



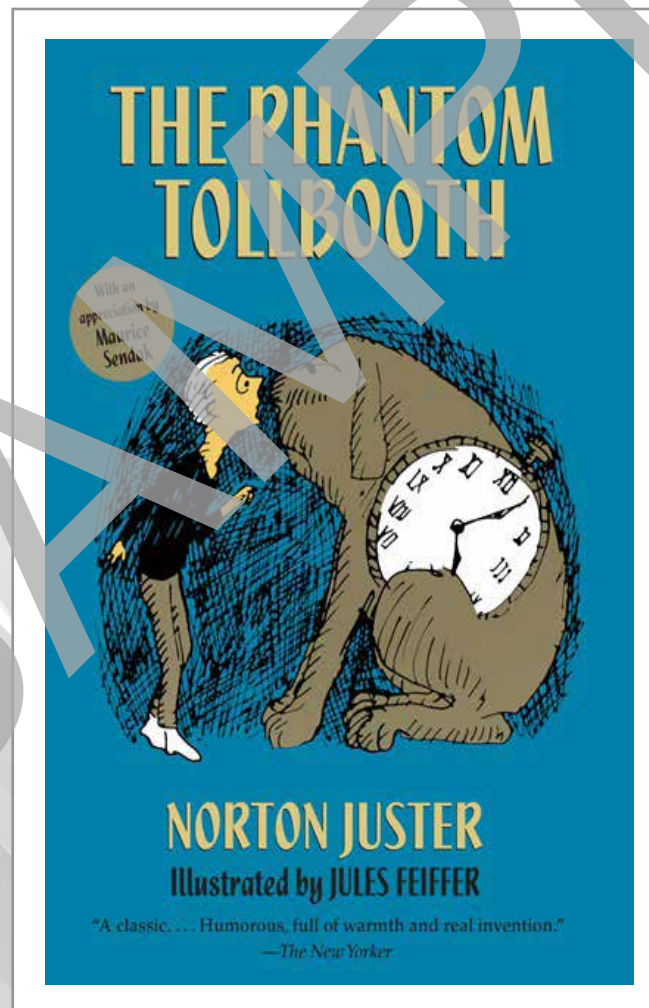
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# The Phantom Tollbooth

Norton Juster



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# The Phantom Tollbooth

Norton Juster

## TEACHER GUIDE

### NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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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

**Genre:** fantasy, allegory

**Setting:** Milo's bedroom, the Lands Beyond

**Point of View:** third person

**Themes:** education, language, wisdom, ignorance, common sense, imagination, appreciating life, friendship

**Conflict:** person vs. self, person vs. society, person vs. person, person vs. nature

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** humorous, playful, nonsensical, thought-provoking

**Date of First Publication:** 1961

## Summary

Nothing interests Milo. He considers everything, especially learning, a waste of time. Then Milo receives a mysterious package containing a tollbooth. With nothing better to do, Milo drives his electric car through the tollbooth into the Lands Beyond. He meets Tock, a watchdog who guards against wasted time and accompanies Milo on the rest of his journey. Milo eventually learns that nothing has been right in the kingdom of Wisdom since Princesses Rhyme and Reason were banished to the Castle in the Air. Milo is granted permission by the king to rescue Rhyme and Reason. The king sends a brash, beetle-like creature named the Humbug with Milo as his guide. Milo and his two companions set out to obtain approval of their quest from the Mathemagician, after which they enter the demon-filled Mountains of Ignorance. Using his gifts of knowledge, Milo escapes several demons and climbs the stairs to the Castle in the Air where he is welcomed by Princesses Rhyme and Reason. With help from Tock and the now-united armies of the kingdom of Wisdom, Milo successfully completes his quest. After a celebration carnival, Milo travels home through the tollbooth. The next day after school, Milo plans to revisit his friends in the Lands Beyond but the tollbooth has vanished. Milo is disappointed until he realizes there is no time to travel because he has so many exciting things to learn and do at home.

