

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

The Phantom Tollbooth

Norton Juster

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THE PHANTOM TOLLBOOTH

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Teacher Guide

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Please note: Please assess the appropriateness of this novel for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, inferring, cause/effect, supporting judgments, problem solving, summarizing

Literary Elements

Character analysis, story mapping, setting, conflict, theme, point of view, author's purpose, genre, figurative language

Vocabulary

Definitions, synonyms, multiple-meaning words, word maps, compound words

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, presentation, drama, debate

Writing

Creative writing, personal narrative, dialogue, poetry, essay

Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research, compare/contrast, analysis, evaluation

Across the Curriculum

Figurative Language—puns, idioms, homophones, synonyms, “hink pinks,” spoonerisms, mondegreens, eggcorns, malapropisms; Math—graphs, polygons, logic problems, Fermi questions, infinity, averages, Fibonacci numbers, *quipu*; Social Studies—education, timekeeping, alphabet, perspective, census taking; Science—doldrums, binomial nomenclature, sound; Health—boredom, bad habits; Music—recordings, soundtrack; Art—illustration, design, models

5. Science: Research the doldrums, also called the Intertropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). Create a visual presentation that illustrates the role wind plays in the doldrums.

Chapters 3–5

Tock accompanies Milo to Dictionopolis, a city where words grow on trees and people eat their words. While Milo drives, Tock explains his family history and how his relatives have been watchdogs since time was invented. In Dictionopolis, King Azaz the Unabridged's synonymic cabinet greets Milo and Tock before they go to the word market where vendors sell words, phrases, and letters. The Spelling Bee, an earnest but clumsy bee, informs Milo about the importance of proper spelling until he is abruptly interrupted by the Humbug, a brash, beetle-like insect. The ensuing fight between the Spelling Bee and the Humbug breaks over vendor booths, resulting in a scrambled collision of words. Officer Shrift—the show-woman police force, judge, and jailer of Dictionopolis—sentence Milo and Tock to six million years in prison for their various “crimes.” In prison, they meet “Faintly Macabre, the Not-So-Wicked Which” (p. 67). Once in charge of composing which words could be used, Faintly Macabre admits to becoming miserly with words until all talk ceased and the king imprisoned her. She tells Milo that she cannot leave prison until rhyme and Reason return to the kingdom.

Vocabulary

ferocious
distribute
confusion
proclamation
bunting
unabridged
connotation
audibly
tumult
decrees
misapprehension
disdain
imposter
infuriate
shrill
commerce
commendable
macabre
corrupts
miserly

Discussion Questions

1. According to Tock, people waste time because there seems to be more than can ever be used. Is time unlimited? Do you agree with Tock that time is no more valuable than diamonds? *(Answers will vary. Time seems immeasurable when figured by minutes, hours, days, and years; however, time actually passes quickly. Unlike diamonds, time cannot be stored for another day. Time is in constant motion, and people should use it wisely. Discussion could cover Tock's comment about the human need to invent time and how our lives would be different without it.)*
2. What is odd about Milo needing a reason to enter Dictionopolis? Is “why not?” actually a good reason for almost anything? (p. 36), as the gateman suggests? *(The gateman is not asking Milo why he wishes to enter the city. Instead, he expects Milo to give a physical reason for the Lands Beyond, which Milo considers to be places or objects that are tangible objects. Answers will vary.)*
3. Why does Azaz the Unabridged a fitting name for the king of Dictionopolis? *(Answers will vary. The king's name playfully refers to a dictionary, just as Dictionopolis means city of words. In Dictionopolis, nothing is more important than words. “Unabridged” so means “unlimited,” which may imply that the king's power over the kingdom is likewise unlimited.)*
4. Compare Milo's view of synonyms to the king's advisers' views. Why might the advisers not care whether they make sense? *(To Milo, using one word is simpler than using many. Milo has been taught in school about the importance of learning the exact meanings of words and then*

a brief description and illustration of it. Begin with *Insecticus* (as the Humbug does on page 54 of the novel). Choose the second part of the name based on your insect's appearance or traits. For example, a blue insect could be *Insecticus caeruleus*. Read more about the "binomial nomenclature" system that scientists around the world use in "What's in a scientific name?" at http://www.biokids.umich.edu/resources/exercises/scientific_name. (Both Web sites were active at time of publication.)

4. Writing: The Humbug boasts that "history is full of Humbugs" (p. 54). Write a tall tale about a member of the Humbug's family being involved in a well-known historical event.
5. Critical Thinking: Consider the following quotes about words. Choose one quote, and explain what you think it means and why it is important.
 - "A word is dead when it's been said; some say. I say it just begins to live that day."
~ Emily Dickinson
 - "All my life I've looked at words as though I were seeing them for the first time."
~ Ernest Hemingway
 - "I like good strong words that mean something."
~ Louisa May Alcott

