

Tolkien's Middle-earth: Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Content Focus: The Oral Tradition

Thematic Focus: Creating Meaning Through Myth

Overview

In creating *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R. Tolkien drew upon traditional folk literature, including myths, tales, sagas, poems, legends, ballads, and epics. All of these forms ultimately spring from the oral tradition: stories told and retold over the centuries. In Unit One, students explore this rich heritage through readings, discussions, journal writing, and projects.

Learning Goals

By the end of Unit One, the student should be able to:

- Describe some types of oral narrative that influenced Tolkien.
- Identify several common myth and folktale motifs.
- Indicate what Tolkien meant by "Faerie."
- Suggest what is lost when an oral narrative is transcribed.
- Discuss Tolkien's concept of the "eucatastrophe."

Unit One Content

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Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Comments for Teachers

There are several ways to launch Unit One and the Middle-earth course as a whole. You could begin by determining how much the class already knows about J.R.R. Tolkien and his masterpiece. It's important to clarify that *The Lord of the Rings* is not a true trilogy but a single, unified novel.

Another approach would be to inform the class of Tolkien's desire to fill the void created in world literature by the Norman Conquest, which suppressed English storytelling traditions. The author of *The Lord of the Rings* asked himself a fruitful question. What might the lost tales and poems of the English peoples — the Saxons and other tribes — have been like? Might it be possible to weave these hypothetical narratives into an ambitious work of fantasy?

Finally, you could key your opening remarks to the recent explosion of Tolkienesque tropes in the popular culture. Fantasy role-playing games, best-selling "epic fantasy" novels, movie heroes wielding light sabers against dark lords: these phenomena owe a huge debt to Middle-earth.

Unit One includes seven handouts, a small compendium of myths, folktales, ballads, and fairy stories derived from ancient traditions. We suggest that as Unit One progresses, students read at least three of these texts in class. Choose whichever narratives seem best suited to your students and your larger objectives. Additional resources for more examples are provided in the bibliography.

As they learn about the oral tradition in Unit One, students should be reading Chapters I-VII of *The Hobbit* at home. The in-class consideration of Tolkien's great novel for children begins with Unit Two.

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Key Terms

oral tradition. The universal human practice of memorizing and performing stories: telling tales, singing ballads, reciting poems. Although the venue varies — campfire, fireside, kitchen, tavern, workplace, child's bedside — storytelling occurs throughout history. Myths, folktales, fairy stories, and heroic epics are rooted in the oral tradition. Each such narrative was written down only after thriving for generations in spoken form

Faerie (fay-ree). The perilous realm of magic and enchantment that overlaps the human sphere. In his letters and critical writings, J.R.R. Tolkien argued that a "fairy story" is characterized not by diminutive sprites called "fairies" but by an encounter between a human and the Faerie realm. From Faerie spring the dragons, ogres, giants, trolls, gnomes, elves, dwarfs, witches, wizards, and goblins who populate the classic fairy tales

myth. A traditional story about the relationship between mortal beings and the supernatural realm of gods, goddesses, wizards, enchantresses, and monsters. Every ancient society boasts a cycle of myths reflecting shared beliefs. The Greek myths are the most famous — Perseus and Medusa, Theseus and the Minotaur, Jason and the Golden Fleece, and dozens of others — but Tolkien was inspired more by Norse mythology than by the Greek myths

folktale. A traditional episodic narrative transmitted orally within a society and between cultures. Such "fairy stories" as "Puss in Boots" and "Hansel and Gretel" are more properly termed folktales

heroic epic. A long poem recounting the deeds of a valiant warrior or courageous ruler. The epic hero represents the best in a nation; he is a beacon to his people. Examples include *Gilgamesh* (the exploits of the ancient Sumerian demigod), the *Iliad* (Homer's great narrative of the Trojan war), the *Aeneid* (concerning the founding of Rome), and the *Song of Roland* (from medieval France). A heroic epic is sometimes called a national epic or simply an epic poem

motif (moe-teaf). An important theme that appears frequently within a body of myths or tales or that recurs within a longer work. A common motif in fairy stories is the "impossible task" — an idea that lies at the heart of *The Lord of the Rings*. A common motif in myths is the "forbidden action," an idea that also figures crucially in Tolkien's novel

eucatastrophe (yew-cat-as-tro-fee) A term invented by Tolkien for the "good catastrophe" that typically resolves the plot of a Faerie narrative. The eucatastrophe is a joyous and wholly unexpected turn of events that delivers the hero or heroine from disaster. Mysterious in origin — fate? chance? luck? providence? — the eucatastrophe gives the fairy tale its happy ending

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Handouts

"Rumpelstiltskin" (Brothers Grimm)

With the help of a strange little man, a young woman accomplishes the impossible task of spinning straw into gold, but she must promise to give him her firstborn child in return. This famous fairy tale features two eucatastrophes: the appearance of Rumpelstiltskin and the discovery of his secret name.

"The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs" (Brothers Grimm)

To prove himself worthy of the King's daughter, a young man must enter Hell and bring back three golden hairs plucked from the Devil's head. This tale contains several classic motifs, including the lucky child, the impossible task, the well-earned reward, and — when the King seeks to circumvent a prophecy concerning his daughter's future husband — the attempt to elude fate.

"Orpheus and Eurydice" (Greek myth)

When Eurydice, wife of the great musician Orpheus, dies from a snakebite, her husband descends into the underworld and, through the beauty of his singing, persuades the rulers of Hades to release her. He is permitted to take Eurydice back with him on one condition: he must not turn around and look at her until they have reached the surface. Apart from the biblical narrative of Lot's wife, "Orpheus and Eurydice" is the most famous example of a story centered on the "forbidden action" motif.

"Creation of the World" (Norse myth)

In this excerpt from "Voluspo" ("The Sibyl's Vision"), a wise woman relates how Othin (Odin) and his fellow gods created the world from the body of the frost-giant Ymir. These cryptic verses, written down in Old Icelandic but originating in the ancient Teutonic oral tradition, begin a collection of poems called "The Elder Edda," a crucial document in northern myth and a fount of inspiration for Tolkien.

"Khodumodumo" (African folktale)

Hiding from a shapeless ogre who is devouring every creature in its path, a woman gives birth to a boy who immediately grows to adulthood, slays the beast, and cuts the people and animals free from its body. Many variations of the "swallowing monster" motif occur in African folklore. The idea of a live person being recovered from a vanquished beast is familiar to us from the story of Little Red Riding Hood. In the European tradition, Hercules and the Irish hero Cuchulain are other examples of the

child who displays adult powers.

