

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

Unit Three: There and Back Again

Content Focus: *The Hobbit*, Chapters VIII – XIX

Thematic Focus: The Quest in Life and Literature

Overview

In Unit Three, the class uses *The Hobbit* as a springboard to a more general consideration of quest adventures, with a special emphasis on the heroic epic. Moving back and forth between Bilbo Baggins's journey and their personal experiences, students consider three types of quest — the heroic, the interior, and the metaphorical — that recur in life and literature.

Learning Goals

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

- List W. H. Auden's six characteristics of a quest story.
- Say what is meant by a "metaphorical quest."
- Discuss some differences between symbolism and allegory.
- Indicate how Bilbo Baggins's adventures changed him for the better.
- Appreciate Gandalf's distinction between providence and "mere luck."

Unit Three Content

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Unit Three: There and Back Again

Comments for Teachers

You might begin Unit Three by drawing students' attention to Tolkien's own description of *The Hobbit*: "If you care for journeys there and back, out of the comfortable Western world, over the edge of the Wild, and home again, and can take an interest in a humble hero (blessed with a little wisdom and a little courage and considerable good luck), here is a record of such a journey and such a traveler. The period is the ancient time between the age of Faerie and the domination of men, when the famous forest of Mirkwood was still standing, and the mountains were full of danger."

The Hobbit presents an intriguing variation on the usual quest narrative. The object of the expedition, Smaug's treasure, is not desired by the main character, Bilbo Baggins. The seeker is instead the obsessive dwarf Thorin Oakenshield. But Bilbo is also on a kind of quest. By joining the dwarves he hopes to prove to himself that he has inherited his grandfather's courage. While we would expect to find a brave-hearted fighter like Thorin venturing into a dragon's cave, Tolkien demonstrates that "a humble hero" may also be suited to such exploits.

A handout you may find particularly useful is "The Water of Life." The Grimm Brothers have given us a primordial quest story, the sort of tale that ignited Tolkien's own desire to write about "journeys there and back."

While studying Unit Three in class, students should be reading Book One of *The Lord of the Rings* at home.

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Preliminary Quiz

1. In what sort of dwelling did the Wood-elves of Mirkwood live?

(Answer: a great underground hall)

2. How did Bilbo survive while his companions were imprisoned?

(Answer: He stole food from the elves.)

3. What was the name of the great jewel coveted by Thorin Oakenshield?

(Answer: the Arkenstone)

4. What was "the bravest thing" Bilbo ever did?

(Answer: continuing through the tunnel to Smaug's lair)

5. Why is it wise to bring Cram on a journey?

(Answer: You can eat it.)

6. Who slew Smaug, and how?

(Answer: Bard, with an arrow)

7. What common threat caused the Elves and Dwarves to join forces?

(Answer: an attack by goblins)

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Key Terms

quest (qwest) An expedition undertaken to find or achieve something. *The Hobbit* tells of Thorin Oakenshield's quest to regain his people's wealth, stolen by Smaug. The word *quest* enters our language through *quaesta*, a form of the Latin verb meaning "to seek."

legend (lej-end) A story passed down for generations, conceivably rooted in an actual person or event. Examples include the legend of Robin Hood and the legend of King Arthur. Early in *The Hobbit*, the narrator recounts a humorous legend that supposedly explains the origins of golf.

symbolism (sim-ba-liz-em) The literary device of using concrete particulars to represent abstract ideas. When Bilbo imagines himself wearing "a sword instead of a walking-stick," Tolkien is using the walking-stick to symbolize everyday life and the sword to symbolize adventure.

allegory (al-a-gor-ey) A literary work in which each major character and event has a fixed meaning. In Edmund Spenser's epic *The Faerie Queen*, the ruler Gloriana represents Queen Elizabeth and the Red Cross Knight symbolizes Holiness. George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm* is largely an allegory of the Russian Revolution. Although allegories often take the form of quest stories, Tolkien explicitly rejected allegorical interpretations of his fiction.

animism (an-e-miz-em) The belief that every living thing is endowed with a soul and a personality. When Tolkien uses talking birds in *The Hobbit*, he is evoking the animistic world.

hoard (hord) A supply of something valuable, such as money or food, that is carefully guarded. In *The Hobbit*, the dragon Smaug keeps a hoard of stolen treasure. The word comes from the Old English *hord* via an Indo-European verb meaning "to cover."

bard A Celtic word for a poet. In *The Hobbit*, Bard is the name of the Lake-town man who slays Smaug.

