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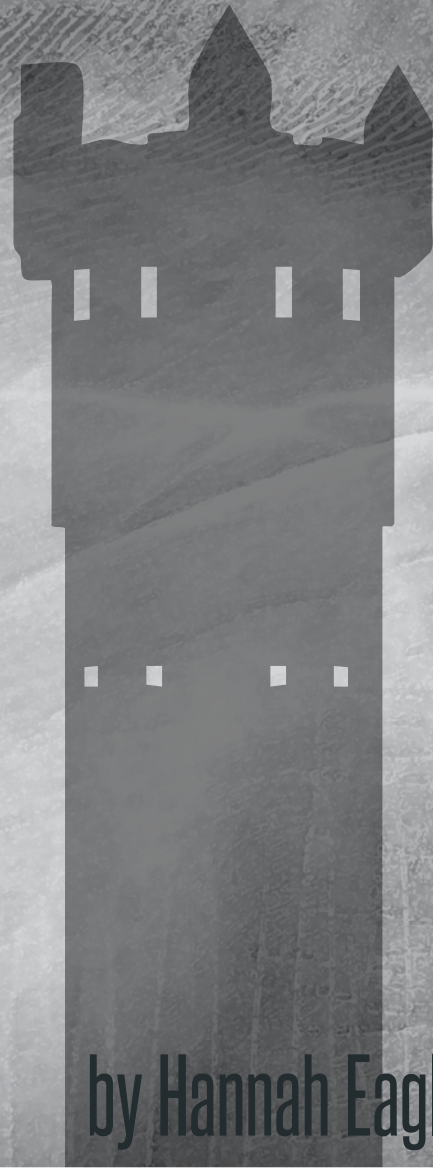
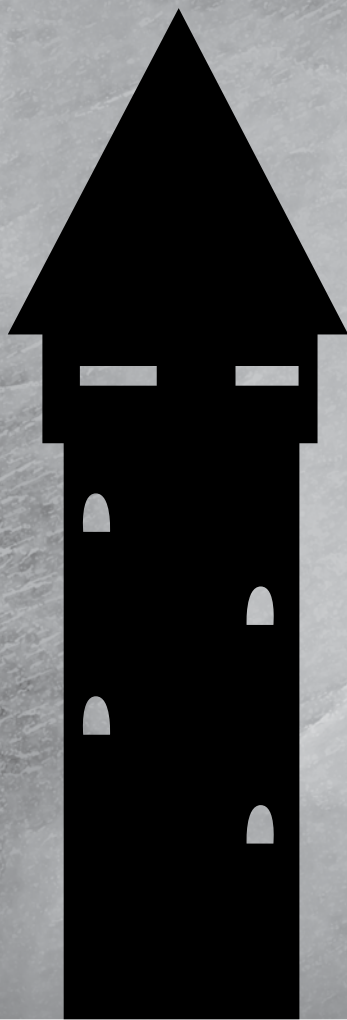
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# WALKING TO WISDOM

LITERATURE GUIDE SERIES

## The Two Towers

J.R.R. Tolkien



by Hannah Eagleson



*Inklings* Collection



*Walking to Wisdom Literature Guide: The Two Towers*

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# 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!

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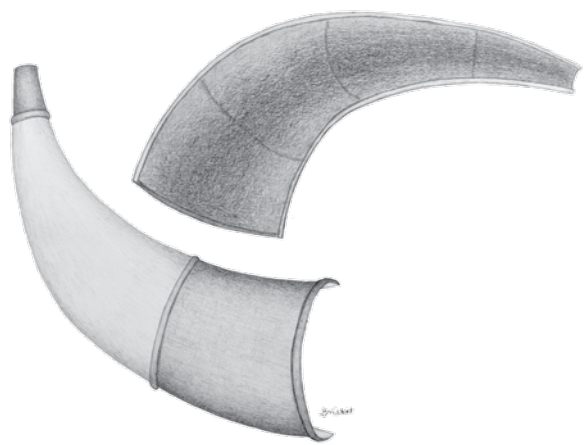
# INTRODUCTION TO TEACHERS

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Teacher's Introduction  
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# 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 Inklings 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 Inklings “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.<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/)).

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

# DAILY READING OUTLINES FOR J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *THE TWO TOWERS*

## Schedule 1

### Book 3

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- 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

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- 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

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- 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"

# ELEMENTS IN THE LITERATURE GUIDE

## Make Notes: Possess the Book

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

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

## Tracing the Great Ideas 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.<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 Koalbiters' 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.<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.”

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).









## 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***

#### Example quotes

“... 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***

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

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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?

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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?

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

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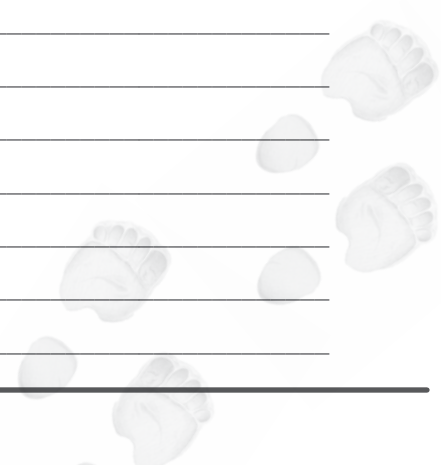
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## Chapter 2

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?