"The Charmed Ring" (Hindu folktale)

A merchant's son is thought a fool for spending his inheritance to save the lives of three animals. But these very creatures help him gain a magic ring and the hand of a beautiful princess. The idea of doing the right thing for its own sake characterizes a folktale type called "the grateful dead," in which a hero starting on a journey gives his last penny so an anonymous corpse can receive a decent burial. Soon the traveler is joined by a companion, sometimes in animal form, who helps him gain his desires and is eventually revealed to be the ghost of the buried stranger. This theme of unforeseen benefits accruing to unselfish actions appears in *The Hobbit* and is especially prominent in *The Lord of the Rings*.

"Thomas the Rhymer" (Scottish ballad)

Thomas goes willingly to Faerie when the Queen of Elfland entices him to spend seven years with her. During their marvelous journey, the lady shows him three roads: one to Heaven, one to Hell, and one to Elfland. He chooses the third path. Upon returning home, Thomas becomes a famous prophet, called "True" for the accuracy of his predictions. This ballad, like those about Robin Hood in England and John Henry in America, is supposedly based on actual events.

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Handouts

"Rumpelstiltskin"

Once there was a miller who was poor, but who had a beautiful daughter. Now it happened that he had to go and speak to the King, and in order to make himself appear important he said to him, "I have a daughter who can spin straw into gold."

The King said to the miller, "That is an art which pleases me well; if your daughter is as clever as you say, bring her to my palace, and I will see what she can do."

And when the girl was brought to him he took her into a room which was quite full of straw, gave her a spinning-wheel and a reel, and said, "Now set to work, and if I see tomorrow morning that you have not spun this straw into gold during the night, you must die." Thereupon he himself locked up the room, and left her in it alone. So there sat the poor miller's daughter, and for the life of her could not tell what to do; she had no idea how straw could be spun into gold, and she grew more and more miserable, until at last she began to weep.

But all at once the door opened, and in came a little man, who said, "Good evening, Mistress Miller, why are you crying so?"

"Alas!" answered the girl, "I have to spin straw into gold, and I do not know how to do it."

"What will you give me," asked the little man, "if I do it for you?"

"My necklace," said the girl.

The little man took the necklace, seated himself in front of the wheel, and whirr, whirr, whirr, three turns, and the reel was full; then he put another on, and whirr, whirr, whirr, three times round, and the second was full too. And so it went on until the morning, when all the straw was spun, and all the reels were full of gold.

By daybreak the King was already there, and when he saw the gold he was astonished and delighted, but his heart became only more greedy. He had the miller's daughter taken into another room full of straw, a much larger room, and commanded her to spin that also in one night if she valued her life.

The girl knew not how to help herself, and was crying when the door again opened, and the little man appeared and said, "What will you give me if I spin that straw into gold for you?"

"The ring on my finger," answered the girl. The little man took the ring, again began to turn the wheel, and by morning had spun all the straw into glittering gold.

The King rejoiced beyond measure at the sight, but still he had not gold enough; and he had the miller's daughter taken into a still larger room full of straw, and said, "You must spin this, too, in the course of this night; but if you succeed, you shall be my wife."

"Even if she be a miller's daughter," thought he, "I could not find a richer wife in the whole world."

When the girl was alone, the little man came again for the third time, and said, "What will you give me if I spin the straw for you this time also?"

"I have nothing left that I could give," answered the girl.

"Then promise me, if you should become Queen, to give me your first child."

"Who knows whether that will ever happen?" thought the miller's daughter; and, not knowing how else to help herself, she promised to give the little man what he wanted, and for that he once more spun the straw into gold.

And when the King came in the morning and found all as he had wished, he took her in marriage, and the pretty miller's daughter became a Queen.

A year after, she had a beautiful child, and she never gave a thought to the little man. But suddenly he came into her room, and said, "Now give me what you promised." The Queen was horror-struck, and offered him all the riches of the kingdom if he would let her keep her child. But he said, "No, something that is living is dearer to me than all the treasures in the world." Then the Queen began to weep and cry so that the little man pitied her. "I will give you three days' time," said he. "If by that time you find out my name, then shall you keep your child."

So the Queen thought the whole night of all the names that she had ever heard, and she sent a messenger over the country to inquire, far and wide, for any other names that there might be. When the little man came the next day, she began with Caspar, Melchior, Balthazar, and said all the names she knew, one after another; but to every one the little man said, "That is not my name."

On the second day she had inquiries made in the neighborhood as to the names of the people there, and she repeated to the little man the most uncommon and curious. "Perhaps your name is Shortribs, or Sheepshanks, or Laceleg?" but he always answered, "That is not my name."

On the third day the messenger came back again, and said, "I have not been able to find a single new name, but as I came to a high mountain at the end of the forest, where the fox and the hare bid each other good night, there I saw a little house, and before the house a fire was burning, and round about the fire quite a ridiculous little man was jumping. He hopped upon one leg, and he shouted this rhyme:

'Today I brew, tomorrow I bake,
The next the young Queen's child I'll take.
How hard it is to play my game

For Rumpelstiltskin is my name!"

You may think how glad the Queen was when she heard the name! And when soon afterwards the little man came in and asked, "Now, Mistress Queen, what is my name?"

At first she said, "Is your name Conrad?"

"No."

"Is your name Harry?"

"No."

"Perhaps your name is Rumpelstiltskin?"

"The devil has told you that! The devil has told you that!" cried the little man, and in his anger he plunged his right foot so deep into the earth that his whole leg went in; and then in rage he pulled at his left leg so hard with both hands that he tore himself in two.

(adapted from *Household Tales* by the Brothers Grimm, translated from the German by Margaret Hunt; original text in the public domain)

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Handouts

**"The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs"
Brothers Grimm**

There was once a poor woman who gave birth to a little son; and because he came into the world with a caul on, it was predicted that in his fourteenth year he would have the King's daughter for his wife.

It happened that soon afterward the King visited the village, and no one knew that he was the King, and when he asked the people what news there was, they answered, "A child has just been born with a caul on; whatever anyone so born undertakes turns out well. It is prophesied, too, that in his fourteenth year he will have the King's daughter for his wife."

The King, who had an evil heart, was angry about the prophecy; he went to the parents, and, seeming quite friendly, said, "You poor people, let me have your child, and I will take care of him."

At first they refused, but then the stranger offered them a large amount of gold, and they thought, "He is a luck-child, and everything must turn out well for him." They at last consented and gave him the child.

The King put the boy in a box and rode away with it until he came to a deep lake; then he threw the box into the water and thought, "I have freed my daughter from her unwelcome suitor."