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Handouts

"The Water of Life"

Jacob of the Brothers Grimm inspired Tolkien in several ways. Beyond his interest in traditional stories, Jacob was a pioneering comparative philologist and the author of "Grimm's Law," which describes how consonant sounds change in a predictable manner from one language to another — an insight that enabled Tolkien and his fellow philologists to recover words from long-lost languages. The class may wish to use the Auden paradigm not only in analyzing "The Water of Life" but also two stories from Unit One, "The Devil with the Three Golden Hairs" and "The Charmed Ring." What similarities and differences do students notice among these three quest adventures?

The Slaying of Fafnir

(Excerpts from "Reginmol" and "Fafnismol" in the Elder Edda)

The Old Norse poems that constitute the Elder Edda represent just one facet of a far-ranging oral tradition celebrating the dragonslayer Sigurd (Sigurth) and the accursed treasure — including a notorious ring — of the dragon Fafnir. Scholars assume that the original version, since lost, emerged in the German Rhineland some fourteen centuries ago and was brought to other parts of Europe by migrating tribes. The retellings took the form of heroic epic in Germany (the Nibelungenlied) and prose saga in Scandinavia (especially the Volsungasaga). Beowulf includes a reference to the story, which was evidently known to everyone in the audience. Students may be familiar with another work in which Sigurd appears, Richard Wagner's opera cycle, The Ring of the Nibelung. The present handout includes the famous conversation between Sigurd and Fafnir, which Tolkien had in mind when he wrote the encounter between Bilbo and Smaug.

The Odyssey of Homer

(Excerpts from Book VII)

The Odyssey is the archetypal "there and back again" epic of Western literature, recounting Odysseus's decade-long quest to reach his home in Ithaca after the Trojan War. In adapting novelist Samuel Butler's public domain translation, we restored the Roman names to their standard Greek forms. With its emphasis on domestic virtues, as opposed to the martial ethos of the Iliad, Butler theorized that the Odyssey was written by a woman.

The present handout includes the scene in which Odysseus, having reached the country of Phaeacia, relates his adventures to Princess Nausicaa and her royal parents. Students may be amused by the snide remark about young people — some prejudices never change.

Note especially Odysseus's assertion that his host will "win an imperishable name among mankind" for assisting him. To be praised and celebrated by all is the traditional aim of the epic warrior. The Achilles of the Iliad was possessed by this ambition, and so was Beowulf.

In the last two lines of the Old English epic, as the hero is laid to rest after defeating the dragon who had devastated his kingdom, the poet tells us, "Of men he was mildest and most beloved, to his kin the kindest, keenest for praise."

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Handouts

"The Water of Life"

There was once a king who had an illness, and no one believed that he would come out of it with his life. He had three sons who were much distressed about it, and they went down into the palace garden and wept.

There they met an old man who inquired as to the cause of their grief. They told him their father was so ill that he would certainly die, for nothing seemed to cure him. Then the old man said, "I know of one more remedy, and that is the water of life; if he drinks of it he will become well again, but it is hard to find."

The eldest said, "I shall manage to find it," and he went to the sick king and begged to be allowed to go forth in search of the water of life, for that alone could cure his father.

"No," said the king, "the danger is too great. I would rather die."

But the eldest son begged so long that the king consented. The prince thought in his heart, "If I can bring him the water, I shall be my father's best beloved and inherit the kingdom."

So he set out, and when he had ridden a little distance, he encountered a dwarf standing by the road who called to him and said, "Where are you going in such great haste?"

"You ridiculous troll," said the prince, very haughtily, "it is none of your business," and he rode on. But the dwarf was angry, and he put a spell on the prince. Soon after this the prince entered a ravine, and the farther he rode the closer the mountains drew together, and at last the path became so narrow he could not advance another step; it was impossible either to turn his horse or to dismount, and he was shut in there as if in prison. The sick king waited for him, but he did not come back.

