the goodness of forgiveness and what might be called redemption, the transformation of evil actions into good results by the work of providence. This theme finds fuller expression later in the trilogy. Redemption always involves the interplay of providence and individual choice in *LOTR*. Questions to be asking can include: What is the nature of forgiveness? What does forgiveness allow in terms of individual lives and grander ongoing stories?

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 first novel comes to have a very deep meaning by the end of the series. 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 Two Towers* 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. The 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 in *The Two Towers* 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 goodwill, 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 Two Towers*. Places can also be deeply affected by good or evil, and the way that they are affected often lasts for centuries.

Journeying/homecoming

Another major theme of the novel is the tension between journeying and coming to or staying at home. Many of the characters are reluctantly propelled upon a quest (although some choose it with excitement). Often the need to protect their homes from disaster is what causes them to journey far away, but there is a sense still of being torn by the desire to be at home and the desire to adventure and to fulfill the quest.

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 Two Towers* 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 Two Towers*. You may write informal responses to the life questions in a separate journal.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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

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 into 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]

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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 Koalbiter'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 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."

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.

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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.

Summarize the Context Essays

Before you start reading *The Two Towers*, you will read and summarize the essays we have selected. Then cross-check your summaries with ours (in the teacher's edition) to make sure you have covered the topic adequately. Our summaries range from approximately 50 to 400 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 Two Towers*. An important part of becoming a good reader involves being able to summarize your reading in such a way that someone else can understand what you have read.

"The Weight of Glory" (from *The Weight of Glory*, Essay 1, by C.S. Lewis)

"The Weight of Glory" is Lewis's keystone essay that begins by describing how the promise of reward does not invalidate the claims of Christianity. Lewis describes the significance of a reward whose object is proper to the desire (a general who fights for victory vs. money) and explains how our understanding of the object of our longing develops. In us desire begins as a wish to go to heaven and migrates to a desire for glory—that of the loving approval of our God as well as sheer radiance itself. In this essay Lewis makes reference to the inconsolable longing that we all have for an object we aren't entirely sure of; elsewhere he uses the German word *Sehnsucht* to try to get a handle on this slippery fish. He calls it a "desire which no natural happiness will satisfy," not yet attached to its proper object.

Hence we go in search of this desire and attach our depth of longing to various objects—whether it be a person or a thing that has brought us this sensation of longing. For Lewis this included a tin garden (planetarium) he had as a child that brought him, inexplicably, the enormous bliss of Eden. He argues that these experiences of joy still include the feeling of a "chasm that yawns between us and reality," the sense that though we long for total union with the object of our desire, we are outside it, and cannot reach it. These feelings, he insists, suggest that we are dimly conscious that heaven with God our Creator and Redeemer awaits us—that we can't long for something that doesn't exist. If we can conceive of a thing, we are likely made for that thing but not fully involved in it yet.

Our neighbor is the experience of the eternal that we have now. We are to take on the glory of our neighbor, to realize that the way we relate to that person will determine whether she moves toward godlikeness or monster-likeness, that this person is eternal and the closest thing we have to God and being in the presence of God now. There are no ordinary people. We experience the Savior through the live human beings we love now. Our unsatisfied longing comes closest to its satisfaction in relation to those around us. We can take heart at desire which goes unsatisfied—it means we are made for more—for God's pleasure, for union with God—and will have it.

"Charity" Summary (from *Mere Christianity*, Book III, Chapter 9)

Charity is love and the effort that leans toward love. The practice of this allows us to see God and rescues us from pride. We can learn to treat others with charity by treating them in this manner even when we do not feel this way toward them.

