

*Ready Readers:
The Chronicles of Narnia*

A Teacher's Guide To Socratic Discussion
by Megan L. Andrews

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Introduction

These teacher guides are intended to assist the teacher or parent in conducting meaningful discussions of literature in the classroom or home school. Questions and answers follow the pattern presented in *Teaching the Classics*, the Center for Literary Education's two day literature seminar. Though the concepts underlying this approach to literary analysis are explained in detail in that seminar, the following brief summary presents the basic principles upon which this guide is based.

The *Teaching the Classics* approach to literary analysis and interpretation is built around three unique ideas which, when combined, produce a powerful instrument for understanding and teaching literature:

First: All works of fiction share the same basic elements — *Context, Structure, and Style*. A literature lesson that helps the student identify these elements in a story prepares him for meaningful discussion of the story's themes.

Context encompasses all of the details of time and place surrounding the writing of a story, including the personal life of the author as well as historical events that shaped the author's world.

Structure includes the essential building blocks that make up a story, and that all stories have in common: Conflict, Plot (which includes exposition, rising action, climax, denouement, and conclusion), Setting, Characters and Theme.

Style refers to the literary devices used by authors to create the mood and atmosphere of their stories. Recognition of some basic literary devices (alliteration, simile, personification, metaphor, etc) enables a reader not only to understand the author's themes more readily, but also to

appreciate his craftsmanship more fully.

Second: Because it is approachable and engaging, Children's Literature is the best genre to employ in teaching the foundational principles of literary analysis. Children's books present these building blocks in clear, memorable language, and are thus treasure mines of opportunities for the astute teacher — allowing him to present Context, Structure and Style with ease to children and adults alike. Having learned to recognize these basic elements in the simple text of a classic children's story, a student is well prepared to analyze complex works suitable for his own age and level of intellectual development.

Third: The best classroom technique for teaching literary analysis and interpretation is the *Socratic Method*. Named after the ancient gadfly who first popularized this style of teaching, the Socratic method employs the art of questioning, rather than lecturing, to accomplish education. Based upon the conviction that the process of discovery constitutes the better part of learning, our program uses well placed questions to teach students how to think, rather than dictating to them what to think.

The *Teaching the Classics* seminar syllabus supplies a thorough list of Socratic questions for teachers to use in class discussion. The questions are general enough to be used with any book, but focused enough to lead the student into meaningful contemplation of the themes of even the most difficult stories. Questions on the list are arranged in order of difficulty: from grammar level questions which ask for the mere fact of a story, to rhetoric level questions which require discussion of ideologies and transcendent themes. Properly employed, this list can help teachers engage their classes in important discussions of ideas, and can also provide a rich resource for essay and other writing assignments! Used in conjunction with a good writing program, *Teaching the Classics* produces deep thinkers at any age.

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A Few Notes About Numbering

Page numbers in this volume refer to the 1994 box set edition of *The Chronicles of Narnia* issued by Harper Trophy, a division of HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY, 10022.

That edition was the first to arrange the seven volumes in Narnian chronological order — that is, according to the events of Narnian history that they relate. Thus *The Magician's Nephew* is dubbed Volume One, followed by *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair* and *The Last Battle*.

Earlier editions had always presented the tales in the order in which C.S. Lewis wrote and published them between 1950 and 1956. The earlier order began with *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and continued with *Prince Caspian*, *The Voyage of The Dawn Treader*, *The Silver Chair*, *The Horse and His Boy*, *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Last Battle*.

The editors of these guides, having fallen in love with Narnia in the 1970s under the old regime, still cling faithfully to the opinion that reading the tales in publication order adds dimensions of pleasure and wonder to the Narnian experience that can't be had otherwise. They have therefore arranged the guides in this volume to correspond with the order of earlier editions.

Reference numbers in parentheses next to each question in this book refer to the complete Socratic List, which is included in the course syllabus of CenterForLit's flagship seminar, *Teaching the Classics: A Socratic Method for Literary Education*. For more information about *Teaching the Classics*, please visit CenterForLit at www.centerforlit.com.