Then the second son said, "Father, let me go forth to seek the water," and he thought to himself, "If my brother is dead, then the kingdom will fall to me."

At first the king would not allow him to go either, but at last he yielded, so the prince set out on the same road that his brother had taken, and he too met the dwarf, who stopped him to ask, "Where are you going with such great speed?"

"Little fool," said the prince, "that is nothing to you," and he rode on without giving the dwarf another look. But the dwarf bewitched him too, so he rode into a ravine just as his brother had done, and he could neither go forward nor backward.

When the second son did not return, the youngest begged to be allowed to go forth to fetch the water, and at last the king was obliged to let him leave.

When the youngest, in his turn, met the dwarf, who asked where he was going in such great

haste, he stopped to explain, saying, "I am seeking the water of life, for my father is sick unto death."

"Do you know, then, where it is to be found?"

"No," said the prince.

"As you have behaved courteously, and not haughtily like your false brothers, I shall give you the information and tell you how you may obtain the water of life. It springs from a fountain in the courtyard of an enchanted castle, but you will not be able to reach it unless I give you an iron wand and two small loaves of bread. Strike three times with the wand on the iron door of the castle, and it will spring open: inside lie two lions with gaping jaws, but if you throw a loaf of bread to each of them, they will be quieted. Then hasten to fetch some of the water of life before the clock strikes twelve, else the door will shut again, and you will be imprisoned."

The prince thanked him, took the wand and the bread, and set out on his way. When he arrived, everything was as the dwarf had said. The door sprang open at the third stroke of the wand, and when he had appeased the lions with the bread, he entered the castle and came to a large, splendid hall. A sword and a loaf of bread were lying there, which he carried away.

Then he entered a chamber where he found a beautiful maiden, who rejoiced when she saw him, kissed him, and told him that he had saved her and would therefore be given her entire kingdom. She said that if he would return in a year their wedding would be celebrated; likewise she told him where the spring of the water of life was, and that he was to hasten and draw some of it before the clock struck twelve.

He went on, and at last entered a room where there was a lovely newly made bed, and as he was very weary, he felt inclined to rest a little. So he lay down and fell asleep.

When he awoke, the clock was striking a quarter to twelve. He jumped up in a fright, ran to the spring, drew some water in a bottle which stood near, and hastened away. But just as he was passing through the iron door, the clock struck twelve, and the door fell in place with such violence that it carried away a piece of his heel. He, however, rejoicing at having obtained the water of life, went homeward, and again passed the dwarf.

When the latter saw the sword and the loaf, he said, "With these you have won great wealth; with the sword you can slay whole armies, and the bread will never come to an end."

But the prince would not go home to his father without his brothers, so he said, "Dear dwarf, can you not tell me where my two brothers are? They went out before I did in search of the water of life, and they have not returned."

"They are imprisoned between two mountains," said the dwarf. "I have condemned them to stay there, because they were so haughty."

Then the prince begged until the dwarf released them; but the dwarf warned him, saying, "Beware of them, for they have bad hearts."

When his brothers came, he rejoiced and told them how things had gone with him, that he had found the water of life and had brought a bottle away with him, and had rescued a beautiful princess, who was willing to wait a year for him, and then their wedding was to be celebrated and he would obtain a great kingdom.

After that they rode on together, and they chanced upon a land where war and famine reigned, and whose king thought he must perish of starvation. Then the youngest prince went to him and gave him the loaf, with which he fed and satisfied the whole of his kingdom, and the prince also gave him the sword, with which he slew the hosts of his enemies, so the kingdom could now live in peace.

The prince then took back his loaf and his sword, and the three brothers rode on. But after this they entered two more countries where war and famine reigned, and each time the prince gave his loaf and his sword to the kings, and so preserved three kingdoms, and after that they went on board a ship and sailed over the sea.

During the passage, the two eldest spoke together in secret, saying, "The youngest has found the water of life and not we, and for that our father will give him the kingdom, which belongs to us, and he will rob us of all our fortune."

Then they began to seek revenge, and they plotted with each other to destroy him. They waited until they found him fast asleep, then poured the water of life out of the bottle and took it for themselves, but into the bottle they poured salty sea water.