The box, however, did not sink but floated like a boat, and not a drop of water leaked into it. And the box drifted to within two miles of the King's chief city, where there was a mill, and ran aground at the mill-dam. A miller's boy, who by good luck was standing there, noticed the box and pulled it out with a hook, thinking that he had found a great treasure, but when he opened it there lay a pretty boy inside, quite fresh and lively. He took the child to the miller and his wife, and as they had no children they were glad and said, "God has given him to us." They took great care of the foundling, and he grew up in all goodness.

It happened that once in a storm, the King went into the mill, and he asked the mill-folk if the tall youth was their son. "No," answered they, "he's a foundling. Fourteen years ago he floated down to the mill-dam in a box, and the mill-boy pulled him out of the water."

Then the King knew that it was none other than the luck-child whom he had thrown into

the water, and he said, "My good people, could not the youth take a letter to the Queen? I will give him two gold pieces as a reward."

"Just as the King commands," answered they, and they told the boy to hold himself in readiness.

Then the King wrote a letter to the Queen, wherein he said, "As soon as the boy arrives with this letter, let him be killed and buried, and this must be done before I come home."

The boy set out with this letter; but he lost his way, and in the evening came to a large forest. In the darkness he saw a small light; he went toward it and reached a cottage. When he went in, an old woman was sitting by the fire quite alone. She started when she saw the boy, and said, "Whence do you come, and whither are you going?"

"I come from the mill," he answered, "and wish to go to the Queen, to whom I am taking a letter; but as I have lost my way in the forest I should like to stay here overnight."

"You poor boy," said the woman. "You have come into a den of thieves, and when they come home they will kill you."

"Let them come," said the boy. "I am not afraid; but I am so tired that I cannot go any farther." And he stretched himself upon a bench and fell asleep.

Soon afterward the robbers came, and angrily asked, "What strange boy is lying there?"

"Ah," said the old woman, "it is an innocent child who became lost in the forest, and out of pity I have let him come in; he has to take a letter to the Queen."

The robbers opened the letter and read it, and in it was written that the boy should be put to death the instant he arrived. Then the hard-hearted robbers felt pity, and their leader tore up the letter and wrote another, which said that as soon as the boy came, he should be married at once to the King's daughter. Then they let him lie quietly on the bench until the next morning, and when he awoke they gave him the letter and showed him the right way.

And the Queen, when she had received the letter and read it, did as was written in it and had a splendid wedding-feast prepared. The King's daughter was married to the luck-child, and as the youth was handsome and agreeable, she lived with him in joy and contentment.

After some time the King returned to his palace and saw that the prophecy was fulfilled, the luck-child married to his daughter. "How has that come to pass?" asked he. "I gave quite another order in my letter."

So the Queen gave him the letter and said that he might see for himself what was written in it. The King read the letter and saw quite well that it had been exchanged for the other. He asked the youth what had become of the letter entrusted to him and why he had brought another instead of it.

"I know nothing about it," answered he. "It must have been changed in the night, when I slept in the forest."

The King said in a passion, "You shall not have everything quite so much your own way; whosoever marries my daughter must fetch me from Hell three golden hairs from the head of the Devil; bring me what I want, and you shall keep my daughter." In this way the King hoped to be rid of him forever.

But the luck-child answered, "I will fetch the golden hairs, I am not afraid of the Devil." Thereupon he took leave of them and began his journey.

The road led him to a large town, where the watchman by the gates asked him what his trade was and what he knew. "I know everything," answered the luck-child.

"Then can you do us a favor," asked the watchman, "and tell us why our market-fountain, which once flowed with wine, has become dry and no longer gives even water?"

"That you shall know," answered the luck-child. "Only wait until I come back."

Then he went farther and came to another town, and there also the gatekeeper asked him what was his trade and what he knew. "I know everything," answered the luck-child.

"Then can you do us a favor," asked the gatekeeper, "and tell us why a tree in our town which once bore golden apples now does not even put forth leaves?"

"You shall know that," answered the luck-child. "Only wait until I come back."

Then the youth went on and came to a wide river that he had to cross. The ferryman asked him what his trade was and what he knew. "I know everything," answered he.

"Then can you do me a favor," asked the ferryman, "and tell me why I must always be rowing backward and forward, and am never set free?"

"You shall know that," answered the luck-child. "Only wait until I come back."

When the youth crossed the water he found the entrance to Hell. It was black and sooty within, and the Devil was not at home, but his grandmother was sitting in a large armchair. "What do you want?" she asked of him, but she did not look so very wicked.

"I should like to have three golden hairs from the Devil's head," answered he, "else I cannot keep my wife."

"That is a good deal to ask for," said she. "If the Devil comes home and finds you, it will cost you your life; but as I pity you, I will see if I cannot help you."

She changed him into an ant and said, "Creep into the folds of my dress, for you will be safe there."

"Yes," answered he, "so far, so good; but there are three things besides that I want to know: why a fountain which once flowed with wine has become dry, and no longer gives even water; why a tree which once bore golden apples does not even put forth leaves; and why a ferry-man must always be going backward and forward, and is never set free."

"Those are difficult questions," answered she, "but just be silent and quiet and pay attention to what the Devil says when I pull out the three golden hairs."

As the evening came on, the Devil returned home. No sooner had he entered than he noticed that the air was not pure. "I smell man's flesh," said he. "All is not right here." Then he pried into every corner and searched, but could not find anything. His grandmother scolded him. "It has just been swept," said she, "and everything put in order, and now you are upsetting it again; you have always got man's flesh in your nose. Sit down and eat your supper."

When he had eaten and drunk he was tired, and laid his head in his grandmother's lap, and before long he was fast asleep, snoring and breathing heavily. Then the old woman took hold of a golden hair, pulled it out, and laid it down near her. "Oh!" cried the Devil. "What are you doing?"

"I have had a bad dream," answered the grandmother, "so I seized hold of your hair."

"What did you dream then?" asked the Devil.

"I dreamed that a fountain in a market-place from which wine once flowed was dried up, and not even water would flow out of it; what is the cause of it?"

"Oh! If they did but know it," answered the Devil. "There is a toad sitting under a stone in the well; if they killed it, the wine would flow again."

He went to sleep again and snored until the windows shook. Then she pulled the second hair out. "Ha! What are you doing?" cried the Devil angrily.

"Do not take it ill," said she. "I did it in a dream."

"What have you dreamt this time?" asked he.

"I dreamt that in a certain kingdom there stood an apple-tree which had once borne golden apples, but now would not even bear leaves. What, think you, was the reason?"

"Oh! If they did but know," answered the Devil. "A mouse is gnawing at the root; if they killed this they would have golden apples again, but if it gnaws much longer the tree will wither altogether. But leave me alone with your dreams: if you disturb me in my sleep again I shall box your ears."