Chapters 6–8

Faintly Macabre relates the kingdom of Wisdom's history involving the air settling the wilderness and then raising two boys and two adopted daughters. After the king's death, his sons Azaz—who thought words most important—and the death magician—who thought numbers most important—quarreled. Their adopted sisters, Princesses Rhyme and Reason, wisely determined words and numbers to be of equal value. The determination did not satisfy the two brothers, so they banished the princesses to Castle in the Air, deep in the demon-filled Mountains of Ignorance. After Faintly Macabre's tale, Milo and Tock leave prison and attend the royal banquet, a ridiculous and comic event at which they eat their words. King Azaz the Unabridged agrees with Milo's suggestion of returning Rhyme and Reason to the kingdom. He appoints the Humbug as the quest guide and gives Milo a box containing all the words he (the king) knows.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is Null an appropriate name for the land that eventually became the kingdom of Wisdom? According to Faintly Macabre, "the new king vowed to conquer the land that was rightfully his" (p. 73). Do you agree that the king had a right to claim the land as his? ("*Null*" means worthless, an apt description of the barren wilderness occupied by evil creatures. Answers will vary. Discussion should explain that Faintly Macabre's story represents the rise of wisdom and knowledge combating ignorance; the young prince was seeking knowledge and had the right to conquer ignorance. However, the story also parallels the history of mankind and the conquering of lands where the natives and their resistance were seen as wicked.)
2. How do you think Princesses Rhyme and Reason determined that "words and numbers are of equal value" (p. 77)? Do you think words or numbers are more important? Is it possible to have only one or the other? (Answers will vary. The princesses' determination was based on common sense. King Azaz and his brother only focused on their own interests without consideration of the "big picture." The princesses pointed out that, when it comes to knowledge, it's best to learn from all available sources.)

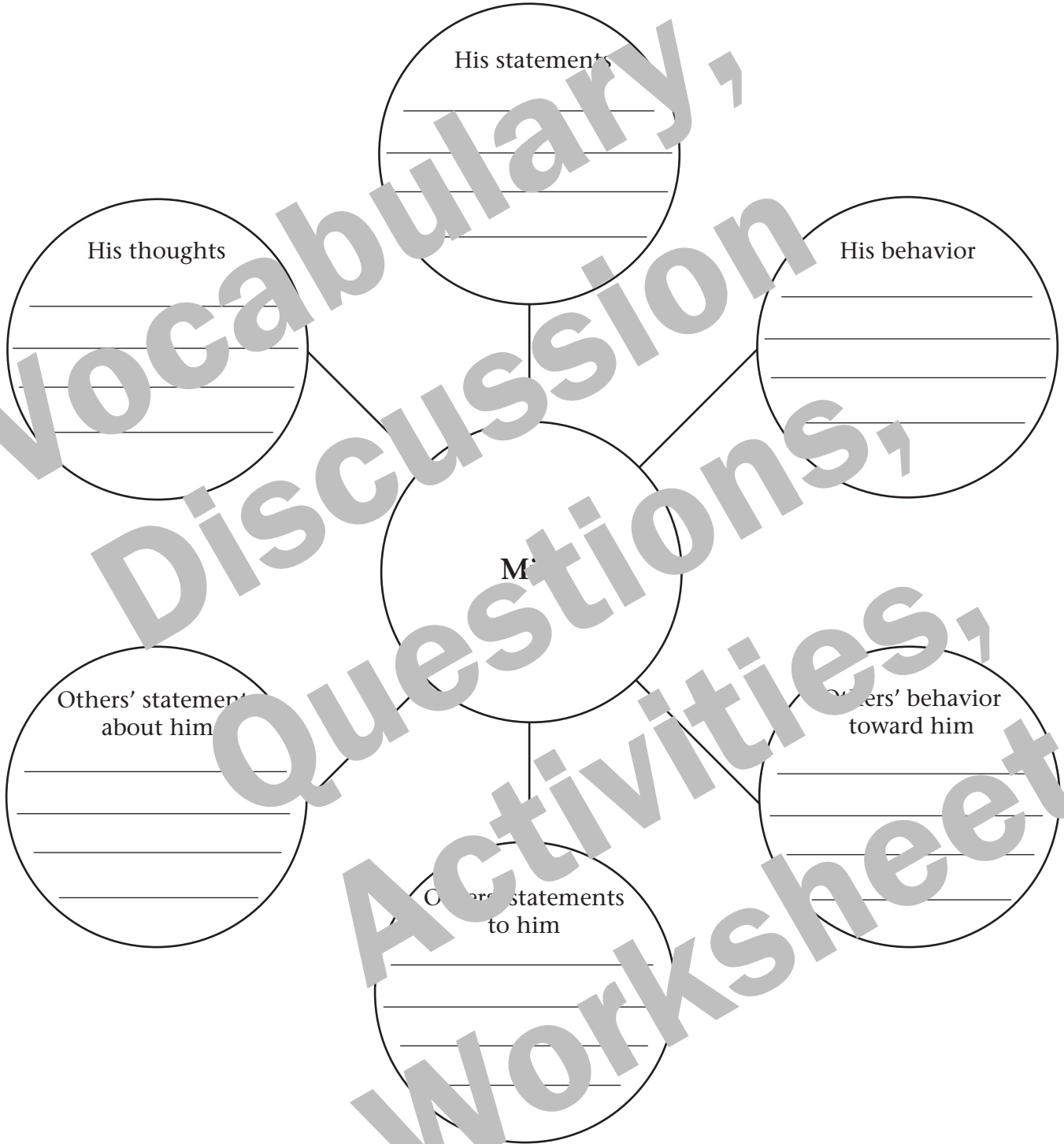
The Title Tells All

Directions: Use the chart below to describe a chapter from the novel.

<p>Title of chapter:</p>
<p>Based on the title, what do you think this chapter will be about?</p>
<p>Describe what you think is happening in this chapter's illustrations.</p>
<p>After reading this chapter, write a brief summary below.</p>

Character Web

Directions: Complete the attribute web below by filling in information specific to Milo.



Rainstorming

Directions: Write a place from the Lands Beyond in the top cloud. Use the clouds on the left to show what conditions were like in your chosen location when Rhyme and Reason were imprisoned. Use the clouds on the right to show how things might have changed after Rhyme and Reason returned.

