

	The Hero's Journey	Moses' Journey--Exodus	The Hobbit
Separation			
Ordinary World	When the story begins, we find the hero in his normal, everyday life.	Moses lives contentedly in Midian with his family.	
Call to Adventure	While the hero is comfortable in his ordinary world, he somehow finds out about some sort of problem that he should help solve. This is often a call to action and adventure.	God calls Moses at the burning bush.	
Refusal of the Call	The hero initially is reluctant to go on the journey.	Moses is reluctant to go speak to Pharaoh.	
Meeting the Mentor	The hero receives counsel from a mentor, who encourages him to accept the call. A mentor is usually an older, wiser person, but it can also be the hero's own conscience.	Moses is frequently given direction from God.	
Descent			
Crossing the Threshold	The hero accepts the journey, and there is no going back until the quest is accomplished or the hero is killed in the attempt. Many times, the crossing of the threshold is literal—the character walks through a doorway not knowing if he will return.	Moses finally takes the journey to Egypt.	
Tests, Allies, and Enemies	The hero encounters trials and adversaries, as well as friends, who help him on the journey.	As events unfold in Egypt, Moses encounters difficulties, also friends and enemies: Aaron, the Magicians, the Israelites, and Pharaoh.	
Approach the Inmost Cave	The hero approaches an inmost cave or a dark lair, a place of severe danger.	While Pharaoh chases Israel, Moses and Israel are between the Egyptians and the Red Sea. They bravely enter into the Red Sea, trusting God to deliver them.	
The Ordeal	In the dark lair, the hero faces a life-and-death conflict with his enemy.	The Egyptians are on the Israelites' heels.	
Reward	The hero gains some sort of reward by surviving the ordeal. The reward can be external (an object) or internal (wisdom, courage, experience, self-knowledge).	The Israelites escape from Pharaoh and the Egyptians.	
Return			
Road Back	The hero takes the road back to his ordinary world.	Israel is able to head toward the Promised Land without the Egyptians' oppression.	
Resurrection	The hero often faces one final, climactic situation in which he is nearly killed but somehow survives. This is usually a miraculous escape from death.	The escape through the Red Sea is nothing short of miraculous.	
Return with Elixir	The hero returns to the ordinary world with some sort of object or new knowledge that brings benefit to his world.	Israel learns to trust in God. Moses has been used of God to deliver Israel.	

Chapters 1–3

Vocabulary:

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

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

Part of speech: _____

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

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

Part of speech: _____

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

The Hobbit Study Guide

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

Part of speech: _____

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

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

Part of speech: _____

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

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

Part of speech: _____

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

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

Part of speech: _____

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

The Hobbit Study Guide

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

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

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

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

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

Extra Activities on Characterization:

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

The Hobbit Study Guide

Thinking About the Story:

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

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

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

The Hobbit Study Guide

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

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

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

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

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

Chapters 4–6

Vocabulary:

For each passage in the following story, choose a word from the Word Box that is closest in meaning to the underlined word(s) or phrase.

Word Box

quaff	prowling	brooded	abominable
hordes	flummoxed	scuttling	benighted
subterranean	screech	ajar	onslaught
uncanny	pinnacle	talons	eyrie

1. The wild hawk soared away, returning to its nest () on the highest point () of the distant mountain, clutching a dead rat in its claws ().
2. “How loathsome!” () thought Tallahassee Tom, world-famous explorer, as he watched the hawk fly away. He meditated () on the sight and decided the world was a brutal place indeed.
3. With a heavy sigh, he began his descent into the underground () cave—the same cave in which his partner, Panama Pam, had disappeared a year earlier.
4. The deeper Tom went, the more anxious he felt, very aware that Pam was not here and that he was alone in the darkness ().
5. His boots finally touched the cave’s rock floor, and Tom would have felt relief—were it not for the sudden, harsh scream () he heard in the distance.

The Hobbit Study Guide

The interpretation of the riddles is sometimes obvious, sometimes obscure; but the descriptive power of the poetry is often high, and the imagery is fresh and picturesque.²

Riddles can be confusing—and fun—because they commonly use the literary techniques of epithet and metaphor.³

An *epithet* is “an adjective or adjectival phrase used to define a distinctive quality of a person or thing,” often “an identifying phrase that stands in place of a noun.”⁴ For example, “the yellow, wheel-footed beast” might be an unhappy but poetic student’s epithet for a school bus!