## About the Author

Born in 1929, Norton Juster grew up in Brooklyn, New York. As a child, he read the encyclopedia for fun and enjoyed writing. Juster studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania and did graduate work in urban planning in Liverpool, England. After serving three years in the U.S. Navy, Juster opened his own architectural firm in New York and added a second branch after moving to Massachusetts. He taught architecture and planning at Pratt Institute in New York and later became Professor of Architecture and Environmental Design at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts. Juster's first novel, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, is recognized as a classic and was made into a feature film (1969) and a libretto (1995) performed in schools. His other books for children include *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics* (1963), which was made into an Academy Award-winning film, *Alberic the Wise and Other Journeys* (1965), *Otter Nonsense* (1982), *As: A Surfeit of Similes* (1989), Caldecott Medal-winner *The Hello, Goodbye Window* (2005) and its sequel *Sourpuss and Sweetie Pie* (2008), *The Odious Ogre* (2010), and *Neville* (2011). Juster and his wife live in Amherst, Massachusetts.

## Chapters 1–2

Milo glumly plods through life, viewing everything as a waste of time, until he receives a mysterious package containing a tollbooth and a map of the Lands Beyond. Milo chooses Dictionopolis as his destination, then climbs into his electric car and passes through the tollbooth. He stops in Expectations to ask for directions but decides to find his own way after a confusing conversation with the Whether Man. Daydreaming results in a wrong turn into the Doldrums, where Milo meets the Lethargarians whose goal is to do nothing each day. A large watchdog berates Milo for killing time. The dog then jumps into the car and advises Milo to start thinking if he wishes to escape the Doldrums.

### Vocabulary

dejectedly  
dimension  
precautionary  
cartographers  
impractical  
destination  
detours  
wistfully  
peculiar  
monotonous  
doldrums  
ordinance  
unethical  
speculate  
dawdle  
loiter  
dillydally  
procrastinating  
strenuous  
precisely

### Discussion Questions

1. What does the illustration on page 10 of the novel tell you about Milo? Brainstorm reasons why Milo might look this way. *(Answers will vary. Milo's boredom is overwhelming. His lack of interest in anything makes him gloomy, as if rain clouds follow him. Milo's unhappiness affects those around him, even the house sparrow that rushes home to be cheered up by his own family. Milo may be bored because he does not have any expectations and he does not believe that what he learns makes a difference in his life. Other possibilities include his overall negative attitude, laziness, a lack of education, excess material possessions, or little curiosity and imagination.)*
2. The author states, "And, since no one bothered to explain otherwise, [Milo] regarded the process of seeking knowledge as the greatest waste of time of all" (p. 9). Do you think Milo's opinion would change if his teachers or parents explained the purpose of learning? What do you think is the purpose of seeking knowledge? *(Answers will vary. Discussion should cover the goals of education, such as providing students with the foundation to fulfill their potential, follow their dreams, and become productive members of society who learn from the past and are prepared to shape the future. Humans who seek knowledge, who can learn on their own, contribute to bettering themselves and the world—academically, socially, economically, and emotionally. A love of learning instills curiosity and makes for a creative and interesting individual.)*
3. In Chapter 1, readers learn only that Milo is bored and does not appreciate life. Why do you think the author provides so little information about the novel's main character? *(Answers will vary. Milo's roomful of books and toys implies that Milo is an average child, if not a bit privileged. Readers need not pity Milo for his circumstances, but for his attitude. The vague, or generic, characterization presents Milo as a symbol for all bored children. By beginning the story with a bored—and boring—character, the author alerts readers to the need for change in Milo's life.)*
4. Analyze the author's writing style in the following: "For, while [the package] was not quite square, it was definitely not round, and for its size it was larger than almost any other big package of smaller dimension that [Milo had] ever seen" (p. 11). *(Answers will vary. The author uses language in a confusing but humorous way that requires readers to reread the sentence and think about its meaning. He may also be trying to describe the package as a child might see it.)*