The grandmother spoke gently to him until he fell asleep again and snored. Then she took hold of the third golden hair and pulled it out. The Devil jumped up, roared out, and would have treated her ill if she had not quieted him once more and asked, "Who can help bad dreams?"

"What was the dream, then?" asked he, quite curious.

"I dreamt of a ferryman who complained that he must always ferry from one side to the other, and is never released. What is the cause of it?"

"Ah! The fool," answered the Devil. "When anyone comes and wants to go across, he must put the oar in his hand, and the other man will have to ferry and he will be free."

As the grandmother had plucked out the three golden hairs and the three questions were answered, she let the old serpent alone, and he slept until daybreak.

When the Devil had gone out again, the old woman took the ant out of the folds of her dress, and gave the luck-child his human shape again. "There are the three golden hairs for you," said she. "What the Devil said to your three questions, I suppose you heard?"

"Yes," answered he. "I heard and will take care to remember."

"You have what you want," said she, "and now you can go your way."

He thanked the old woman for helping him in his need, and left Hell well content that everything had turned out so fortunately.

When he came to the ferryman, he was expected to give the promised answer. "Ferry me across first," said the luck-child, "and then I will tell you how you can be set free," and when he reached the opposite shore he gave him the Devil's advice: "Next time anyone comes, who wants to be ferried over, just put the oar in his hand."

He went on and came to the town wherein stood the unfruitful tree, and there too the watchman wanted an answer. So the luck-child told him what he had heard from the Devil: "Kill the mouse which is gnawing at its root, and it will again bear golden apples." Then the watchman thanked him, and gave him as a reward two asses laden with gold, which followed him.

At last he came to the town whose well was dry. He told the watchman what the Devil had said: "A toad is in the well beneath a stone; you must find it and kill it, and the well will again give wine in plenty." The watchman thanked him, and also gave him two asses laden with gold.

At last the luck-child got home to his wife, who was heartily glad to see him again, and to hear how well he had prospered in everything. To the King he brought what he had asked for, the Devil's three golden hairs, and when the King saw the four asses laden with gold he was quite content, and said, "Now all the conditions are fulfilled, and you can keep my daughter. But tell me, dear son-in-law, where did all that gold come from? This is tremendous wealth!"

"I was rowed across a river," answered he, "and got it there; it lies on the shore instead of sand."

"Can I too fetch some of it?" asked the King; and he was quite eager about it.

"As much as you like," answered the youth. "There is a ferryman on the river; let him

ferry you over, and you can fill your sacks on the other side."

The greedy King set out in all haste, and when he came to the river he beckoned to the ferryman to put him across. The ferryman came and bade him get in, and when they got to the other shore he put the oar in his hand and sprang out. But from this time forth the King had to ferry, as a punishment for his sins. Perhaps he is ferrying still? If he is, it is because no one has taken the oar from him.

(adapted from *Household Tales* by the Brothers Grimm, translated from the German by Margaret Hunt; original text in the public domain)

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Handouts

"Orpheus and Eurydice" A Greek Myth

Many were the singers who, in the early days, went through the world, telling to men the stories of the gods, telling of their wars and their births. Of all these wanderers none was so famous as Orpheus, who had gone with the Argonauts; none could tell truer things about the gods, for he himself was half divine.

But a great grief came to Orpheus, a grief that stopped his singing and his playing upon the lyre. His young wife, Eurydice, was taken from him. One day, walking in the garden, she was bitten on the heel by a serpent, and straightaway she went down to the world of the dead.

Then everything in this world was dark and bitter for the musician Orpheus; sleep would not come to him, and for him food had no taste. Then Orpheus said: "I will do that which no mortal has ever done before; I will do that which even the immortals might shrink from doing: I will go down into the world of the dead, and I will bring back my bride, Eurydice, to the living and to the light."

Then Orpheus went on his journey to the valley of Acherusia, which goes down, down into the world of the dead. He would never have found his way to that valley if the trees had not shown him the true path. For as he went along Orpheus played upon his lyre and sang, and the trees heard his song and they were moved by his grief, and with their arms and their heads they showed him the way to the deep, deep valley of Acherusia.

Down, down by winding roads through that deepest and most shadowy of all valleys Orpheus went. He came at last to the great gate that opens upon the world of the dead. And the silent guards who keep watch there for the rulers of the dead were frightened when they saw a living being, and they would not let Orpheus approach the gate.

But the singer, knowing the reason for their fear, said: "I am not Heracles come again to drag up from the world of the dead your three-headed dog, Cerberus. I am Orpheus, and all that my hands can do is to make music upon my lyre."

And then he took the lyre in his hands and played upon it. As he played, the silent watchers gathered around him, leaving the gate unguarded. And as he played, the rulers of the dead came forth, Hades and Persephone, and listened to the words of the living man.

"The cause of my coming through the dark and fearful ways," sang Orpheus, "is to strive to gain a fairer fate for Eurydice, my bride. All that is above must come down to

you at last, O rulers of the eternal domain. But before her time has Eurydice been brought here. I have desired strength to endure her loss, but I cannot endure it. And I come before you, Hades and Persephone, brought here by Love."

When Orpheus said the name of Love, Persephone, the Queen of the Dead, bowed her young head, and bearded Hades, the King, bowed his head also. Persephone remembered how Demeter, her mother, had sought her all through the world, and she remembered the touch of her mother's tears upon her face. And Hades remembered how his love for Persephone had led him to carry her away from the valley in the upper world where she had been gathering flowers. He and Persephone bowed their heads and stood aside, and Orpheus went through the gate and came among the dead.

Still upon his lyre he played. Tantalus — who, for his crimes, had been condemned to stand up to his neck in water and yet never be able to assuage his thirst — Tantalus heard, and for a while did not strive to put his lips toward the water that ever flowed away from him; Sisyphus — who had been condemned to roll up a hill a stone that ever rolled back — Sisyphus heard the music that Orpheus played, and for a while he sat still upon his stone. And even those Dread Ones who bring to the dead the memories of all their crimes and all their faults, even the Furies had their cheeks wet with tears.

In the throng of the newly arrived dead Orpheus saw Eurydice. She looked upon her husband, but she had not the power to approach him. But slowly she came when Hades called her. Then with joy Orpheus took her hands.

The privilege would be granted them that no mortal and his dead bride had ever been given before — to leave, both together, the underworld, and to abide for a time in the world of the living. One condition there would be: that on their way up through the valley of Acherusia Orpheus should never look back.