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

by C. S. Lewis

Overview

Plot

During a wartime visit to an old country house, four English children stumble through the back of a magical wardrobe into another world. There they join the great talking lion Aslan in a struggle to free the land of Narnia from an evil enchantment.

Conflict

Can Aslan and his friends free Narnia from the clutches of the White Witch? (Man vs. Man, Man vs. Society, Man vs. God) Will Edmund be saved from the consequences of his treachery? (Man vs. Self, Man vs. God)

Setting

England during WWII; the mythical land of Narnia

Characters

The talking lion Aslan; English children Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie; the evil White Witch; various talking beasts of Narnia.

Theme

Sin and redemption; betrayal; forgiveness; sacrificial love

Questions About Structure: Setting

(1.d-i) Where does this story happen?

This story takes place in two separate settings. The first of these creates what literary analysts call a *story frame*—an initial narrative within which the main story takes place. Just as a picture frame surrounds a piece of artwork, providing contrast and positioning the work on the larger wall, so a story frame surrounds a story with external context and added significance.

In Lewis’s book, the initial story setting finds the protagonists, the four young Pevensie children, journeying to the English countryside and the home of old Professor Digory Kirke in order to avoid the air raids of World War II. In the Professor’s old mansion there are many long corridors and dusty rooms to explore. It is in one of these rooms that the children discover a doorway into another world. As the children enter this world one by one, the “frame” gives way to the interior portion of the story, which takes place in the magical land of Narnia.

Though at first the Pevensie children are enamored with the whimsical qualities of the new world in which they find themselves, they soon discover that strife grips Narnia. Due to the absence of Narnia’s true king, Aslan, a traitorous usurper — the White Witch — has cast a spell on Narnia which makes it always winter there, but never Christmas. As the tyrant rules Narnia with a frigid fist, the beleaguered Narnians pray for Aslan to return and deliver them. This political turmoil in Narnia is subtly allegorical. The real, historical world of the external setting and the world of Narnia may both be considered to languish in the rule of a usurper; both await a Savior. Each of these worlds is equally rich in circumstantial conflict, given the political and spiritual struggles inherent in their settings. These complex settings and conflicts enrich Lewis’s plot.

(2) When does this story happen?

Due to incongruities between the passage of time in Narnia and in its correlative real world, this story takes place in a whole era or generation of Narnian time while only a moment of time passes in the England of the story’s external frame. While visiting Narnia, the children experience adventure after adventure, maturing into kings and queens who share the life-content of true adults. Yet

Questions About Structure: Characters

(3) Who is this story about? (Protagonist)

This story chronicles the adventures of the four young Pevensie siblings: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. Choosing a protagonist for this story can produce a fruitful discussion. As a result of the third person, omniscient narration, it is difficult to pinpoint a single protagonist. While Lucy may be the protagonist for a good portion of the story, Edmund soon takes her place when the narrator follows him to the White Witch's castle, where he traitorously betrays his family. In addition, Aslan's crucial, heroic role in the climax and the resolution of the story leads many readers to assign the protagonist badge to Him.

In fact, the choice of the protagonist depends largely on what perspective the reader intends to chart: the human or the heavenly. After all, the *Chronicles of Narnia* are, in part, an allegory of the Christian life. While Edmund and Lucy represent human, fallen sinners, Aslan is the Christ-figure who lays down His life for them. Since the content of the greater portion of the story follows the struggles and actions of the children (the sinners – Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve), it seems appropriate to consider them the protagonists. It is their story, the sinners' story, that we will chart in this guide.