When the three arrived home, the youngest took his bottle to the sick king so he might drink out of it, and be cured. But scarcely had he drunk a very little of the salt water than he became sicker still. And as he was lamenting over this, the two eldest brothers came, and accused the youngest of having intended to poison the king, and said that they had brought him the true water of life, and handed it to him. He had scarcely tasted it, when he felt his sickness departing, and he became strong and healthy as in the days of his youth.

After that eldest brothers both went to the youngest, mocked him, and said, "You certainly found the water of life, but you have had the pain, and we the gain; you should have been sharper and kept your eyes open. We took it from you while you were asleep at sea, and when a year is over, one of us will go and fetch the beautiful princess. But beware that you do not disclose any of this to our father; indeed he does not trust you, and if you say a single word, you shall lose your life."

The old king was angry with his youngest son, and thought he had plotted against his life. So he summoned the court together and had sentence pronounced upon his son, that he should be secretly killed. And once when the prince was riding out to hunt, suspecting no evil, the king's huntsman rode with him, and when they were quite alone in the forest, the huntsman looked so sorrowful that the prince asked him, "Dear huntsman, what ails you?"

The huntsman said, "I cannot tell you, and yet I should."

Then the prince said, "Say openly what it is; I shall pardon you."

"Alas!" said the huntsman, "I am to kill you; the king has ordered me to do it."

Then the prince was shocked, and he said, "Dear huntsman, let me live. There, I give you my royal garments; give me your common ones in their place."

The huntsman said, "I shall willingly do that; indeed I would not have been able to kill you."

Then they exchanged clothes, and the huntsman returned home. The prince, however, went farther into the forest. After a time three wagons of gold and precious stones came to the king's palace, intended for his youngest son; this treasure was sent by the three kings who had slain their enemies with the prince's sword, and maintained their people with his bread, and who wished now to show their gratitude.

The old king then thought, "Can my son have been innocent?" and he said to his people, "Would that he were still alive; how it grieves me that I have suffered him to be killed!"

"He still lives," said the huntsman, "for I could not find it in my heart to carry out your command," and he told the king how it had happened. Then a stone fell from the king's heart, and he had it proclaimed in every country that his son should return and be taken into favor again.

Meanwhile, the beautiful princess had built a road up to her palace, and the road was quite bright and golden, and she told her people that whoever came riding straight along it would be the right suitor and was to be admitted, and whoever rode by the side of it was not the right one, and was not to be admitted. As the time was now close at hand, the eldest thought he would hasten to go to the king's daughter, present himself as her rescuer, and thus win her for his bride, and the kingdom to boot.

Therefore he rode forth, and when he arrived before the palace and saw the splendid golden road, he thought, "It would be a sin and a shame if I were to ride over that," and he turned aside and rode on the right side of it. But when he came to the door, the servants told him he was not the right man, and he must go away again.

Soon after this the second prince set out, and when he came to the golden road, and his horse had put one foot on it, he thought, "It would be a sin and a shame to tread a piece of it off," and he turned aside and rode on the left side of it, and when he reached the door, the attendants told him he was not the right one, and he must go away again.

When at last the year had entirely expired, the third son likewise wished to ride out of the forest to his beloved, and in her company forget his sorrows. He set out, and he thought of her so incessantly, and wished so much to be with her, that he never noticed the golden road at all. So his horse rode on up the middle of it, and when he came to the door, it was opened, and the princess received him with joy, and she said he was her rescuer and lord of the kingdom, and their wedding was celebrated with great rejoicing.

When the celebration was over, the princess told her husband that his father had forgiven him and wanted to see him again. So he rode there with his wife, and he told the king everything: how his brothers had betrayed him, and how he had nevertheless kept silence. The old king wished to punish them, but they had put to sea, and never came back as long as they lived.