“Theology in Stories” Summary (Online Essay by Gilbert Meilaender, <http://wordandworld.luthersem.edu/content/pdfs/1-3_Experience/1-3_Meilaender.pdf>)

The paradox of our existence is that we are both temporal and transcendent—we live in time and in the minute-by-minute daily life, but we also have the sense that we are made for something beyond our daily experience. Stories, which contain both realities, come closest to helping us to understand ourselves as well as the nature of our existence. On the one hand there is plot, and on the other there is theme. These parallel the sense that our lives, too, have things that happen in time but also have a meaning that knits them all together. For instance, the fact that we have memory and can think about the future is already significant in relation to our own meanings beyond what happens to us in the moment. Myth, unlike story, is nakedly about transcendence, and all the details are nearly incidental to the meaning. Historically the meaning of a myth organized the culture that believed in it; hence it lacks some of the quotidian (everyday or daily) characteristics that stories have, or “the narrative quality of experience.” “The very nature of human existence—conceived in Christian terms—is best understood within narrative” (Meilaender, 223). We are always trying to capture something, to “get in.” We are both finite and free, body and spirit, finite and infinite. Story catches theme by plot and unites the temporal and eternal.

Unit 1: Book 3, Chapters 1–3

Make Notes in Your Book

Don't forget to make notes in your book!

Tracing the Great Ideas

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

Example quotes and their themes:

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the themes *Good and evil; Forgiveness/redemption*[B]

Example quotes

[B]Teachers, remember that your edition contains quotes that you can use to support and instruct your students' efforts in this skill.

" '. . . I am sorry. I have paid.' " (512)

" 'Farewell, Aragorn! . . . save my people!' " (512)

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

" '. . . better to begin than to refuse . . .' " (546)

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

" '. . . a small matter in the great deeds of this time. . . .' " (527)

" '. . . who come after will make the legends of our time. . . .' " (538)

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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. When Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn place Boromir's body in the Elven boat to float down the river, they have little time if they are going to have a chance to rescue Merry and Pippin. Yet they tarry and sing a lament for Boromir. What does this suggest about the importance of song to grieving in Middle-earth?

   Song is one of the most important ways of expressing things in Middle-earth. It is important to sing a song for Boromir as a way of honoring his valor, and also as a way of coming to terms with the grief his companions feel. There are things that must be honored even if there is little time, and the song for Boromir shows the companions know that.

2. As Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn deliberate over what happened to Frodo and in which direction he escaped, Aragorn concludes that "He fled, certainly . . . but not, I think, from Orcs" (519). From what does Aragorn believe Frodo fled? Why does he choose to keep this information to himself?

   He believes—and rightly so—that Frodo fled from Boromir, but "What he thought was the cause of Frodo's sudden resolve and flight Aragorn did not say. The last words of Boromir he long kept secret" (519). Aragorn saw how earnestly Boromir sought forgiveness; he therefore recognizes a goodness in Boromir that surpasses his giving in to the Ring's temptation.

3. By the end of the chapter, which course do Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn decide to take? How does Aragorn reach this decision?

   They decide to follow the Orcs on foot. Aragorn says:

   > I would have guided Frodo to Mordor and gone with him to the end; but if I seek him now in the wilderness, I must abandon the captives to torment and death. My heart speaks clearly at last: the fate of the Bearer is in my hands no longer. The Company has played its part. Yet we that remain cannot forsake our companions while we have strength left. (519)

   His heart gives him the answer that he must attempt to rescue Merry and Pippin.

Chapter 2

1. When the Orcs are entering the trees and seem to have escaped with Merry and Pippin, Gimli and Aragorn have this exchange:

   > Gimli ground his teeth. "This is a bitter end to our hope and to all our toil!" he said.
   >
   > "To hope, maybe, but not to toil," said Aragorn. (530)

   Why would the companions keep toiling here, even when hope seems to be gone?

   In Tolkien, part of the courage nobility requires is the willingness to do the right thing even when there is little or no hope that it will succeed in any obvious way. Gimli, Legolas, and Aragorn are all characters with the commitment required to be loyal to companions even when things seem hopeless. They are willing to keep trying even if the chances of their rescuing the Hobbits seem incredibly small.

2. In this chapter we meet Éomer, an important leader in Rohan. What impression of his character do you have? Give at least two examples from the text to support your view.

   Answers may vary. Sample answer:

   Éomer seems to be a man with the wisdom to recognize good when he meets it, and the humility to change his mind if necessary. He is willing to loan horses to Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, even though it might mean risking his life (543–544). He also has the humility to ask for Aragorn's help (541), and to ask pardon for his words about Galadriel and say he would gladly learn better (542).