They went through the gate and came among the watchers around the portals. These showed them the path that went up through the valley of Acherusia. That way they went, Orpheus and Eurydice, he going before her.

Up and up through the darkened ways they went, Orpheus knowing that Eurydice was behind him but never looking back upon her. But as he went, his heart was filled with things of which he greatly desired to sing — how the trees were blossoming in the garden she had left; how the water was sparkling in the fountain; how the doors of the house stood open; and how they, sitting together, would watch the sunlight on the laurel bushes. All these things were in his heart to tell her, she who came behind him, silent and unseen.

And now they were nearing the place where the valley of Acherusia opened on the world of the living. Orpheus looked on the blue of the sky. A white-winged bird flew by. Orpheus turned around and cried, "O Eurydice, look upon the world that I have won you back to!"

He turned to say this to her. He looked upon her long dark hair and pale face. He held out his arms to clasp her. But in that instant she slipped back into the depths of the valley. And all he heard spoken was a single word, "Farewell!" Long, long had it taken Eurydice to climb so far, but in the moment of his turning around she had fallen back to

her place among the dead.

Down through the valley of Acherusia Orpheus went again. Once more he came before the watchers of the gate. But now he was neither looked at nor listened to, and, hopeless, he had to return to the world of the living.

The birds were his friends now, and the trees and the stones. The birds flew around him and mourned with him; the trees and stones often followed him, moved by the music of his lyre. But a savage band slew Orpheus and threw his severed head and his lyre into the River Hebrus. It is said by the poets that, while they floated in midstream, the lyre gave out some mournful notes, and the head of Orpheus answered the notes with song.

And now that he was no longer to be counted with the living, Orpheus went down to the world of the dead, not going now by that steep path through the valley of Acherusia but descending straightaway. The silent watchers let him pass, and he went among the dead and saw his Eurydice in the throng. Again they were together, Orpheus and Eurydice, and as they went through the place that King Hades ruled over, they had no fear of looking back, one upon the other.

(adapted from *The Golden Fleece and the Heroes Who Lived Before Achilles* by Padraic Colum; original text in the public domain)

**Tolkien's Middle-earth:
Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators**

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Handouts

"Creation of the World"

**Excerpt from "Voluspo,"
the first poem in the *Elder Edda***

Othin (Odin), chief of the gods, aware of impending disaster and eager for knowledge, calls on a certain "Volva," probably a wise-woman of the race of giants, bidding her rise from the grave and prophesy. First she tells him of the past, of the creation of the world

Hearing I ask | from the holy races,
From Heimdall's sons, | both high and low;
Thou wilt, Valfather, | that well I relate
Old tales I remember | of men long ago.

I remember yet | the giants of yore,
Who gave me bread | in the days gone by;
Nine worlds I knew, | the nine in the tree
With mighty roots | beneath the mold.

Of old was the age | when Ymir lived;
Sea nor cool waves | nor sand there were;
Earth had not been, | nor heaven above,
But a yawning gap, | and grass nowhere.

Then Bur's sons lifted | the level land,
Mithgarth the mighty | there they made;
The sun from the south | warmed the stones of earth,
And green was the ground | with growing leeks.

The sun, the sister | of the moon, from the south
Her right hand cast | over heaven's rim;
No knowledge she had | where her home should be,
The moon knew not | what might was his,
The stars knew not | where their stations were.

Then sought the gods | their assembly-seats,
The holy ones, | and council held;
Names then gave they | to noon and twilight,
Morning they named, | and the waning moon,

Night and evening, | the years to number.

* * *

Heimdall = watchman of the gods

Valfather = father of the slain = Othin, chief of the gods, so called because slain warriors were brought to him at Valhall, the hall of the slain, by the Valkyries, the choosers of the slain

Nine worlds = the worlds of the gods called the Aesir and the Vanir (Asgarth and Vanaheim), of the elves (Alfheim), of humans (Mithgarth), of the giants (Jotunheim), of fire (Muspellsheim), of the dark elves (Svartalfaheim), of the dead (Niflheim), and presumably of the dwarfs (perhaps Nithavellir, but the ninth world is uncertain)

The tree = the great ash-tree Yggdrasil, symbolizing the universe

Ymir = the giant out of whose body the gods made the world

Yawning gap = Ginnungagap

Bur's sons = Othin, Vili, and Ve

Leeks = a symbol of growth also supposed to have magic power

* * *

(adapted from the Henry Adams Bellows translation of the Old Norse *Poetic Edda*, also known as the *Elder Edda*; original text in the public domain)

Tolkien's Middle-earth: Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Handouts

"Khodumodumo" A South African Folktale

Once upon a time there appeared in our country a huge, shapeless thing called Khodumodumo. It swallowed every living creature that came in its way. At last it came through a narrow pass in the mountains and entered a valley where there were several villages. The monster went to one settlement after another and devoured the people, the cattle, the goats, the dogs, and the chickens.

In the last village there was a woman who had just happened to sit down on the ash-heap. When she saw the monster coming, she smeared herself all over with ashes and ran into the calves' kraal, where she crouched on the ground.

Khodumodumo, having eaten all the people and all the animals, took a look around the calves' kraal, but since the woman was smeared with ashes and keeping very still, it mistook her for a stone. Then the shapeless thing turned and went away, but when it reached the narrow pass at the entrance to the valley it could not get through, because it had swollen to such a great size. So the monster was forced to stay where it was.

Meanwhile the woman in the kraal, who had been expecting a baby shortly, gave birth to a boy. She laid him on the ground and left him for a minute or two while she looked for something to make a bed for him. When she came back she found a grown man sitting there, with two or three spears in his hand and a string of ditaola — divining bones — around his neck.

She said, "Hello, man! Where is my child?"

"It is I, Mother!" he answered. "I am Ditaolane." Then he asked what had become of the people, and the cattle, and the dogs, and she told him. And he asked, "Where is this shapeless thing, Mother?"

"Come out and see, my child."

So they both went out and climbed to the top of the wall surrounding the kraal, and she pointed to the mountain pass, saying, "That thing you see filling the pass, as big as a mountain itself, that is Khodumodumo."

Ditaolane got down from the wall, fetched many spears, sharpened them on a stone, and set off to the far side of the valley, where Khodumodumo lay. It saw the man and opened its mouth to swallow him. But Ditaolane dodged the monster, who was too big

and clumsy to turn and seize him, and running to its other side drove a spear into it. Then he stabbed it with a second spear and it sank down and died.

Ditaolane took his knife and had begun to cut the monster open when he heard a man's voice cry out, "Do not cut me!" So he inserted his knife in a different place, and another man cried out because the knife had slashed his leg. Then Ditaolane began cutting in a third place, and a cow lowed, and someone called out, "Don't stab the cow!" Then he heard a goat bleat, a dog bark, and a hen cackle, but he managed to avoid them all as he went on cutting, and so in time he released all the inhabitants of the valley.