(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 Slaying of Fafnir

Excerpted from "Reginismol" and "Fafnismol"

Sigurth was there with Regin, who said to Sigurth that Fafnir lay at Gnita Heath, and was in the shape of a dragon. He had a fear-helm, of which all living creatures were terrified. Regin made Sigurth the sword which was called Gram; it was so sharp that when he thrust it down into the Rhine, and let a strand of wool drift against it with the stream, it cleft the strand asunder as if it were water. With this sword Sigurth cleft asunder Regin's anvil. After that Regin egged Sigurth on to slay Fafnir...

Sigurth and Regin found the track that Fafnir made when he crawled to water. Then Sigurth made a great trench across the path, and took his place therein. When Fafnir crawled from his gold, he blew out venom, and it ran down from above on Sigurth's head. But when Fafnir crawled over the trench, then Sigurth thrust his sword into his body to the heart. Fafnir writhed and struck out with his head and tail. Sigurth leaped from the trench, and each looked at the other. Fafnir said:

"Youth, oh, youth! | of whom then, youth, art thou born?
Say whose son thou art,
Who in Fafnir's blood | thy bright blade reddened,
And struck thy sword to my heart."

Sigurth concealed his name because it was believed in olden times that the word of a dying man might have great power if he cursed his foe by his name. He said:

"The Noble Hart | my name, and I go
A motherless man abroad;
Father I had not, | as others have,
And lonely ever I live."

Fafnir spake:

"If father thou hadst not, | as others have,
By what wonder wast thou born?
Though thy name on the day | of my death thou hidest,
Thou knowest now thou dost lie."

Sigurth spake:

"My race, methinks, | is unknown to thee,
And so am I myself;
Sigurth my name, | and Sigmund's son,
Who smote thee thus with the sword."

Fafnir spake:

"Who drove thee on? | why wert thou driven
My life to make me lose?
A father brave | had the bright-eyed youth,
For bold in boyhood thou art."

Sigurth spake:

"My heart did drive me, | my hand fulfilled,
And my shining sword so sharp;
Few are keen | when old age comes,
Who timid in boyhood be."

Fafnir spake:

"In all I say | dost thou hatred see,
Yet truth alone do I tell;
The sounding gold, | the glow-red wealth,
And the rings thy bane shall be."

* * *

Rhine = river that flows from Switzerland through western Germany to the Netherlands

hart = stag, deer

Regin = a dwarf, brother of Fafnir

Sigurth = also known as Sigurd, Siegfried in other versions

"rings thy bane" = Fafnir's treasure was cursed

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(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)

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Handouts

The Odyssey of Homer

Excerpts from Book VII

(The Queen of the Phaeacians has just asked Odysseus how he reached their shores.)

Odysseus answered, "It would be a long story, My Lady, were I to relate in full the tale of my misfortunes, for the hand of heaven has been laid heavy upon me ... Zeus struck my ship with his thunderbolts, and broke it up in mid-ocean. My brave comrades were drowned every man of them, but I stuck to the keel and was carried hither and thither for the space of nine days, till at last during the darkness of the tenth night the gods brought me to the Ogygian island where the great goddess Calypso lives. She took me in and treated me with the utmost kindness; indeed she wanted to make me immortal that I might never grow old, but she could not persuade me to let her do so.

"I stayed with Calypso seven years straight on end, and watered the good clothes she gave me with my tears during the whole time; but at last when the eighth year came round she bade me depart of her own free will, either because Zeus had told her she must, or because she had changed her mind. She sent me from her island on a raft, which she provisioned with abundance of bread and wine. Moreover she gave me good stout clothing, and sent me a wind that blew both warm and fair. Seven days and ten did I sail over the sea, and on the eighteenth I caught sight of the first outlines of the mountains upon your coast — and glad indeed was I to set eyes upon them. Nevertheless there was still much trouble in store for me, for at this point Poseidon would let me go no further, and raised a great storm against me; the sea was so terribly high that I could no longer keep to my raft, which went to pieces under the fury of the gale, and I had to swim for it, till wind and current brought me to your shores.