3. Éomer says that it is against the law of Rohan to let strangers wander in the land without the king's permission, which is why he is hesitant to allow Aragorn and his friends to continue the search for the Hobbits. What is Aragorn's reply? How does it show wisdom?

Aragorn answers on page 543: "I do not think your law was made for such a chance. . . . Nor indeed am I a stranger; for I have been in this land before, more than once, and ridden with the host of the Rohirrim, though under other name and in other guise."

Aragorn's reply is wise for several reasons. First, he reminds Éomer that there are moments that human laws cannot fully cover. This does not mean that right and wrong are flexible—clearly Aragorn always believes it necessary to do the right thing whatever the cost. But human law cannot always be written in order to cover perfectly the right thing to do in every circumstance. Aragorn's reply is also wise because it shows Éomer that Aragorn is not in fact a stranger, and that he has aided the Rohirrim before, so he may have some right to be in the land of Rohan within the law.

4. When Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are near Fangorn and have made a fire for the evening, an old man appears nearby. They fear that it may be Saruman, an immensely powerful wizard who has become evil. Yet Aragorn invites him to be warmed at their fire in very gracious language (548). What does this say about how much Aragorn values hospitality and graciousness?

Aragorn knows that they may all be risking their lives with a foe stronger than any of them, yet it seems important to him to offer hospitality in a courteous way until they know for sure the intentions of the old man. Hospitality and courtesy must be of very great value to Aragorn.

Chapter 3

1. As the Orcs are carrying Merry and Pippin away, Pippin thinks that perhaps he should not have come on the journey at all: "'What good have I been? Just a nuisance: a passenger, a piece of luggage. And now I have been stolen and I am just a piece of luggage for the Orcs" (551).

   In this chapter, Pippin begins to prove this view of himself wrong. How?

   In this chapter Pippin becomes less passive and takes on more responsibility. He grows in courage and resourcefulness. He manages to free his hands, to leave the brooch from Lórien as a sign to anyone who may be trying to rescue them, to trick Grishnákh, and to help Merry get free and escape into Fangorn.

2. How does Merry also help Pippin in the course of the chapter?

   Merry spent time studying maps at Rivendell, and is able to tell Pippin where they are and do some navigating (569).

3. When the Hobbits have gotten free, they compare notes, "talking lightly in hobbit-fashion of the things that had happened since their capture" (568). Reread their conversation. How does this lighthearted way of talking show the courage of the Hobbits?

In spite of a very difficult few days and little reason to hope for much at present, Pippin and Merry are able to joke with each other. Rather than complaining or despairing, they go on bravely and share the camaraderie of good humor.

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. As Boromir is dying, he says to Aragorn: "Farewell, Aragorn! Go to Minas Tirith and save my people! I have failed" (512). What is Aragorn's reply, and what do you think he means by speaking of victory?

   Themes: Forgiveness/redemption; Good and evil; Individual freedom/choice

   Aragorn answers: "You have conquered. Few have gained such a victory. Be at peace! Minas Tirith shall not fall!" (512).

   Answers may vary as to what Aragorn means. Sample answer:

   Boromir seems genuinely repentant about trying to take the Ring from Frodo. He confesses it to Aragorn and says that he is sorry. Further, he gives his life in the effort to rescue Merry and Pippin. I think it is these two things—his repentance about the Ring and his willingness to die for his friends—that Aragorn especially refers to in saying that Boromir has conquered and that few have gained such a victory. Even though Boromir tries to take the Ring, he retains real power to make choices and turns to good ones afterward. Very few people in the course of *LOTR* repent if they have set their minds to taking the Ring, and it is also true that giving one's life for one's friends is a rare and amazing choice.

2. Éomer's companion laughs at the mention of Halflings and says they are a people from old stories and songs. He asks, "Do we walk in legends or on the green earth in the daylight?" (538). What is Aragorn's reply? Do you find it compelling? Why or why not?

Theme: Story

Aragorn replies beginning with "A man may do both," and ending with "under the light of day!" (538).