A *metaphor* is a comparison in which one thing (sometimes called “the tenor”) is described in terms of a second, often dissimilar thing (sometimes called “the vehicle”).⁵ For example, the prophet Isaiah writes, “Surely the people *are* grass” (Isaiah 40:7c, emphasis added). The “tenor”—the Babylonian exiles—is described in terms of the “vehicle” of grass. The metaphor suggests that the weary, disheartened captives are as frail and feeble as withering grass.

A metaphor differs from a *simile*. While both metaphors and similes compare things, a simile does so by means of the words “like” or “as”—for example, Isaiah 40:6: “All men are *like* grass, and all their glory is *like* the flowers of the field” (emphasis added).

Although Bilbo’s and Gollum’s riddles do not, medieval riddles often end with the phrase, “Tell me what I’m called.”⁶

1. Identify each of the following passages as using *epithet*, *metaphor*, or *simile*:
 - a. “Fly away little birds! Fly away if you can! Come down little birds, or you will get roasted in your nests!” _____
 - b. “He is a liar, O truly tremendous one!” _____
 - c. “He was watching Bilbo now from the distance with his pale eyes like telescopes.” _____
 - d. “[The elves] had called it Orcrist, Goblin-cleaver, but the goblins called it simply Biter.” _____

The Hobbit Study Guide

Thinking About the Story:

6. The narrator identifies finding the ring as “a turning point in [Bilbo’s] career.” Why?

7. At key points, the narrator talks about the ring as if it were a character with its own personality and motivation: “The ring felt very cold as it quietly slipped on to [Bilbo’s] groping forefinger.” “Whether it was an accident, or a last trick of the ring before it took a new master, it was not on his finger.” This technique is called *anthropomorphism* (from the Greek words *anthropos*, “human being,” and *morphe*, “form”): describing something other than a person in personal terms. What sort of “character” does the ring seem to be?

8. Gollum accuses Bilbo of being a thief. Do you think Bilbo is? Why or why not?

9. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we discover that Bilbo’s ring is in fact a ring of power created for dark purposes. Even in *The Hobbit*, we can see the ring working its questionable influence. How has the ring affected Gollum? What hints do you see that it might corrupt Bilbo?

The Hobbit Study Guide

In the previous section, we began looking at the Christian life as a hero's journey. Read Acts 9:1–25; 12:1–17. How do these stories about Saul and Peter illustrate the truth that discipleship can involve a “descent into darkness”?

How does the life of Jesus show the same movement? Read Luke 4:1–15, Romans 6:1–14, and Philippians 2:5–11. How do our lives as Christians mirror the pattern of Jesus' life?

Some people may see the stylistic similarity of portions of the Bible with heroic epics or mythology as evidence that it is a fallible human creation. In fact, epics and mythology simply stylize a pattern of *true experience*—for example, that a period or event of hardship (or darkness) changes and often strengthens a person. Tom Brokaw's book about people's experiences in World War II, *The Greatest Generation*, is full of examples of true stories that fit such a pattern. The literary pattern of a story has little to do with its authenticity or truth.

12. Note the various ways in which Tolkien uses images of light and darkness—not only in these chapters, but also throughout *The Hobbit*. How do various characters and creatures react to light? What activities take place in the dark? How might you associate these with Jesus' words in John 3:19–21?

Chapters 7 & 8

Vocabulary:

Each underlined word below is shown in the context of the passage in which it appears. Determine from the context what the word means and define it in your own words. Then compare your definition with that found in a dictionary.

1. "Farewell!" they cried, "wherever you fare, till your eyries receive you at the journey's end!"

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

2. "He can be appalling when he is angry, though he is kind enough if humoured. Still I warn you he gets angry easily."

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

3. "That is Mr. Baggins, a hobbit of good family and unimpeachable reputation," said Gandalf.

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

The Hobbit Study Guide

9. . . . and after the coming of Men they took ever more and more to the gloaming and the dusk.

Your Definition:

Dictionary Definition:

Setting:



Authors create convincing settings for their stories by writing descriptions that involve all five senses. Read Tolkien's description of Mirkwood in Chapter Eight carefully, and point out at least one example of each sense being used.