There was great rejoicing as the people collected their belongings, and all returned to their villages praising their deliverer and saying, "This young man must be our chief." They brought him gifts of cattle, so that, between one village and another, he soon had a large herd, and he had his choice of wives among their daughters. So he built himself a fine kraal and married and settled down, and all went well for a time.

(adapted from *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* by Alice Werner; original text in the public domain)

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Handouts

"The Charmed Ring" A Hindu Folktale

A merchant started his son in life with three hundred rupees, and bade him go to another country and try his luck in trade. The son took the money and departed. He had not gone far before he came across some herdsmen quarreling over a dog, which some of them wished to kill.

"Please do not kill the dog," pleaded the young and tender-hearted fellow. "I will give you one hundred rupees for it." Then and there, of course, the bargain was concluded, and the foolish fellow took the dog and continued his journey.

He next met with some people fighting about a cat. Some of them wanted to kill it, but others not. "Oh! please do not kill it," said he. "I will give you one hundred rupees for it." Of course they at once gave him the cat and took the money.

He went on till he reached a village, where some folk were quarreling over a snake that had just been caught. Some of them wished to kill it, but others did not. "Please do not kill the snake," said he. "I will give you one hundred rupees." Of course the people agreed and were highly delighted.

What a fool the fellow was! What would he do now that all his money was gone? What could he do except return to his father? Accordingly he went home.

"You fool! You scamp!" exclaimed his father when he heard how his son had wasted all the money that had been given to him. "Go and live in the stables and repent of your folly. You shall never again enter my house."

So the young man went and lived in the stables. His bed was the grass spread for the cattle, and his companions were the dog, the cat, and the snake, which he had purchased so dearly. These creatures got very fond of him, and would follow him about during the day and sleep by him at night; the cat preferred to sleep at the young man's feet, the dog at his head, and the snake over his body, with its head hanging on one side and its tail on the other.

One day the snake in course of conversation said to its master, "I am the son of Raja Indrasha. One day, when I had come out of the ground to drink the air, some people seized me, and would have slain me had you not most opportunely come to my rescue. I do not know how I shall ever be able to repay your great kindness to me. Would that you knew my father! How glad he would be to see his son's preserver!"

"Where does he live? I should like to see him, if possible," said the young man.

"Well said!" continued the snake. "Do you see yonder mountain? At the bottom of that mountain there is a sacred spring. If you will come with me and dive into that spring, we shall both reach my father's country. Oh, how glad he will be to see you! He will wish to reward you, too. And how can he do that? If he asks you what you would like, you would perhaps do well to reply, 'The ring on your right hand, and the famous pot and spoon that you own.' With these in your possession, you would never need anything, for the ring is such that a man has only to speak to it, and immediately a beautiful furnished mansion will be provided for him, while the pot and the spoon will supply him with all manner of the rarest and most delicious foods."

Attended by his three companions, the man walked to the well and prepared to jump in, according to the snake's directions. "O master!" exclaimed the cat and dog when they saw what he was going to do. "What shall we do? Where shall we go?"

"Wait for me here," he replied. "I am not going far. I shall not be long away." On saying this, he dived into the water and was lost to sight.

"Now what shall we do?" said the dog to the cat.

"We must remain here," replied the cat, "as our master ordered. Do not be anxious about food. I will go to the people's houses and get plenty of food for both of us." And so the cat did, and they both lived very comfortably till their master came again and joined them.

The young man and the snake reached their destination in safety, and news of their arrival was sent to the Raja. His highness commanded his son and the stranger to appear before him. But the snake refused, saying that it could not go to its father till it was released from this stranger, who had saved it from a most terrible death, and whose slave it therefore was.

Then the Raja went and embraced his son, and saluting the stranger welcomed him to his dominions. The young man stayed there a few days, during which he received the Raja's right-hand ring and the pot and spoon, in recognition of His Highness's gratitude to him for having delivered his son. He then returned.

On reaching the top of the spring he found his friends, the dog and the cat, waiting for him. They told one another what they had experienced since the three had last been together, and they were all very glad. Afterward they walked together to the riverbank, where it was decided to try the powers of the charmed ring and pot and spoon.

The merchant's son spoke to the ring, and immediately a beautiful house and a lovely princess appeared, with hair as golden as the magic ring. He spoke to the pot and spoon also, and the most delicious dishes of food were provided for them. So he married the princess, and they lived very happily for several years until one morning the princess, while combing her tresses, put the loose hairs into a hollow bit of reed and threw them into the river that flowed along under the window.

The reed floated on the water for many miles, and was at last picked up by the prince of that country, who curiously opened it and saw the golden hair. Then the prince rushed off to the palace, locked himself up in his room, and would not leave it. He had fallen desperately

in love with the woman whose hair he had picked up, and refused to eat, or drink, or sleep, or move, till she was brought to him.

The king, the prince's father, was in great distress about the matter, and did not know what to do. He feared lest his son should die and leave him without an heir. At last he determined to seek the counsel of his aunt, who was an ogress.

The old woman consented to help him, and bade him not to be anxious, as she felt certain that she would succeed in getting the beautiful woman for his son's wife. She assumed the shape of a bee and flew off buzzing and buzzing and buzzing. Her keen sense of smell soon took her to the beautiful princess, to whom she appeared as an old hag, holding in one hand a stick by way of support.

The hag introduced herself to the beautiful princess and said, "I am your aunt, whom you have never seen before, because I left the country just after your birth." She also embraced and kissed the princess by way of adding force to her words.

The beautiful princess was thoroughly deceived. She returned the ogress's embrace, and invited her to come and stay in the house as long as she could, and treated her with such honor and attention that the ogress thought to herself, "I shall soon accomplish my errand."

When the ogress had been in the house three days, she began to talk of the charmed ring, and advised the princess that she, and not her husband, should keep it, because the latter was constantly out hunting and on other such expeditions and might lose it. Accordingly the beautiful princess asked her husband for the ring, and he readily gave it to her.

The ogress waited another day before she asked to see the precious thing. Doubting nothing, the beautiful princess complied; the ogress seized the ring, and reassuming the form of a bee flew away with it to the palace, where the prince was lying nearly on the point of death. "Rise up. Be glad. Mourn no more," she said to him. "The woman for whom you yearn will appear at your summons. See, here is the charm, whereby you may bring her before you."