5. What does the surprise package's envelope and note say about time? (*"FOR MILO, WHO HAS PLENTY OF TIME" implies that Milo wastes a lot of time [p. 12]. The promise "...IF NOT PERFECTLY SATISFIED, YOUR WASTED TIME WILL BE REFUNDED" humorously delivers the message that wasted time can never be recovered [p. 13].*)
6. What does the Whether Man mean when he says, "Expectations is the place you must always go to before you get to where you're going" (p. 19)? (*Answers will vary. The statement has two meanings. The literal meaning is that expectations always come before an actual event. For example, people must have plans, or expectations to meet, before their plans can be put into effect. Without expectations, people do not have any goals to meet or to exceed. The figurative meaning is that Expectations is a real location in the story that everyone must pass through to get to his/her destination in the Lands Beyond.*)
7. What lesson(s) can be learned from the Whether Man? (*Answers will vary. Remaining in Expectations serves no purpose; people should not remain still in life. The Whether Man lost his way because he did not go beyond Expectations. He is stuck analyzing options and asking "whether" questions instead of actually accomplishing something. The Whether Man represents people who overthink or are too fearful to move forward and act on their expectations.*)
8. What do you think the Doldrums represent? Why is "Lethargarians" an appropriate name for the Doldrums' inhabitants? (*Answers will vary. The Doldrums represent boredom, as demonstrated by the writing style: "Mile after mile after mile..." [p. 22]. At home, Milo lived in his own doldrums. In the Lands Beyond, he daydreams his way into the Doldrums until the watchdog shows him that thinking is the way out. Note that "Doldrums" has multiple meanings: as a literal reference to the area near the equator where sailors get stranded and the figurative references to the place in the Lands Beyond and Milo's mental boredom. Lethargarians is based on the word "lethargy," meaning sluggishness, slowness, or dullness. The tiny creatures in the Doldrums have the common goal of doing nothing and spend their days wasting time listlessly.*)
9. How is the watchdog an example of a pun? (*The watchdog is a humorous play on words. A watchdog is a guard dog, and in the novel, the term refers to both the dog guarding against wasting time and the actual clock that makes up the dog's body.*)
10. **Prediction:** What will Milo discover about words in Dictionopolis?

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Writing:** Review the map of the Lands Beyond at the beginning of the novel. Decide which destination you would travel to if the tollbooth appeared in your room. Explain your choice in a brief essay.
2. **Literary Analysis:** Begin the Story Map on page 33 of this guide. Add information as you read the novel.
3. **Critical Thinking:** Divide a sheet of paper into three columns. In Column 1, list things people expect from you. List things you expect of yourself in Column 2. Use Column 3 to explain whether you feel that you meet each expectation.
4. **Figurative Language:** "...I'm the Whether man, not the Weather Man, for after all it's more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be" (p. 19). The above sentence includes homophones, which are words that sound the same but have different meanings. With your teacher's permission, look at homophone lists on the Internet. Choose two different homophones, and write a sentence that includes both.

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 browse the word market where vendors sell words, phrases, and letters. The Spelling Bee, an enormous bumblebee, informs Milo about the importance of proper spelling until he is rudely interrupted by the Humbug, a brash, beetle-like insect. The ensuing fight between the Spelling Bee and the Humbug knocks over vendor booths, resulting in a scrambled confusion of words. Officer Shrift—the short, wide police force, judge, and jailer of Dictionopolis—sentences 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 choosing 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  
disrepute  
confusion  
proclamation  
bunting  
unabridged  
connotation  
audibly  
tumult  
decrees  
misapprehension  
disdain  
imposter  
infuriate  
shrift  
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 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 comments 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 hand over a physical reason. In the Lands Beyond, what Milo considers to be ideas or concepts are tangible objects. Answers will vary.)*
3. Why is 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” also 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*

# Word Map

**Directions:** Complete a word map for at least seven vocabulary words from the lists in this guide.

Definition

Synonym

Antonym

Pronunciation

Part of Speech

Sentence



## Qualities of a Hero

**Directions:** Choose Milo, Tock, or the Humbug. For each quality listed in the left column, tell if the character has this quality. If you write “yes” in the second column, then you must list an event in the third column that proves that the character has the quality. If you write “no” in the second column, you may leave the third column blank.

**Character:** \_\_\_\_\_

Quality	Does the character have this quality? (yes or no)	Event from the Story
honesty		
fairness		
bravery		
kindness		
calmness		
intelligence		
loyalty		

Look at the chart you filled in above. Based on this information, do you think the character is a hero? Explain your decision on the lines below.

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