

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Return of the King

by
J.R.R. Tolkien

Book Information

J.R.R. Tolkien, The Return of the King

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Book Level: 6.2

Interest Level: UG

Sam and Frodo must make their way deep into Mordor to destroy the Ring of Power in the fires of Mount Doom.

Topics: Adventure, Escape; Adventure, Survival; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Series, Lord of the Rings Trilogy

Main Characters

Aragorn Isildur's heir and true king of Gondor

Arwen daughter of Elrond, who marries Aragorn and becomes queen

Beregond a soldier of Minas Tirith

Bilbo an old hobbit who was the first Ring-bearer

Denethor Lord and Steward of Gondor, who commits suicide

Dernhelm Lady Eowyn disguised as a male soldier

Eowyn Edmund's daughter, Theoden's niece

Faramir son of Denethor

Frodo a hobbit and bearer of the Ring

Galadriel one of three Great Ones, lady of the elves of the Golden Wood

Gandalf a wizard, one of the three Great Ones

Gimli a dwarf

Gollum a loathsome creature that wants the Ring for his own

King Theoden king of Rohan, who dies in battle

Legolas an elf

Merry a young hobbit related to Frodo

Pippin a young hobbit related to Frodo

Sam a hobbit, Frodo's helper

Saruman the only one of the three Great Ones who has succumbed to the desire for power

Sauron the evil Dark Lord of Mordor

the Nazgul Sauron's Captains

Treebeard (Fangorn) oldest of the Ents, a slowly dying race

Vocabulary

citadel a strong fortress

scion descendant

sortie a sudden attack of troops against an enemy

steward a manager of a large estate or organization

Synopsis

In part three of the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Books V and VI), war between the West and Mordor is approaching. Gandalf, a wizard, and Pippin, a hobbit, arrive in Minas Tirith just before the fighting begins. Other forces of the West are gathering and moving in that direction as well. Lord Denethor goes mad and burns himself alive. The forces of Mordor use a battering ram to break the gate of the City, and just when defeat appears inevitable for the West, the warriors from Rohan arrive. A great battle ensues in which King Theoden is killed, and Lady Eowyn and the hobbit Merry are injured. Aragorn and other forces arrive via boat, and Mordor's armies are defeated.

Gandalf proposes that the forces of the West keep advancing to distract Sauron--the leader of the Dark Forces--from Frodo and Sam's journey into Mordor. They are on a mission to throw the Ring into the chasm in Mount Doom to forever rid Middle-earth of the Ring's dangerous powers. The lords agree with Gandalf, and they head to Mordor.

Meanwhile, Sam rescues Frodo, where he is imprisoned in the Tower. Disguised as orc soldiers, they head toward Mount Doom with the Ring. After a difficult journey, they make it to the chasm on the top. At the brink, Frodo can no longer resist the power of the Ring, and he claims it for himself. But Gollum, a creature who has followed the hobbits, attacks Frodo and obtains the Ring. Gollum dances too close to the edge of the chasm and falls in. Immediately, Mordor begins to crumble and its

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creatures to die. Eagles sent by Gandalf fly Frodo and Sam to the land of Ithilien, where King Aragorn honors them with great feasting.

Eventually, the hobbits travel home to the Shire, where they find trouble. Saruman and his ruffians have taken over. They drive out the ruffians, Saruman dies by the hand of his underling, and peace is restored.

The Third Age in Middle-earth comes to an end. The following September, Frodo, Bilbo, Gandalf, and many others from Middle-earth board a boat and sail off. Sam, Pippin and Merry return home.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

After the battle at Minas Tirith, Gandalf said, "Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succor of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule." What was Gandalf saying?

The forces of the West could do no more than work for the defeat of Sauron, the evil that was apparent to them. It would be up to those in the future to conquer the evil that would come to the world during their time.

Literary Analysis

What themes, or main ideas, did Tolkien express in *The Return of the King*? How were these themes shown? How do the themes relate to modern times?

Good triumphs over evil as Mordor crumbles, but evil is not conquered permanently. Neither is good absolute. The good--Frodo--is in the end unable to resist the temptation to claim the Ring. Evil destroys itself through grace as Gollum falls into the chasm in Mount Doom. Knowledge and power are not always positive: the desire for power corrupts. In contemporary society, nuclear power, advanced weaponry, genetic engineering, and other advanced technologies created with technological know-how may bring negative consequences.

Inferential Comprehension

What might Tolkien be saying about forms of government in the chapter in which the hobbits return to the Shire, "The Scouring of the Shire"?

Ruffians, led by Saruman, have taken over the Shire and control its politics and economics. The politics are corrupt. There are many new rules that are enforced by police powers. Individual freedoms are thwarted. There are shortages of goods for the common people; the ruffians take most of them. The environment is suffering. Tolkien seems to be pointing out the problems with fascist types of governments.

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Constructing Meaning

After Merry was injured, he said to Pippin, "It is best to love first what you are fitted to love, I suppose: you must start somewhere and have some roots, and the soil of the Shire is deep. Still there are things deeper and higher; and not a gaffer could tend his garden in what he calls peace but for them, whether he knows about them or not. I am glad that I know about them, a little." What was Merry saying?

Although he felt he was meant for a peaceful life in the Shire, Merry was called to try to help rid the world of evil and promote good. Even those who are ignorant of the need to work in the cause of good cannot live in peace unless good exists. Merry was glad he was aware of bigger issues, even though his awareness caused him difficulties.

why there may be so few female characters.

Understanding the Author's Craft *The Return of the King* is a unique book in that Tolkien created a complex world with its own history, cultures and languages. Ask the students to look through the appendices to the book. Then instruct them to research Tolkien in the library and/or on the Internet to find out more about how his academic background and responsibilities prepared him for and aided him in the writing of *The Return of the King*. Discuss what the students discover.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Plot What might have happened if Gollum had not followed Frodo and Sam to the brink of the chasm on Mount Doom? Have the students write a page or two of an alternative climax, as consistent in style to Tolkien's as they can. Instruct them to explain how their climax is consistent with the themes they think Tolkien was presenting, or, if it is not, to explain their own theme.

Recognizing Setting The plot of *The Return of the King* can be difficult to follow unless one uses a map. Provide large sheets of paper. Divide the class into small groups and assign each a region of Middle-earth. Ask them to create a map of it. (Various versions of the book contain different maps, some of which are clearer than others and may be more helpful.) When they are finished, tape them together into a large map and hang it on the wall. If the class is reading the book together, ask for volunteers to plot the course of the characters and note where events occur.

Understanding Characterization There are few female characters in *The Return of the King*. Hold a class discussion on this topic. Ask the students to identify the female characters in the story and the roles that they play. Ask for discussion on