Even after this decision is made, we readers face a final choice: do we chart Lucy's story or Edmund's? Lucy represents the ideal, obedient Christian, never straying from her Lord's set path, faithfully believing Him until the end. In Lucy's story, Edmund is a sort of antagonist as he casts his lot with the White Witch for a time. However, Edmund remains a Pevensie child, and it is the Pevensies whom we have identified to be the protagonists of the story. It seems likely that his turncoat behavior exists to illustrate the traitorous nature of man. That is, whereas Lucy represents innocent humanity searching for God, Edmund plays the Prodigal Son. Both of these stories and responses are equally valid, but they emphasize different conflicts and, therefore, will produce different story charts. The choice remains for the reader to make. Remember that getting the right answer is not the object of the discussion here. What we are after is thoughtful discussion that forces the kids to read closely and support their own understandings of the story with evidence from the text.

For the purposes of this Teacher Guide, we will chart Edmund's story, since it is fraught with both internal and external conflict. As the receiver of Aslan's love and sacrifice, this story is uniquely his. In addition, Edmund's character is perhaps the most sympathetic. While Lucy represents an ideal Christian and an "example to follow," the average struggling, suffering sinner may not identify with her. Edmund, however, stands as a remarkably sympathetic character. Helpless in his sin and treachery, he needs a Savior desperately. All readers identify with this fundamental need.

(4) Who else is the story about? (Antagonist)

The White Witch remains the story's main antagonist. A traitorous usurper, she opposes the children at every turn. She hates the Pevensies from the start because ancient Narnian prophecy has foretold that the arrival of these four siblings, destined to become the monarchs of Narnia, will herald her downfall. The White Witch opposes the children's attempts to survive, to meet Aslan, and to reach Cair Paravel, all for the purpose of preventing her prophesied demise. Despite her reprehensible nature and purpose, the White Witch commands a peculiar fascination and attraction. As Edmund discovers soon after his entrance into Narnia, the White Witch is as deceptively attractive as Queen Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew* (see chapter 6 below). Using her striking beauty and frigid charm to their best advantage, she seduces Edmund into her service, but her charms soon fade. Having once obtained her goal, the White Witch reveals a heart as cold as the icy winter she imposes upon Narnia.

Interestingly enough, Edmund too plays the part of an antagonist in the initial portion of the story. Controlled entirely by his lust for Turkish Delight and all that it signifies, Edmund is driven to act in a way that is ultimately incompatible with his own goals of survival and happiness. This Turkish Delight which Edmund lusts after boasts intense allegorical significance. As tantalizing as the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, the Witch's candy revolutionizes Edmund's perspective on his own life and situation. Much as the forbidden fruit incited dissatisfaction and ambition in Adam and Eve, Turkish Delight opens Edmund's eyes to the insufficiency of his current state and rouses evil ambitions in his mind and heart.

(5) What does the protagonist want? (6) Why can't he have it?