- Sight:
- Sound:
- Taste:
- Touch:
- Smell:

Extra Activity on Setting:

Imagine the most fantastic setting for a story that you can. Write the most realistic description of it that you can. Use all five senses.

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7. Why do you think Bilbo is reluctant to tell the dwarves about his magic ring? What might this reluctance tell us about him?

8. After the attack of the spiders, how do the dwarves' attitude toward Bilbo change?

Dig Deeper:

9. We have been comparing the Christian life to a heroic quest. Often, heroes are helped by "a protective figure" who offers "supernatural aid."¹ To this point in their journey, Bilbo and the dwarves have had Gandalf as their supernatural helper. What supernatural aid do Christians have?

Read John 13:36–14:4, 14:25–31. How do Jesus' words to his disciples as he prepares to leave them compare with Gandalf's words of parting to the dwarves and Bilbo near the beginning and end of Chapter Seven?

According to the above passages, are we ever truly alone?

Chapters 9 & 10

Vocabulary:

As you read these chapters, be aware of the following words. In the exercise below, match the words to the best possible definition. You will not use all the definitions.

- | | |
|-------------------|--|
| 1. ___ surly | a. banners or pennants carried by armies in battle |
| 2. ___ portcullis | b. structures built along waterways as landings for ships |
| 3. ___ flagon | c. intoxicating |
| 4. ___ heady | d. overly intellectual; cerebral |
| 5. ___ kine | e. an archaic word meaning "cattle" |
| 6. ___ ominous | f. wanderers |
| 7. ___ quays | g. close, blood relatives |
| 8. ___ vagabonds | h. possessing a stately, regal bearing |
| 9. ___ circuitous | i. irritable and rude |
| | j. a navigational term meaning obstacles on a ship's left side |
| | k. roundabout and indirect |
| | l. an iron grating hung over a fortified place's gateway |
| | m. a large bottle for wine |
| | n. questions without logical answers; paradoxes |
| | o. inauspicious; threatening evil or bad fortune |

Thinking About the Story:

6. What evidence do you see in these chapters that validates Gandalf's original opinion of Bilbo—that "[t]here is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself"? How does Bilbo grow in these chapters?

What has been a time in your life when you have realized that you've grown as a person—that there is a lot more in you than you or other originally guessed?

7. The narrator states that "some of the younger people" in Lake-town were skeptical that any dragon exists in the Lonely Mountain. Why might the young people be skeptical?
8. Why do you think Bilbo is the only "thoroughly unhappy" person at the end of Chapter Ten?

The Hobbit Study Guide

12. Interpreting prophecy can be a tricky thing—people often see in prophecy what they want to see. The people of Jesus' time correctly remembered some messianic prophecies and applied them to Jesus (such as Zechariah 9:9–10) but ignored others (Isaiah 53). Read John 13:19, 14:29, 16:4, and Mark 13:22, 23. What do these verses say prophecy is for? How can we avoid falling into the same error as the majority of people in Jesus' time?

13. Some in Lake-town regard the songs of the return of the King under the Mountain as a “pleasant legend” that does “not much affect their daily business.” How does this situation compare to the one faced by Christians in 2 Peter 3? According to Peter, what accounts for Jesus' delayed return? How ought the promise of his coming affect our “daily business”?

Chapters 11–13

Vocabulary:

Almost every word has *antonyms* and *synonyms*. Synonyms are words that have nearly the same meaning as the original word; antonyms have the opposite meaning. For each word listed below, demonstrate your understanding of its meaning by providing an antonym and a synonym. In some cases, brief synonymous or antonymous phrases are acceptable.

Original Word	Synonym	Antonym
1. stealthy	_____	_____
2. waning	_____	_____
3. marauding	_____	_____
4. brooded	_____	_____
5. cowered	_____	_____
6. grievous	_____	_____
7. stratagems	_____	_____
8. foreboding	_____	_____
9. pallid	_____	_____
10. furtive	_____	_____

The Hobbit Study Guide

Set Two:

- The riddle game Bilbo and Gollum play
- The conversation between Bilbo and Smaug

Can you identify other examples of parallelism in *The Hobbit*? Remember: as with any literary technique, finding examples is not the significant task. Explaining why the technique is used is what counts when interpreting a text.