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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.

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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?

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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?

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### 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?

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

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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?

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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. 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

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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

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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



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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.

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?

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### Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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## 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*

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

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

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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?



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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?

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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?

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## 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.

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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?

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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?

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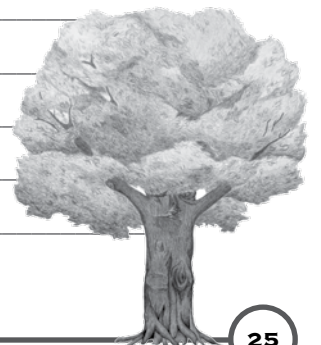
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## Discussion Questions

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?

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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?

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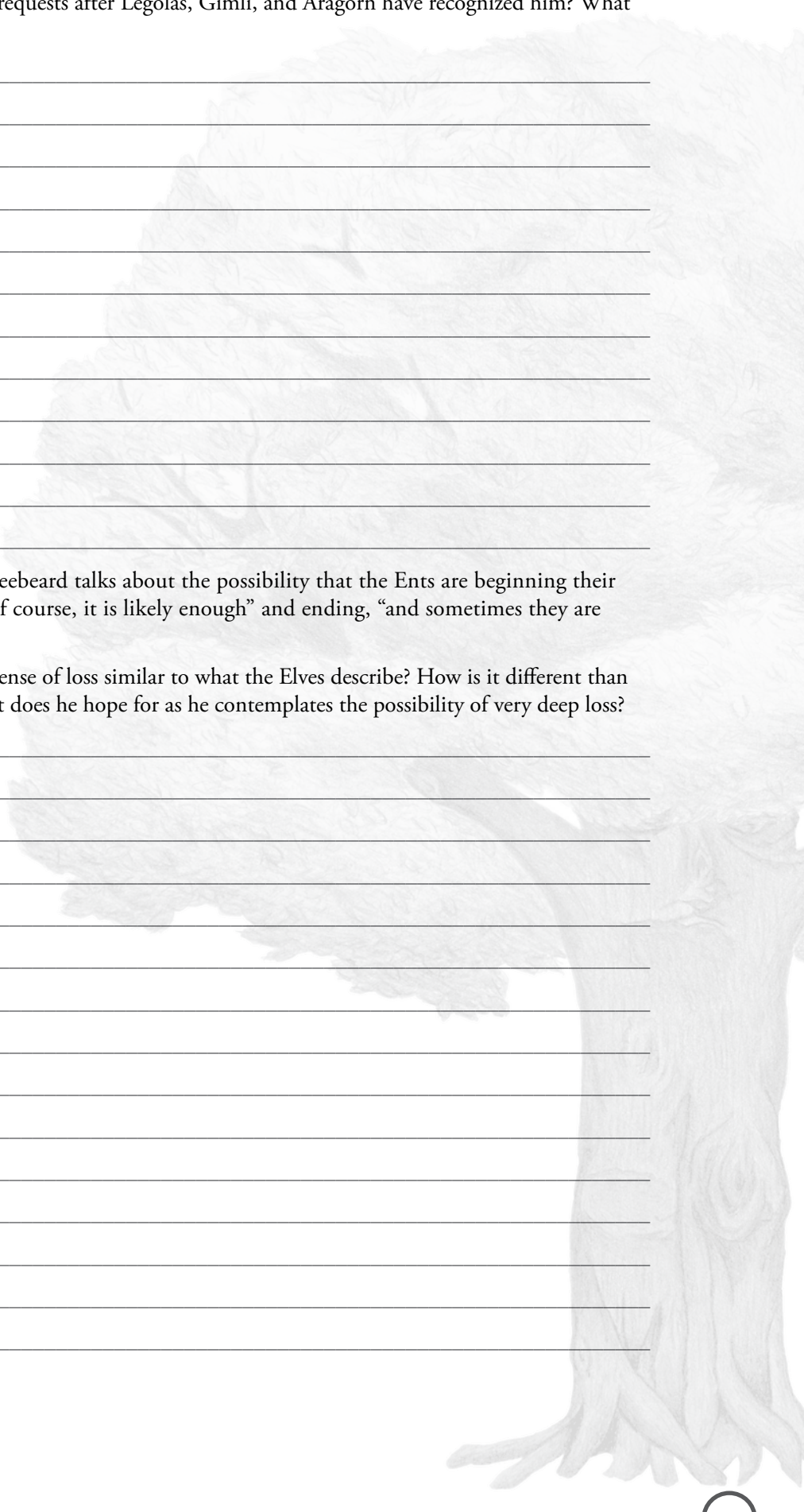
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3. What is the first thing Gandalf requests after Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn have recognized him? What does that say about him?

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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?

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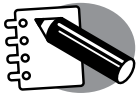
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## Life Question—Journaling Assignment

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.

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### Write Your Own Discussion Questions

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