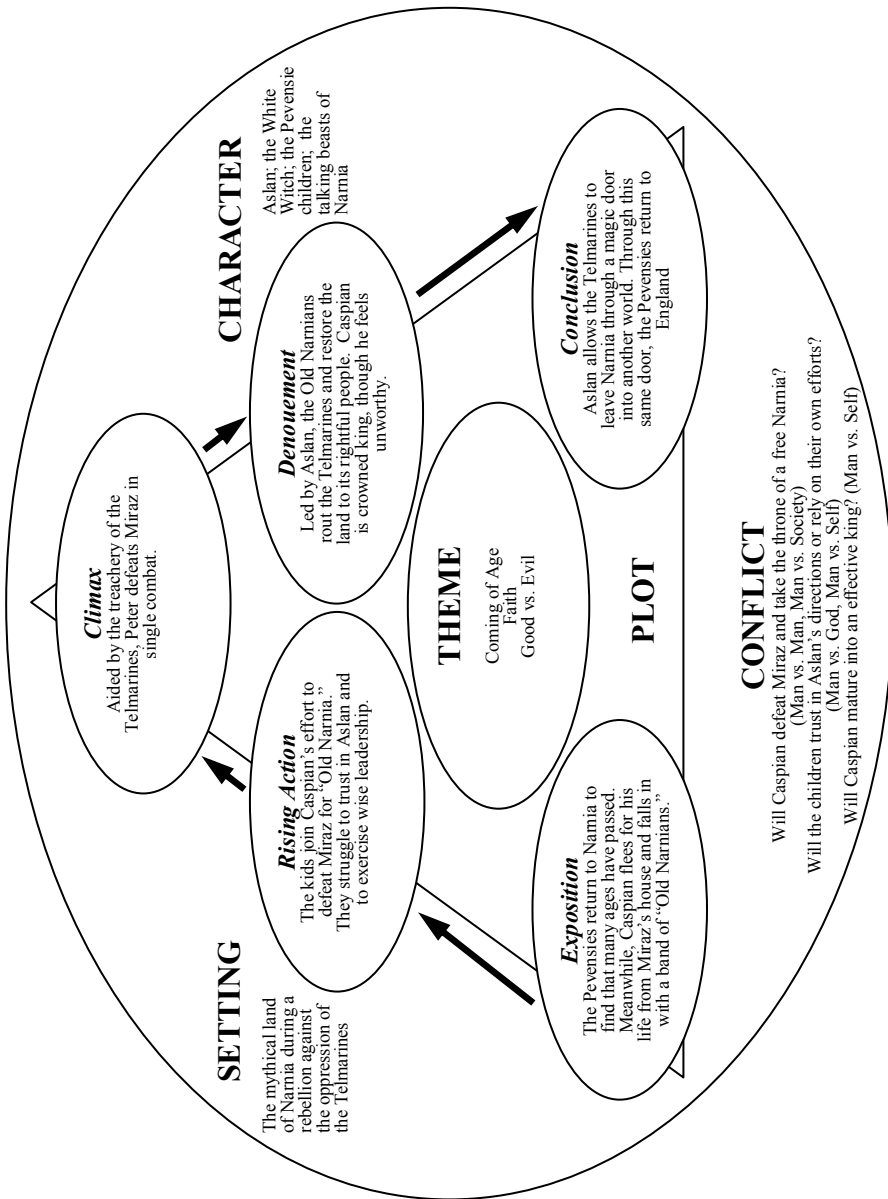
As the protagonist, Edmund Pevensie's desires and goals are the driving focus of the story. Initially, Edmund wants one thing, pure and simple: Turkish Delight. Due to the allegorical nature of this story, however, this craving of Edmund's is much deeper than it seems. This is a fabulous point of discussion as well, for truly, Edmund wants much more than sweet treats to tickle his taste buds. He wants what the Turkish Delight represents, namely self-gratification, guilty comfort and satisfaction, and all the fruits of sin. He lusts after this end and dreams that he can obtain it, while avoiding the consequences which inevitably follow such indulgence.

His dreams prove ultimately futile. As every sinner knows, the wages of sin are death, and Edmund's violation is no different. No sooner does he indulge in the fruits of his sin than he finds himself bound to the White Witch; simultaneously, his awareness of the cruelty of his liege-lady grows. As the realization of his dire predicament dawns on Edmund, he becomes miserable and begins to long for salvation. This conflict begins as a Man vs. Self conflict as Edmund gratifies himself despite the harm his actions will eventually cause him. Later it becomes a Man vs. Man conflict, as Edmund longs for freedom and the White Witch holds him captive.