Personal answers may vary. Sample answer:

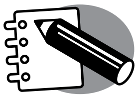
Yes, I find it very compelling. It recognizes the possibility that the characters are living in legend but do not know it yet, that the choices they are making right now will become the stories of those who come after. It also recognizes that the earth itself has a role to play in the story, and the ground that Éomer's companion treads every day is a central part of the vast story of Middle-earth.

3. When Gimli says that Gandalf's foresight was amiss because he fell in Moria, Aragorn answers that Gandalf's advice was not founded on the foresight of safety. He adds, "There are some things that it is better to begin than to refuse, even though the end may be dark" (546). Does this seem true to you?

Themes: Good and evil; Individual freedom/choice

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

Yes, this does seem true. There are certain tasks so necessary to pursuing good that they have to be attempted, even if failure is a likely result. Within Tolkien's world, the effort to destroy the Ring is clearly one of them. Gandalf's choice to embrace the task is the right one, even though it leads to his death.



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.

Have you ever had to make a choice like Gandalf's—to risk safety (whether emotional or physical) in order to take on a necessary task? In some ways, that is also precisely what Frodo does—he bears a burden that leads him into terrible risk.

The martyrs of the Church did this as well. Christianity has historically been very risky business; in our current world it still is for many (think of Egypt and other Middle Eastern countries). Reflect upon this reality. How does it make you think about your faith and its practice and purpose?

Answers will vary.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1.

2.

Unit 2: Book 3, Chapters 4–5

Make Notes in Your Book

Tracing the Great Ideas

Example quotes and their themes:

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

"'. . . tell me of yourselves!'" (614)

". . . the old figure, white, shining now . . ." (621)

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the theme *Sorrow/loss*

"'. . . Never again. . . .'" (581)

"'. . . before we pass away. . . .'" (603)

Great Ideas Quotes throughout these chapters for the themes *Story; Language*

"'. . . Real names tell you the story . . .'" (576)

"'. . . a hasty word for a thing . . .'" (578)

Tell It Back

Reading Questions

Chapter 4

1. When the Hobbits ask Treebeard what he plans to do with them, what is his reply? How would you like to receive this reply?

 Treebeard replies beginning with "I am not going to do anything *with* you" and ending with "your way may go along with mine for a while" (577).

 Personal answers will vary. Sample answer:

 I would be very happy to receive this reply. Not only does it show that Treebeard doesn't want to hurt the Hobbits, but it also treats them as equals, free to do as they like. Further, it offers the possibility of doing things together, as friends and companions might, and hints at the possibility that the Hobbits and Treebeard may become friends.

2. Treebeard says the Ents and the Entwives may meet again someday and find a land where both can "be content" (591). He adds, "But it is foreboded that that will only be when we have both lost all that we now have" (591). Does it seem believable to you that this might happen only when both Ents and Entwives have lost everything?

 Answers may vary. Sample answer:

 This seems very believable. Often it is the loss of something we are clinging to that allows us to see the need for reconciliation, and to take the steps toward it that are necessary.

3. The Ents say over and over that they are not hasty, and there is plenty of evidence of that in the chapter. Yet when they do make up their minds, they move decisively. Does this seem likely to you?

 Answers may vary. Sample answer:

 Yes, it does seem likely. Often people who think carefully and weigh all the options before making a decision are very committed and decisive once they have come to a conclusion. The Ents are like this. They want to think everything through carefully, but once they come to a conclusion they follow through on it.

Chapter 5

1. For all the mystery and tenseness that Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli encounter in Fangorn, there is some humor as well. Describe a moment you find humorous.

   Answers may vary. Sample answer:

   When Gimli is saying that he will go into Fangorn with Legolas, Gimli also advises caution. Revisit his words, beginning with "'But keep your bow ready to hand'" and ending with "under which they stood" (609).

   I find Gimli's quick reminder that he will not use the axe on trees quite funny.

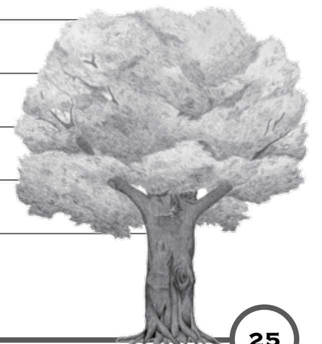
2. Aragorn asks the old man they meet in the woods if he knows Fangorn well. What is his reply? Does his reply shed any light on what it must be like to be an Ent?

