

Chapters 1–3

Vocabulary:

For each underlined word below, identify the part of speech and choose the best definition given. Use the word's context (surrounding material) as your guide.

1. . . . once in a while members of the Took-clan would go and have adventures. They discreetly disappeared, and the family hushed it up

Part of speech: _____

- a. slowly and clumsily
- b. cautiously and quietly
- c. loudly and rambunctiously
- d. quickly and mysteriously

2. “Dwalin and Balin here already, I see,” said Kili. “Let us join the throng!”

Part of speech: _____

- a. crowd
- b. party
- c. family
- d. mess

The Hobbit

3. “All the same, I should like it all plain and clear,” said he obstinately, putting on his business manner (usually reserved for people who tried to borrow money off him), and doing his best to appear wise and prudent and professional

obstinately

Part of speech: _____

- a. firmly
- b. carelessly
- c. boldly
- d. sadly

prudent

Part of speech: _____

- a. foolish
- b. boring
- c. scheming
- d. practical

4. “Also I should like to know about risks, out-of-pocket expenses, time required and remuneration, and so forth”—by which he meant: “What am I going to get out of it? and am I going to come back alive?”

Part of speech: _____

- a. preparations
- b. education
- c. payment
- d. qualifications

5. “. . . . funeral expenses to be defrayed by us or our representatives, if occasion arises and the matter is not otherwise arranged for.”

Part of speech: _____

- a. ignored
- b. paid
- c. considered
- d. taxed

The Hobbit

6. They were on ponies, and each pony was slung about with all kinds of baggages, packages, parcels, and paraphernalia.

Part of speech: _____

- a. assorted belongings
- b. food and water
- c. non-essential items
- d. maps and papers

7. A really first-class and legendary burglar would at this point have picked the trolls' pockets . . . pinched the very mutton off the spits, purloined the beer, and walked off without their noticing him.

Part of speech: _____

- a. poisoned
- b. sipped
- c. stolen
- d. poured

8. By that time they felt like breakfast, and being very hungry they did not turn their noses up at what they had got from the trolls' larder.

Part of speech: _____

- a. cave
- b. stockpile
- c. stolen goods
- d. pantry

9. He was as noble and as fair in face as an elf-lord, as strong as a warrior, as wise as a wizard, as venerable as a king of dwarves, and as kind as summer.

Part of speech: _____

- a. ancient
- b. silly
- c. respectable
- d. stubborn

The Hobbit

10. He loved maps, as I have told you before; and he also liked runes and letters and cunning handwriting, though when he wrote it himself it was a bit thin and spidery.

Part of speech: _____

- a. ancient monuments
- b. ancient alphabets
- c. ancient charts
- d. ancient people

11. “What do [the letters] say?” asked Gandalf and Thorin together, a bit vexed perhaps that even Elrond should have found this out first

Part of speech: _____

- a. annoyed
- b. pleased
- c. curious
- d. angry

To expand your vocabulary as you read, keep a list of words that you don't know and make a point of either figuring them out from context or looking them up in a dictionary.

Characterization:

Characterization is the process by which an author establishes the distinctive traits and personalities of characters in a story.¹ Authors use many techniques to create believable characters, including:

- direct information (telling the reader something specific about the character)
- dialogue (letting the reader infer something about the character from what the character says and how the character says it)
- physical action (showing the character engaged in an activity that reveals something about the character)
- physical description (letting the reader infer something about the character from the character's appearance, mannerisms, and so on)
- physical surroundings (letting the reader infer something about the character from the places that character chooses to be)

The Hobbit

Characters may or may not change during a story; readers must pay attention to the above techniques to determine if a character changes and to evaluate any changes that occur.

In the opening pages of *The Hobbit*, as he introduces his story's protagonist (main character), Tolkien writes:

This is a story of how a Baggins had an adventure, and found himself doing and saying things altogether unexpected. He may have lost the neighbours' respect, but he gained—well, you will see whether he gained anything in the end.

Tolkien thus alerts readers to the fact that Bilbo Baggins will change, in some way, over the course of the story. To track the change in Bilbo's character by the book's end, however, we must know what sort of person Bilbo is at the book's beginning.

Think about the techniques of characterization outlined above, then write a short character sketch (personality description) of Bilbo. How does Tolkien use each technique to establish Bilbo's character as *The Hobbit* begins? What changes can you already begin to see in these first three chapters? Use specific examples in your character sketch.

Extra Activities on Characterization:

1. Write a character sketch of a person in the Bible. Your character may be fictional (for example, a person in one of Jesus' parables), or a real person (for example, Peter). Even when biblical authors describe real people, they use techniques of characterization. Notice what techniques the biblical authors use. What is the author trying to tell us about this biblical character by using that technique?
2. Write a character sketch of a favorite character from literature, television, the movies, or some other source.
3. Write a character sketch of a person you know in real life, using some or all of the techniques described above.
4. Create your own character, using the techniques described above.