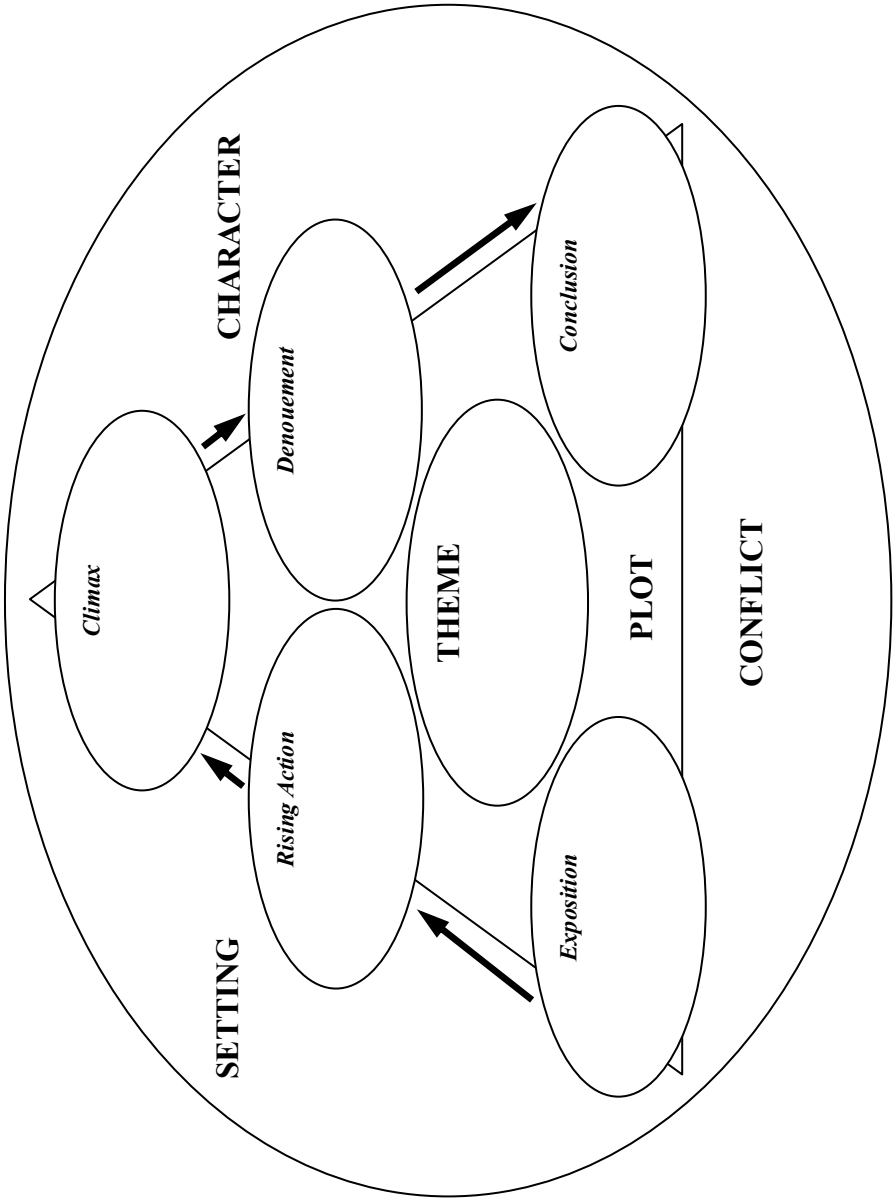
NOTES:

Prince Caspian by C.S. Lewis

Story Chart



Prince Caspian by C.S. Lewis
Story Chart



Questions About Style: Literary Devices

(17) Does the author use the characters and events in his story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way?

Lewis uses the characters of Shift and Rishda Tarkaan to communicate an underlying irony throughout the story. Though they themselves don't believe in Tash or Aslan, the conspirators "summon" Tash in the presence of a host of witnesses. Ironically, both Aslan and Tash do, in fact, exist. In answer to the summons, Tash appears in Narnia. Tirian and his fellows see the specter floating fast to Stable Hill. The dwarf in the king's company chuckles to himself:

