

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Return of the King

by J. R. R. Tolkien

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The Return of the King

Notes

The Return of the King is the third book in the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien. Students must have read the first two books, *The Fellowship of the Ring* and *The Two Towers*, to fully understand and appreciate this book. In *The Return of the King* the ultimate battle between good and evil in Middle-earth comes to a climax. Readers will discover the sometimes surprising roles each of the memorable characters from the previous books assume in the resolution of this conflict.

All references come from the Ballantine Books Edition of *The Return of the King*, copyright 1965.

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. recognize the following symbols and comment on their significance in the novel: the white tree, the sea, the wind, and the archetypal images of darkness.
2. define vocabulary words from the text.
3. discuss the extent to which events in the novel, and the actions of the characters enhance or detract from the verisimilitude—or appearance of truth—in the novel.
4. cite incidents from the novel to illustrate the following themes:
 - There is a benevolent guiding force in our lives.
 - It is important for a person to continue to hope for the best even under difficult circumstances.
 - The power of love is stronger than the power of evil.
5. define and cite instances of the following literary terms:
 - metaphor
 - theme
 - archetype
 - imagery
 - symbolism
 - irony
 - foreshadowing
6. discuss what each of the following characters reveals to the reader about the nature and power of evil: Gollum, Saruman, Sauron, Denethor, the Lieutenant of the Tower (Mouth of Sauron), and the orc captains.
7. cite incidents from the novel illustrating that each of the following characters has the free will to choose to follow either good or evil: King Théoden, Saruman, Wormtongue, Denethor, and Frodo.
8. discuss the ending of the book (and trilogy), and the extent to which it satisfactorily answers the questions raised earlier in *The Lord of the Rings*.
9. discuss the roles of both fate and free will in Aragorn's life and the extent to which each leads to the reclamation of his throne.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Briefly describe the following characters from the text, including the physical characteristics, race, and role of each in the novel: Frodo, Sam, Gimli, Merry, Gandalf, Aragorn, Treebeard, Sauron, Saruman, Gollum, and Legolas.
2. What is the *palantir* and how does Aragorn use it to help Frodo and Sam?
3. Discuss the functions of songs in Middle-earth. What fulfills those functions in our own culture?
4. Why does Denethor go mad? What does his descent into madness reveal about the nature of evil?
5. It has been observed that Tolkien uses archetypes in this story to represent good and evil. Light, for example, is one archetype for good, while darkness is an archetype for evil. Find four passages in *The Return of the King* that illustrates Tolkien's use of this technique.
6. Discuss whether or not you find Eowyn's relationship with Faramir at the end of the novel believable. Relate what you know about Eowyn's character to support your answer.
7. In what ways does Aragorn fulfill ancient prophecies and prove himself the rightful king of Gondor?
8. One of the themes of Tolkien's trilogy is that a person who is following the path of evil can repent and turn to the path of good. Discuss the ways in which Théoden, Wormtongue, Saruman, and Denethor illustrate this theme.
9. Describe the difficult choice Beregonid must make and the consequences his decision has on himself and on others.
10. Cite incidents from the story to prove the following thematic statement: "It is the responsibility of each generation to work to keep the world safe and intact for subsequent generations."
11. Discuss the following symbols and what they represent: the white tree, the sea, and the wind.

BOOK V**Chapter I – Minas Tirith**

VOCABULARY

bastion – a projection from a fortification
betide – befall
butteries –storerooms for wine and liquor
byres – cow barn
citadel – fortress
corsairs – pirates
dais –platform
delved – dug
dotard – a foolish old person
doughty – valiant; brave
embrasure – an opening
flagon – a container for liquids
kine – cows, cattle
manger – a place for horses
monoliths – large blocks or pieces of stone
quays – piers
resolute – determined
slaver – a tray of refreshments
surcoat – a loose, short cloak worn over armor
swarthier – darker in complexion
tilth – tilled land
tithe – one tenth
traceries – ornamental works of interlacing or branching lines
twain – two
unheralded – unannounced
wain – wagon

1. Why is it significant to Gandalf that the “beacons of the North” are lit?

2. What name do the men of Gondor call Gandalf? What do they think about Gandalf’s return to Gondor?

Chapter V – The Ride of the Rohirrim

VOCABULARY

asunder – into parts or pieces
bivouacked – camped
encumber – to weigh down and burden
heedless – thoughtless
host – large number
uncouth – crude, uncultured

1. How do the Wild Man and his people plan to help defeat the Black Riders?

2. What does the Wild Man ask from King Théoden in return for his help?

3. What evidence is there that the men of Rohan are not too late to save Gondor?

Chapter X – The Black Gate Opens

VOCABULARY

clemency – mercy
descry – catch sight of
mirk – murk
noisome – obnoxious, offensive
proffered – offered forth
sluice – a floodgate
vale – valley

1. Which one of the original members of the Fellowship of the Ring is unable to go with Aragon and the others to attack Mordor?

2. Tolkien writes, “Sauron had already laid his plans and he had a mind first to play these mice cruelly before he struck to kill.” What is the literary term for referring to the army as “mice”?

Chapter VI – Many Partings

VOCABULARY

baldric – belt worn over one shoulder and across the chest to support a sword
flotsam – debris
gaffer – old man
impregnable – unconquerable
meres – small lakes; pools
niggard – stingy person

1. Where does Frodo want to go now that the Ring is destroyed?

2. What gift does Queen Arwen give to Frodo and what gift does Éowyn give to Merry?

3. For what reasons does Treebeard free Saruman?