"There I tried to land, but could not, for it was a bad place and the waves dashed me against the rocks, so I again took to the sea and swam on till I came to a river that seemed the most likely landing place, for there were no rocks and it was sheltered from the wind. Here, then, I got out of the water and gathered my senses together again. Night was coming on, so I left the river, and went into a thicket, where I covered myself all over with leaves, and presently heaven sent me off into a very deep sleep. Sick and sorry as I was I slept among the leaves all night, and through the next day till afternoon, when I woke as the sun was westering, and saw your daughter's maid servants playing upon the beach, and your daughter among them looking like a goddess. I besought her aid, and she proved to be of an excellent disposition, much more so than could be expected from so young a person — for young people are apt to be thoughtless. She gave me plenty of bread and wine, and when she had had me washed in the river she also gave me the clothes in which you see me. Now, therefore, though it has pained me to do so, I have told you the whole truth."

Then Alcinous said, "Stranger, it was very wrong of my daughter not to bring you on at once to my house along with the maids, seeing that she was the first person whose aid you asked."

"Pray do not scold her," replied Odysseus, "she is not to blame. She did tell me to follow along with the maids, but I was ashamed and afraid, for I thought you might perhaps be displeased if you saw me. Every human being is sometimes a little suspicious and irritable."

"Stranger," replied Alcinous, "I am not the kind of man to get angry about nothing; it is always better to be reasonable; but by Father Zeus, Athena, and Apollo, now that I see what kind of person you are, and how much you think as I do, I wish you would stay here, marry my daughter, and become my son-in-law. If you will stay I will give you a house and an estate, but no one (heaven forbid) shall keep you here against your own wish, and that you may be sure of this I will attend tomorrow to the matter of your escort. You can sleep during the whole voyage if you like, and the men shall sail you over smooth waters either to your own home, or wherever you please.... You will thus see how much my ships excel all others, and what magnificent oarsmen my sailors are."

Then was Odysseus glad and prayed aloud saying, "Father Zeus, grant that Alcinous may do all as he has said, for so he will win an imperishable name among mankind, and at the same time I shall return to my country."

* * *

Poseidon = god of the sea; Odysseus had angered him by blinding his son, the giant one-eyed Cyclops

Alcinous = king of the Phaeacians

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(adapted from the translation by Samuel Butler; original text in the public domain)

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Discussion Topics

The Inner Quest. In many quest stories, the protagonist undertakes a double search. Even as he labors to complete his mission, he seeks some possibility buried deep within himself. Have the class discuss Bilbo's struggle to keep his timid Baggins side from overcoming "the Tookish part." How does the Bilbo of Chapter XIX differ from the hobbit who hosted "An Unexpected Party"? Is our hero's inner quest complete when he enters the Lonely Mountain? (On page 192 we learn, "Already he was a very different hobbit from the one that had run out without a pocket-handkerchief from Bag-End long ago.") Or does he still need to grow in curiosity, courage, or compassion?

From Grocer to Burglar. In Chapter I, the dwarf Gloin speaks of Bilbo in disparaging terms: "As soon as I clapped my eyes on the little fellow bobbing and puffing on the mat, I had my doubts. He looks more like a grocer than a burglar" (page 18). Ask students to recapitulate the episodes through which Bilbo earns the dwarves' respect and friendship. At what moment in Bilbo's journey does he complete the transition from grocer to hero?

The Metaphorical Quest. The plain meaning of quest is a search, and yet the concept enjoys loftier connotations. Which of humanity's hopes and dreams would students exalt with the word *quest*? (Possibilities include world peace, a cure for cancer, and contact with extraterrestrials.) What pursuits are students unwilling to call quests? Can the class think of controversial enterprises that have nevertheless been labeled quests? (Students might cite the Human Genome Project, for example.) What distinguishes a quest from a conquest? If you know exactly what form your desired object will take, does that mean you aren't really on a quest?

The Crutch of Invisibility. Throughout *The Hobbit* Bilbo performs brave and sometimes foolhardy actions, often after becoming invisible via the magic ring. Do students think Bilbo's use of the ring was necessary in every case? Whom do we admire more, the person who wields a powerful object or the person who cultivates his natural gifts? Which of Bilbo's interventions struck the class as particularly heroic? Which did the students find disturbing? Is Bilbo responsible for Smaug's murderous rampage?