   His answer is, "Not well: . . . that would be the study of many lives. But I come here now and again" (612).

   It would take the length of many lives to know the place the vastly old Ents of Fanghorn tend. It is no wonder that the Ents do not desire to be hasty. The Ents have lived through so many generations that it is hard to know them; they outlive people and live their own lives with a very different sense of time.

3. The scene in which the three friends recognize Gandalf moves slowly and suspensefully. It takes a long time for it to become clear to them who Gandalf is. Why do you think Tolkien takes so much time over this scene?

   It seems very understandable that it should take the friends a long time to recognize a companion whom they thought was dead. This is especially true because Gandalf has changed. He is no longer Gandalf the Gray, but Gandalf the White, and he has become more than he was before. There is a slowness about the process for him as well, because he has to remember things about his past life that he has nearly forgotten in the transformation that came with and after the fight with the Balrog (613–614).



Discussion Questions

1. Treebeard says that his name is growing all the time, and that it is like a story. He adds, "Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say" (576).

Would you like to speak a language in which names tell you the story of the thing they name?

Themes: Story; Language

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

I would love to speak a language in which names tell the story of the thing they name. In much mythology and folklore, the real name of a thing somehow communicates the essence of that thing. A language in which names are stories would come close to that ideal, because stories communicate very deeply about the essence of things. For Tolkien, language and narrative are linked in their effort to describe reality, not only because narrative takes place in language but also because both are an effort to understand the heart of something.

Given this understanding, it is no wonder that Treebeard thinks *hill* is a "hasty word for a thing that has stood here ever since this part of the world was shaped" (578).

2. When Gandalf returns, he is Gandalf the White. The symbolism of this is clear in that Saruman chose to give up white and become Saruman of Many Colors. Gandalf replaces him as the wise wizard who stands for good. White may be symbolic in other ways as well. What might be symbolized by white versus gray?

Theme: Good and evil

Answers may vary. Sample answer:

Gray is a color that blends in, and a color often worn by those hiding or travelling. It may symbolize Gandalf's humility and his willingness to be an unassuming traveler, working behind the scenes to care for Middle-earth. White is more striking, a color sometimes associated with power as well as with goodness. It may symbolize that Gandalf has been given the power and authority he has earned by his humble service. He is still humble, but others recognize him now for who he is.

3. What is the first thing Gandalf requests after Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn have recognized him? What does that say about him?

Themes: Good and evil; Pride and humility

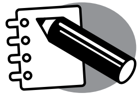
The first thing Gandalf asks is that his friends would tell him about themselves. This shows Gandalf's genuine care and concern for others, and his continued humility. He has passed through fire and water and returned as a being almost beyond mortal understanding, and the first request he makes on meeting his friends is to hear how they are (614–615).

4. Reread the passage in which Treebeard talks about the possibility that the Ents are beginning their last march (603, beginning, "Of course, it is likely enough" and ending, "and sometimes they are withered untimely").

How does Treebeard share in a sense of loss similar to what the Elves describe? How is it different than what the Elves experience? What does he hope for as he contemplates the possibility of very deep loss?

Themes: Sorrow/loss; Good and evil

Much like the Elves, Treebeard sees the possibility that this march may be the end of many things he loves, and he sees that those things may end either way—there is no way to guarantee their safety. Unlike the Elves, who possess immortal life and see things fading away around them, Treebeard thinks that he and the other Ents may themselves pass away. Treebeard hopes that even if this does turn out to be the last march of the Ents, they may help other peoples before they vanish, and what they do may be worth making songs about.



Life Question—Journaling Assignment

You answered this question in relationship to Treebeard: “What does he hope for as he contemplates the possibility of very deep loss?” Now answer it in relationship to yourself. Think of something you have lost—as a citizen, as a family, as an individual—and answer the question in reference to that loss.

Answers will vary.

Write Your Own Discussion Questions

1.

2.