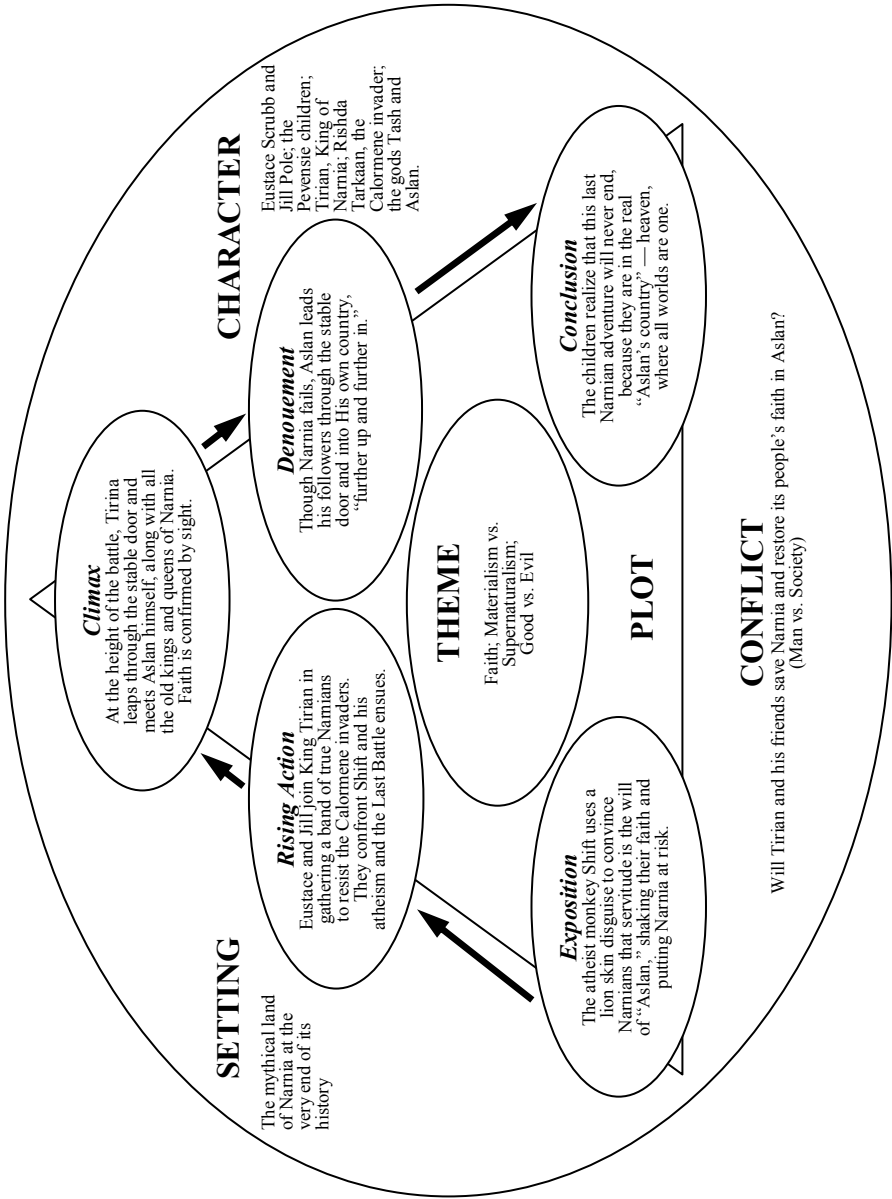
"this fool of an Ape, who didn't believe in Tash, will get more than he bargained for! He called for Tash: Tash has come..."

"Ho, ho, ho!" chuckled the Dwarf, rubbing his hairy hands together. "It will be a surprise for the Ape. People shouldn't call for demons unless they really mean what they say." (p. 103-104)