Symbolism versus Allegory. Most students are familiar with the concept of symbolism in poetry and fiction. As the class discusses *The Hobbit*, you can help students distinguish true literary symbols (objects, characters, and events whose meanings evolve as the story progresses) from mere allegorical equivalences (objects, characters, and events whose meanings are fixed from the outset). What symbolic significance do students find in Tolkien's use of swords, water, magical objects, and the dragon's hoard? What rescues these elements from the purely allegorical realm?

Destiny on the Wing. Like Tolkien's other works, *The Hobbit* implies a world of mysterious forces operating beyond human understanding and hobbit ken. Have the class discuss the ordering principle that evidently hovers over Middle-earth. What moments in the story might

trace to providence or destiny rather than mere chance? Is the eagles' climactic appearance a eucatastrophe? In confronting these questions, students will want to reread Gandalf's final speech to Bilbo: "Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?"

Magic Sword, Enchanted Loaf, Golden Road. This discussion spins off from the handout called "The Water of Life." Begin the conversation by presenting W. H. Auden's six basic elements of a quest adventure: 1) a precious object, 2) a heroic seeker, 3) a long journey, 4) fierce guardians, 5) tests that screen out the unfit, and 6) supernatural helpers. Next have the class map "The Water of Life" onto this model. If students are familiar with Arthurian romance, they might also explore the congruity between Auden's list and a Grail Quest story. Finally, invite the class to fit *The Hobbit* to this scheme. What tests does Bilbo face as the journey progresses? How close does he come to being weeded out?

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Unit Three: There and Back Again

Suggested Activities

Your Enchanted Neighborhood. This is a mapmaking activity. The student picks a familiar place (house, building, street, neighborhood), reimagines it as an enchanted realm, and prepares a map reminiscent of Thrór's chart from Chapter I. What happens when we recast a cemetery as the Land of the Dead or a messy bedroom as the Vortex of Unwashed Garments? Are such transformations necessarily silly, or do they help us to see meaning in the mundane? What sort of quest might bring a hero to a post office, a municipal park, or a sewage treatment plant?

The Hero Next Door. Have each student select an acquaintance that he or she admires: doctor, minister, rabbi, teacher, grandparent, uncle. Equipped with a notepad or a recording device, the student then interviews this unofficial mentor. Does the subject see herself as a counselor in the Gandalf mold? As a pilgrim on a journey? As a seeker on a quest? What advice does the mentor have for young people? Students should write up the interviews in their daily journals.

A Dragon's Diary. A quest adventure typically requires the hero to defeat a dragon or other monster. In this activity, each student chooses a famous literary nemesis and then writes an entry in that creature's diary. The bestiary is large: Grendel, Humbaba, Polyphemus, Fafnir, Tiamat, Python, the Midgard Serpent, a dozen others. (To encourage original research, keep Smaug off limits.) While most students will want to narrate an encounter between dragon and hero, some may prefer to record a more boring day in the monster's life.

Bilbo Goes to Hollywood. Ask the class to assume that a talented movie director has created an ideal adaptation of *The Hobbit*. Each student then writes a review of this nonexistent film, citing the choices the director made in successfully translating Tolkien's themes from text to screen. Conversely, the class might write negative reviews of a hypothetical failed attempt to film *The Hobbit*.

Epics North, East, South, and West. This activity requires you to equip the classroom with a large world map. Divide the class into teams, each of which then selects and researches a different heroic epic. Students needn't read the whole poem, but they should probe deeply enough to answer basic questions. From what culture does the epic emerge? Who is the hero? What does he seek? Each group should summarize its findings as an illustrated sidebar, posting it near the appropriate region on the map. The possibilities include: the Iliad and the Odyssey (Greece), the Aeneid (Italy), Beowulf (England), the Táin bó Cúailnge (Ireland), the Mabinogion (Wales), the Nibelungenlied (Germany), the Song of Roland (France), the Poem of My Cid (Spain), the Kalevala (Finland), Ilya Muromets (Russia), the Mahabharata (India), the Epic of Gilgamesh (Iraq), Shah-Namah (Iran), the Book of Dede Korkut (Turkey), Emperor Shaka the Great (South Africa), the Epic of Sundiata (West Africa), Lac Long Quang and Au Co (Vietnam), Popul Vuh (Central America), and Haion-Hwa-Tha (North America).

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

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