The prince was almost mad with joy when he heard these words, and was so desirous of seeing the beautiful princess that he immediately spoke to the ring, and the house with its fair occupant descended in the midst of the palace garden. He at once entered the building, and telling the beautiful princess of his intense love, entreated her to be his wife. Seeing no escape from the difficulty, she consented on the condition that he would wait one month for her.

Meanwhile the merchant's son had returned from hunting and was terribly distressed not to find his house and wife. There was only the bare ground, just as he knew it before he had used the charmed ring that Raja Indrasha had given him. He sat down and determined to put an end to himself. Presently the cat and dog came up. They had gone away and hidden themselves when they saw the house and everything disappear. "O master," they said, "stay your hand! Your trial is great, but it can be remedied. Give us one month, and we will go and try to recover your wife and house."

"Go," said he, "and may the great god aid your efforts. Bring back my wife, and I shall live."

So the cat and dog started off at a run, and did not stop till they reached the place whither their mistress and the house had been taken. "We may have some difficulty here," said the cat. "Look, the king has taken our master's wife and house for himself. You stay here. I will go to the house and try to see her."

So the dog sat down, and the cat climbed up to the window of the room, wherein the beautiful princess was sitting, and entered. The princess recognized the cat, and informed the creature of all that had happened to her since she had left them.

"But is there no way of escape from the hands of these people?" she asked.

"Yes," replied the cat, "if you can tell me where the charmed ring is."

"The ring is in the stomach of the ogress," the princess said.

"All right," said the cat, "I will recover it. Once we get the ring, everything is ours." Then the cat descended the wall of the house, and went and lay down near a large rat's hole and pretended she was dead.

Now at that time a great wedding chanced to be going on among the local rat community, and all the rats of the neighborhood were assembled in that particular hole where the cat had lain down. The eldest son of the rat-king was about to be married. The cat got to know of this, and at once conceived the idea of seizing the bridegroom and making him render the necessary help. Consequently, when the procession poured forth from the hole, squealing and jumping in honor of the occasion, the cat immediately spotted the bridegroom and pounced down on him.

"Oh! Let me go, let me go," cried the terrified rat.

"Oh! Let him go," squealed all the company. "It is his wedding day."

"No, no," replied the cat. "Not unless you do something for me. Listen. The ogress, who lives in that house with the prince and his wife, has swallowed a ring, which I very much want. If you will procure it for me, I will allow the rat to depart unharmed. If you do not, then your prince dies under my paw."

"Very well, we agree," they said. "Nay, if we do not get the ring for you, devour us all."

This was rather a bold offer. However, they accomplished the thing. At midnight, when the ogress was sound asleep, one of the rats went to her bedside, climbed up on her face, and, inserted its tail into her throat; whereupon the ogress coughed violently, and the ring came out and rolled onto the floor. The heroic rat immediately seized the precious thing and ran off with it to the rat-king, who was very glad, and went at once to the cat, who released the rat-king's son.

As soon as the cat received the ring, she and the dog started back to go and tell their master the good tidings. All seemed safe now. They had only to give the ring to the young man, and he would speak to it, and the house and beautiful princess would again be with them, and everything would go on as happily as before. "How glad master will be!" they thought, and ran as fast as their legs could carry them.

On the way they had to cross a stream. The dog swam, and the cat sat on his back. Now the dog was jealous of the cat, so he asked for the ring, and threatened to throw the cat into the water if she did not give it up; whereupon the cat gave up the ring. Unfortunately, the dog at once dropped the ring, and a fish swallowed it.

"Oh! What shall I do? What shall I do?" said the dog.

"What is done is done," replied the cat. "We must try to recover it, and if we do not succeed we had better drown ourselves in this stream. I have a plan. You go and kill a small lamb, and bring it here to me."

"All right," said the dog, and at once ran off. He soon came back with a dead lamb, and gave it to the cat. The cat got inside the lamb and lay down, telling the dog to go away a little distance and keep quiet.

Not long after this a nadhar, a bird whose look can break the bones of a fish, came and hovered over the lamb, and eventually pounced down on it to carry it away. Suddenly the cat came out and jumped onto the nadhar, and threatened to kill the bird if it did not recover the lost ring. This was most readily promised by the nadhar, who immediately flew off to the king of the fishes, and ordered it to make inquiries and restore the ring. The king of the fishes did so, and the ring was found and carried back to the cat.

"Come along now; I have got the ring," said the cat to the dog.

"No, I will not," said the dog, "unless you let me have the ring. I can carry it as well as you. Let me have it or I will kill you."

So the cat was obliged to give up the ring. The careless dog very soon dropped it again. This time it was picked up and carried off by a bird.

"See, see, there it goes — away to that big tree," the cat exclaimed.

"Oh! Oh! What have I done?" cried the dog.

"You foolish thing, I knew it would be so," said the cat. "But stop your barking, or you will frighten away the bird to someplace where we shall not be able to trace it."

The cat waited till it was quite dark, and then climbed the tree, killed the bird, and recovered the ring. "Come along," the cat said to the dog when she reached the ground. "We must make haste now. We have been delayed. Our master will die from grief and suspense. Come on."

The dog, now thoroughly ashamed of himself, begged the cat's pardon for all the trouble he had caused. He was afraid to ask for the ring the third time, so they both reached their sorrowing master in safety and gave him the precious charm. In a moment his sorrow was turned into joy. He spoke to the ring, and his beautiful wife and house reappeared, and he and everybody were as happy as ever they could be.

(adapted from *Indian Fairy Tales* by Joseph Jacobs; original text in the public domain)

**Tolkien's Middle-earth:
Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators**

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Handouts

**"Thomas the Rhymer"
A Scottish Ballad**

True Thomas lay on Huntly bank;
A wonder he spied with his eye;
For there he saw a lady bright,
Come riding down by the Elder Tree.

Her skirt was of the grass-green silk,
Her mantle of the velvet fine,
And hung upon her horse's mane
Were fifty silver bells and nine.

True Thomas he pulled off his cap,
And bowed him low down to his knee:
"All hail, thou mighty Queen of Heaven!
Thy like on earth I never did see."

"O no, O no, Thomas," she said,
"That name does not belong to me;
I am the queen of fair Elfland,
And I have come to visit thee.

"Harp and carp, Thomas," she said,
"Harp and carp, along with me,
And if you dare to kiss my lips,
Sure of your body I will be!"

"Though I be well, or full of woe,
That fate it never shall daunt me,"
Soon he has kissed her rosy lips,
All underneath the Elder Tree.

"Now you must go with me," she said,
"True Thomas, you must go with me,
And you must serve me seven years,
Well or woe though it may chance to be."