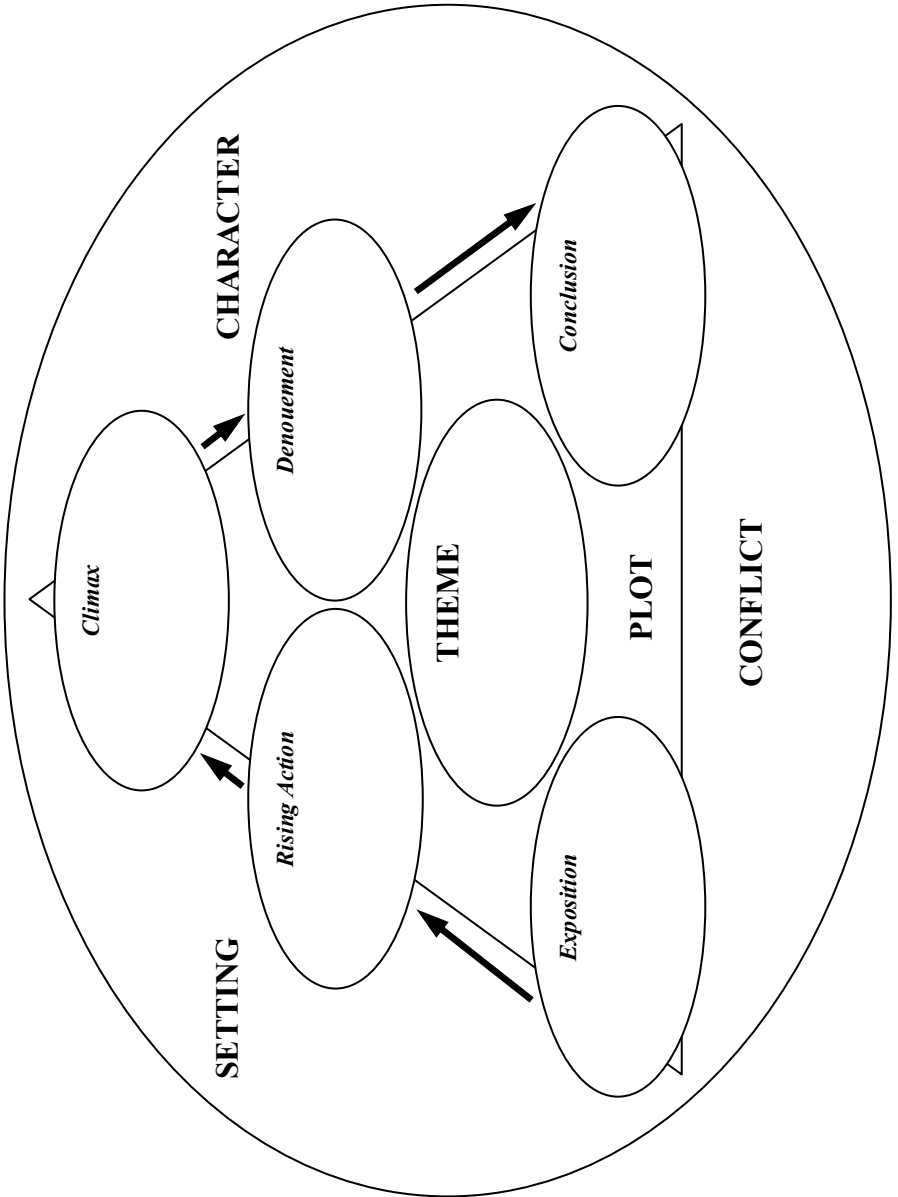
This ironic thread is woven throughout the story, increasing the tension and adding an element of humor to the portentous events of the tale.

NOTES:

The Last Battle by C.S. Lewis Story Chart



The Last Battle by C.S. Lewis
 Story Chart



About the Author



Megan Andrews is a sophomore English major at Hillsdale College in Hillsdale, Michigan. She is the author of several popular Teacher Guides published by the Center for Literary Education, including *Straw Into Gold* by Gary Schmidt and *The Penderwicks* by Jeanne Birdsall. *Ready Readers: The Chronicles of Narnia* is her first book-length compilation. Megan also writes poetry and essays and works as a tutor in the CenterForLit writing center.

In addition to her literary pursuits, Megan is an accomplished classical ballerina who also enjoys singing jazz standards and contemporary church music.

When she is home from school, she likes spending time with her sister Molly Kate, her four brothers—Ian, Aaron, Calvin and Charlie—and her dog, Hound.

