

J. R. R. Tolkien: Myth in Middle Earth
Substitute Literature Course, Grades 9-12

The Hobbit
&
The Lord of the Rings

Introduction: After J. R. R. Tolkien had spent much of his life developing a high fantasy world centered around his perennial love for Northern European languages and myths, on a day in the early 1930s, when he was around forty, he was grading standardized tests for Oxford, and suddenly wrote on the back of one of the tests the now famous words, “In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.” This hobbit, later known as Bilbo Baggins, became a sort of ambassador to the world for Tolkien’s fantasy epic, inviting countless readers over the following decades into Middle Earth through the doors of *The Hobbit* and then *The Lord of the Rings*. Doubtless Tolkien could not have predicted that his works would have spawned countless other highly derivative fantasy novels, two trilogies of films and now a television series in the works, publication of almost every scrap of writing he ever produced, and an abiding fascination with himself and his work. One of the most fascinating aspects of Tolkien’s success and perennial influence on other writers is his deeply-rooted Catholic faith, which informs every page of his writing. His two major novels, therefore, deserve a closer study by the Catholic student of literature, since their universal appeal and accessibility mean that they can serve as a bridge between Catholic and non-Catholic, opening conversation about literary elements which may eventually lead to more fruitful discussion of truth and goodness.

Textbooks: There are multiple editions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* available for purchase. Any are suitable, though Our Lady of Victory recommends any of the **Houghton Mifflin Harcourt** editions, since this publisher produces higher quality books. **Hardcover** can also be a good choice, due to the length of the books, which means that mass-market paperbacks, such as those published by Del Ray, fall apart quickly. For the student’s ease in navigating *The Lord of the Rings*, it may be helpful to purchase an edition which publishes *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King* in **separate volumes**. Recommended further reading, which gives insight into the workings of Tolkien’s own mind regarding Middle Earth, is *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter, Tolkien’s official biographer. Students may also want to explore *The Silmarillion* eventually, to understand the full mythic scope of Tolkien’s creation; the events of this book occur before *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* but are not essential for understanding the two novels. A *Study Guide* written to support this literature course is available for purchase, as well as an *Answer Key* for the weekly comprehension questions.

Assignments: Students will read two to four chapters assigned from the books during eight weeks of each quarter, along with some optional but highly recommended assignments from the introductory and appended material in *The Lord of the Rings*. After completing the reading, students will read the related pages in the accompanying *Study Guide*, and then answer a maximum of nine reading-comprehension questions in one or two complete sentences, as well as choose one longer question to answer in a short (approximately 200-word) paragraph. During the ninth week of each quarter, the student will be required to write a term paper of between 500 and 1000 words, which either deals with one individual book out of the four being studied or addresses themes shared between two or more of the books. It is highly recommended that students keep notes with their reading, since the reading comprehension questions will focus on details and there are many character / place names and plot elements to absorb.

Tolkien: Myth in Middle Earth

Student Name _____ Grade Level _____

Hobbit – *The Hobbit*, J. R. R. Tolkien

LotR – *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R. Tolkien

- FotR – *The Fellowship of the Ring*
- TTT – *The Two Towers*
- RotK – *The Return of the King*

TSG – *Tolkien: Myth in Middle Earth – Study Guide*, Clare Wilson

Week 1

Grade _____

Hobbit Read Chapters 1-3.

Take notes for reference while completing weekly assignments and end-of-term papers.

TSG Read pp. 1-3 & 5-6, including “The Importance of Discomfort”.

Answer Reading Comprehension questions on p. 12 in complete sentences.

Send GRADED assignment to school. _____

Choose ONE Thought Question on p. 6, following “The Importance of Discomfort”, and answer in a 200-word paragraph.

Send UNGRADED assignment to school. _____

Time _____

Week 2

Hobbit Read Chapters 4-6.

Take notes for reference while completing assignments and term papers.

TSG Read “Friends and Foes” on pp. 6-7 and “The Crucial Moment” on pp. 7-8.

Answer Reading Comprehension questions on p. 12 in complete sentences.

Send GRADED assignment to school. _____

Choose ONE Thought Question for “Friends and Foes” on p. 7, or “The Crucial Moment” on p. 8. Answer in a 200-word paragraph.

Send UNGRADED assignment to school. _____

Time _____

Comments _____