She mounted on her milk-white steed,
And she took True Thomas up behind,
And whenever her bridle rang,
The steed ran swifter than the wind.

O they rode on, and farther on,
The steed ran swifter than the wind,
Until they reached a desert wide,
And living land was left behind.

"Get down, get down, now, True Thomas,
And lean your head upon my knee;
Abide and rest a little space,
And I will show you wonders three.

"O do you see that narrow, narrow road,
So thick beset with thorn and briar?
That is the path of righteousness,
Though after it but few enquire.

"Do you see yonder broad broad road,
That lies across the lovely lawn?
That is the path of wickedness,
Though some call it the road to heaven.

"And do you see yon bonny bonny road,
That winds about the fern hillside?
That is the road to fair Elfland,
Where you and I this night must ride.

"But, Thomas, you must hold your tongue,
Whatever you may hear or see,
If you speak a word in Elfin land,
You'll never get back to your own country."

O they rode on, and farther on,
And they waded through rivers above the knee,
And they saw neither sun nor moon,
But they heard the roaring of the sea.

It was dark dark night, there was no starlight,
And they waded through red blood to the knee;
For all the blood that's shed on earth
Runs through the springs of that country.

Soon they came to a garden green,
And she pulled an apple from a tree:
"Take this for thy wages, True Thomas,
For it gives the tongue that can never lie."

"My tongue is my own," True Thomas said,
"No goodly gift would you give me,"
"Now hold thy peace," the lady said,
"For as I say, so must it be."

He has gotten a coat of the finest cloth,
And a pair of shoes of velvet green,
And till seven years were gone and past
True Thomas on earth was never seen.

(adapted from *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* by F. J. Child; original text in the public domain)

Tolkien's Middle-earth: Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Discussion Topics

Echoes of the Oral Tradition. *The Lord of the Rings* has been called an "epic fairy tale." Do students understand that both the heroic epic and the fairy tale trace back to the oral tradition? Can students identify vestiges of the oral tradition thriving in the popular culture and in their own lives? The possibilities include jokes, riddles, nursery rhymes, urban legends, family anecdotes, narrative songs, and the contemporary storytelling movement.

Myth, Meaning, and Motif. Oral narratives frequently outlive the societies that spawned them. After reading several handouts, and thinking about their own previous experiences with myths and folktales, the class should generate a list of common motifs. What do these themes tell us about humanity's deepest aspirations? What mythic ideas still resonate for us in the twenty-first century? Among the most ubiquitous oral-narrative motifs are several that figure in Tolkien's fiction: the impossible task, the rash promise, the wise fool, the forbidden action, the well-earned reward, the descent into the underworld, and the attempt to elude fate.

The Factual Versus the True. In a 1936 lecture called "The Monsters and the Critics," J. R. R. Tolkien spoke in praise of dragons: "Whatever may be his origins ... the dragon in legend is ... richer in significance than his barrow is in gold." Thirty-eight years later, in an essay titled "Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?" the science fiction and fantasy author Ursula K. Le Guin offered a similar sentiment: "For fantasy is true, of course. It isn't factual, but it is true. Children know that. Adults know it too, and that is precisely why many of them are afraid of fantasy." Does the class agree with Tolkien and Le Guin? In the students' experience, do adults tend to dismiss fantasy as childish or escapist? What sense does it make to say that dragons, gorgons, and enchanted rings are "significant" or "true"?

Eucatastrophes Then and Now. Tolkien presented his original idea of the "eucatastrophe" — the sudden and felicitous turn of a protagonist's fortunes — in a 1938 lecture titled "On Fairy-Stories." Ask the class to identify the eucatastrophe in particular myths and folktales with which they are familiar. Do these amazing "lucky breaks" follow certain patterns? Can students offer examples of eucatastrophes in the Bible, Hollywood movies, presidential elections, and professional sports?

The Periodic Table of the Oliphants. One obvious function of myths and folktales is to make the world more comprehensible. In the present age, fanciful explanations of natural phenomena strike many people as primitive and naïve. Do our scientific accounts of suns, storms, and rainbows make myths superfluous? What trade-offs occur when we replace Phaëton's chariot with a ball of burning gas?

Expedience and Ethics. Folklorists have noted that many fairy tales are not "moral" in the conventional sense. The main character often prospers through cunning and deceit rather than selflessness or altruism. In his eagerness to escape a threat or attain a goal, the protagonist may resort to trickery, theft, and even murder. Can students furnish examples of what critics have termed the "amorality" of fairy tales? If these stories are "amoral," why do we tell them to children?

Unit One: Introducing Tolkien and His Worlds

Suggested Activities

From Text to Tongue. Much is gained when an oral narrative is transcribed: suddenly it can be shared with a larger community. But something is lost as well. This activity helps students understand how performance can enhance a story's impact. Divide the class into groups. Each team selects a written narrative — for example, a Greek myth, African folktale, or Grimm Brothers story — for oral presentation. Along with the designated teller, the team may want to appoint a percussionist, singer, or sound-effects provider. During the performance, the teller must speak from memory, though improvisation is allowed and encouraged. It's best if students have a full class period for rehearsal and present their recitations the next day.

"Why Grandma, What Great Variations You Have." It's always fascinating to compare our conventional notion of a particular myth or folktale with a less familiar version. In the earliest known telling of "Little Red Riding Hood," the protagonist is bare-headed, and the wolf eats her. This activity invites the student to become an amateur folklorist. After selecting a favorite narrative, he then uses the Internet or library resources to try to recover the primal form of the story. In reporting back to the class, the student should begin by reading the strangest variation he unearthed. At what point, if any, does the story become recognizable? Compared with its descendant, does the older version embody a different theme or teach a different lesson?

The Faerie Gazette. Invite the class to imagine that daily newspapers issue from Faerie. After picking a favorite tale, the student imagines a typical article from *The Fairyland Sentinel* or *The Enchanted Enquirer*, then writes it out in her daily journal. This piece might be a news report (TROLLS PLAN TO RAISE TOLLS), a feature story (WAYWARD SLIPPER UNITES PRINCE AND SCULLERY MAID), or an editorial (WE MUST REOPEN THE HANSEL AND GRETEL CASE). At some point in the article, the student should allude to the theme of the Faerie narrative in question.

Wizards Around the World. Every culture boasts a rich trove of oral narratives. Working in groups, students can seek out non-Western examples of this tradition: myths and folktales from Japan, China, India, the Muslim world, African communities, and Native American tribes. They can share their findings by holding a "story swap" in the classroom, reading or performing their favorite discoveries. Do any of these non-Western tales have obvious Western equivalents?

Tolkien's Middle-earth: Lesson Plans for Secondary School Educators

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