The Hobbit

Questions:

1. What do Thorin and the rest of the dwarves hope to accomplish on their quest?
2. Why do the dwarves come to Bilbo's home?
3. What important feature on Thror's Map does Gandalf point out to Thorin?
What important feature on the same map does Elrond later point out to Gandalf and Thorin?
4. What is the first problem Bilbo and the dwarves encounter on their quest?
How is the problem solved?
5. What is Durin's Day? Why is it important?

The Hobbit

Thinking About the Story:

6. In the first three chapters of *The Hobbit*, Tolkien introduces us to four of the many races that populate Middle-earth: hobbits, dwarves, trolls, and elves. Compare and contrast these races. What seem to be the distinguishing characteristics of each? Which race do you find the most interesting or appealing? Why?

7. Bilbo feels an internal struggle between the two sides of his ancestry, the Bagginses and the Tooks. Why does he feel this struggle? What do you know about your family roots? Do you identify with one part of your family history more than another? If so, why?

8. Family history is also important to Thorin Oakenshield.² What part does his family's past play in motivating him to undertake this quest? What do you think about that motivation? In your own life, how much do you let your past influence your present? What are some healthy ways in which the past influences us? What might be some unhealthy ways?

Dig Deeper:

9. When Gloom challenges Gandalf's choice of Bilbo, Gandalf replies, "There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself." Gandalf sees potential in Bilbo that others do not.

A recurring theme in the Bible is God's choice of unlikely people to do God's will. Read, for example, these passages: 1 Samuel 16:1–13; Amos 7:10–15; Mark 2:13–17; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. Why might the people in these texts be considered unlikely candidates for serving God? Why do you think God chooses them anyway?

Read Ephesians 2:8–10. While we are saved by God's grace, we are saved not only for eternal life in the future but also for serving God in the present. What "good works" (Ephesians 2:10) do you believe God has prepared for and chosen you to do? What have you done when others have considered you an "unlikely choice"—or when you have considered yourself one?

10. Gandalf tells Bilbo that he "is looking for someone to share in an adventure . . . and it's very difficult to find anyone." Sometimes, in myths and fantasies, heroes initially resist the call to adventure.³

We also see this reaction in the Bible. Read Exodus 3:1–4:16; Jeremiah 1:4–10; and the book of Jonah. How do Moses, Jeremiah, and Jonah resist or refuse God's call? How does God overcome their resistance?

The Hobbit

Contrast those passages with the following: Isaiah 6:1–8; Mark 1:16–20. How does Isaiah respond to God’s call? How do Simon, Andrew, James, and John respond to Jesus’ call?

Think about a time you have felt called by God to do or to be something. Did you resist or accept that call? What were the results of your actions?

11. The dwarves consider themselves to be in exile. Remembering the golden age of Dale, Thorin says, “Altogether those were good days for us” The dwarves express both their memories of happier times and their longing for those times to return through their music in Bilbo’s home (“Far over the misty mountains cold . . .”).

Many psalms reflect similar sentiments. In 587 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, including the Temple, and took the people of Judah into exile in Babylon. They would not be able to return home for almost sixty years. Read Psalms 74, 80, 83, 126, and 137 for a sample of psalms that give voice to both the grief and the hope of God’s people as they endure exile. What similarities and differences do you see in these psalms and the song sung by the dwarves?

How do you react to the emotions expressed in these psalms? How do you think God reacts to these emotions? How would you evaluate the emotional honesty of your prayers?

The Hobbit

12. As you read *The Hobbit*, note the theme of greed. For instance, Thorin calls Smaug “a most specially greedy” dragon—which Smaug certainly is—even as one of Thorin’s own motives is greed: “[W]e have never forgotten our stolen treasure. And even now, when I will allow we have a good bit laid by and are not so badly off . . . we still mean to get it back.” How might Thorin’s attitudes illustrate Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 7:3–5? What does Jesus teach about wealth in Matthew 6:19–24?

13. According to world mythology scholar Joseph Campbell (d. 1987), a hero’s quest begins with a separation from the known and familiar in response to a call to adventure. This separation is complete when the hero successfully crosses the first—though not the last—“threshold to adventure.”⁴ How does this phase of separation occur in the first three chapters of *The Hobbit*?

Jesus called his first disciples away from the known and familiar. They experienced separation. The life of a disciple involves separation; see, for instance, Mark 8:34–38; Luke 12:51–53; 14:25–27. The Christian life can be viewed as an adventure and a quest. Has there been a time when your commitment to Christ has meant separating yourself from other, lesser commitments? What was that experience like? You may wish to share your experience with another person, or to ask other—and perhaps older—Christians about their experiences of separation for the sake of following Christ.

The Hobbit

Notes:

- ¹ H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 5th ed. (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1988) 23.
- ² You will have to pay special attention to Tolkien's use of allusion to gain a sense of Thorin's family history. An allusion "in a literary text is a reference, explicit or indirect, to a well-known person, place, or event, or to another literary work or passage" (Abrams 8). In *The Hobbit*, however, most allusions are to the complex Middle-earth mythology Tolkien had been creating (or "discovering") throughout his life (see "About the Author" in this study guide).
- ³ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, 2nd ed., Bollingen Series 17 (1968; Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972) 59.
- ⁴ Campbell 245.