The Historical Present:

As Bilbo approaches Smaug's lair, the narrator suddenly shifts from the past tense to the present tense. This tense is often called the "historical present"—using present tense verbs to describe action that has already happened. In fact, in the original Greek, many gospel narratives are told using the historical present. Why do you think the narrator makes this switch? What effect is it designed to have on the reader?

Questions:

1. Although the text does not explicitly give its name, on what special day do Bilbo and the dwarves discover a way into the Lonely Mountain? How do you know?
2. What does the narrator mean by referring to "dragon-spell"?
3. How does Bilbo get Smaug to reveal Smaug's weak spot?

The Hobbit Study Guide

Dig Deeper:

9. Throughout *The Hobbit*, and especially in these chapters, references are made to “luck.” For example, Bilbo was chosen to be the “lucky number,” and he says he and the dwarves have “tempted luck too long” as they examine Smaug’s treasure. Do you believe in luck? Why or why not?

What do the following Scripture texts have to say, explicitly or implicitly, about luck and chance, or about God’s ordering of the world? 1 Samuel 6:1–12; Ecclesiastes 7:13–14; 9:11; Luke 13:1–5; John 9:1–3; Acts 1:15–26.

10. Smaug’s “dragon-spell” has a powerful effect on Bilbo. What techniques does Smaug use to try to unnerve the hobbit? How are they reminiscent of the serpent’s speech in Genesis 3:1–5?

Notes:

¹ C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature*, 3rd ed. Based on the original by William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard. (Indianapolis: Odyssey Press—Bobbs-Merill, 1972) 378.

Chapters 14–19

Vocabulary:

Part One:

These chapters use many words appropriate for warfare. Look up the following words in a dictionary, choose the definition that you think best suits a military context, and use each word in an original sentence to demonstrate your understanding of them.

1. parley:
2. siege:
3. sentinel:
4. hauberk:
5. mattock:
6. mail:
7. dominion:
8. vanguard:
9. scimitar:

The Hobbit Study Guide

Irony:

Irony in literature is the contrast between appearance and reality or between expectation and reality. Given this, what is ironic about the way in which Smaug is killed? What are other examples of irony you see in *The Hobbit* as a whole?

Questions:

1. How do the people of the Lake protect themselves against Smaug's attack? What does the Master do at the same time?
2. Who kills Smaug? What help does Smaug's slayer receive in the accomplishment?
3. What is the significance of the birds gathering after Smaug's death?
4. Who is Roäc and why is he important to the dwarves?

The Hobbit Study Guide

9. When the people of the Lake are angry at the Master, where and how does he redirect their anger? Such redirection is often called “scapegoating.” The term originates from the biblical ritual (see Leviticus 16:20–22) in which a goat symbolically bore the sins of God’s people, and is used today when someone takes the blame for the guilt of others. From your knowledge of history, or from your personal experience, what examples of scapegoating can you cite?


Have you ever felt like a scapegoat? Have you ever tried to make anyone else a scapegoat for you? Why do you think scapegoating can prove so effective?

10. After Thorin’s death, Bilbo berates himself for his actions with the Arkenstone. Do you agree with his self-evaluation? Why or why not?

Under what circumstances might it be possible to help another person by doing something they might not consider helpful? Have you ever had to intervene in a way similar to the way Bilbo intervened between Thorin and his opponents?

The Hobbit Study Guide

“Further in his last battle Smaug destroyed the dwellings of the men of Esgaroth . . . I would . . . ask whether you have no thought for the sorrow and misery of [the Esgaroth] people. They aided you in your distress, and in recompense you have thus far brought ruin only, though doubtless undesigned.”

 How does Thorin answer Bard? Read Proverbs 11:24, 25; James 2:15, 16; and 1 John 3:17, 18. How do Thorin’s words and actions compare to these verses?

15. Read Luke 12:15–21; 1 Timothy 6:17–19; James 1:10, 11; and Mark 8:36, 37. How does Thorin’s end illustrate these verses? How might things have ended if Thorin had followed the verses in the previous question?

16. Review Bilbo’s actions regarding the Arkenstone. The entire situation presents quite an ethical dilemma. Was Bilbo right or justified in what he did? Do you see a better way of handling the situation?