

Tolkien's World Teacher's Notes **B1** **B2**

This B2 level article and its B1+ satellite columns can be used for two different types of classes: a “Terminale” class within the notion of “Myths and Heroes”, or a “1ère” class within the approach “Fictions and realities”. How do imaginary worlds help us travel and escape reality whilst inviting us to reflect upon the world we live in?

Vocabulary

- fantasy-fiction, literature, illustrations.

Grammar

- tense agreement
- the function of VB-ING

Culture

- one of the most famous British authors of the 20th century: JRR Tolkien.

Warming Up

- First, we suggest video-projecting the “Letter of the King: Letter from Aragorn to Sam” (last page of this pdf) without giving the source of the document and have the students brainstorm ideas and words around what it could be and in what language. The students use the vocabulary of hypothesis to make assumptions about the language and the documents itself. Guiding the students through their hypotheses will be essential to uncover the theme of the article. To give them further hints, the original cover of *The Hobbit* from 1937 as well as Tolkien's portrait can also be video-projected. Ultimately, the board could be filled with all correct hypotheses and words they came up with. This might come in handy for the next part.

To help with the reading, global understanding

- In a second step, have the students read the article and two columns individually.

We suggest reviewing methods to understanding a text or an article. One of these methods is using a mind map around a recurring theme/character/person mentioned in the text. The students can also work in pairs or groups to brainstorm on their understanding of the article and their difficulties.

- Then separate the class into 3 groups. A larger group will read the main article *Tolkien's World*, while two smaller groups of students that might have struggles with their learning can read each column on *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. Each group will have the task to sum up what they have understood of their reading.
- A class recap will be necessary to check the global understanding of the article and two columns, with mind maps, vocabulary and sentences written on the board. The students must be able at this point to answer the questions: **who** (Tolkien), **when** (1892-1973, but also about an exhibition today), **where** (British-English author, but also the exhibition is in Paris), **what** (his work).
- The students are invited to match a title to each paragraph of the article (in the following order): *A Versatile Artist*, *A Language Professor*, *A Paris Exhibition*, *Visitors Discover Illustrations and Videos*, *A Prolific Amount of Illustrations*, *His Son – a Collector of His Work*.

Detailed reading comprehension

■ Students can then check individually their detailed understanding of the article and two columns by working on the activities on the worksheet, which also includes language activities.

Creative writing

■ The next step is now to get a chance at giving life to the exhibition in the classroom using the resources online. The students can write a column in the school newspaper, as a review of the exhibition inviting people to see it.

Going Further

■ The students can be asked to research on the influence of historical events on the book *The Lord of the Rings* and Tolkien's reaction to twentieth century warfare, with his experience during WWI and his son's during WWII. See our resource on the recent Tolkien biopic for more on this theme. www.speakeasy-news.com/tolkien-war-and-fellowship

Video

■ An excellent video that was produced when the original version of the exhibition was presented at the Bodleian Library at Oxford University can be used to give pupils more information and give them a sense of the importance of language to Tolkien.

Video transcript

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ER9RSBZEaGo>

Alan Lee, Tolkien illustrator: JRR Tolkien was an Oxford don who wrote and told stories to his children that then became some of the most popular and most beloved stories in Western literature.

Catherine McIlwaine, Bodleian Libraries:

When *The Hobbit* was published in 1937 it was quite a success and Tolkien's publisher said please write more about hobbits and Tolkien did start on a sequel immediately, but they became something much darker, much more adult, much longer. It became *The Lord of the Rings*

Stuart Lee, lecturer in English, University of Oxford: He'd been writing the whole history and background to the Middle-Earth for 40-odd years and then this great book appears which sits on top of it and provides you with a story.

Catherine McIlwaine: But at the same time as he was writing prose and poetry versions of the same tales he was painting the most beautiful watercolours to illustrate those tales.

Onscreen text: The Bodleian libraries have looked after Tolkien's artwork for over 40 years.

Catherine McIlwaine: If we open up the mount, we can see the actual size.

Alan Lee: It's just exquisite.

Catherine McIlwaine: I love the movement in it this with the rushing water here coming off the mill wheel. It's a huge privilege to have in the Bodleian collections the Tolkien archive.

Alan Lee: Well he's not really known as an artist and perhaps some people would have looked at the illustrations in *The Hobbit*, and, you know be surprised that he's done that himself. I've always enjoyed his artwork, always loved it, and always found useful because as an illustrator I'm trying to get into the author's mind as much as possible they obviously do that through the text, but be able to go a little bit further to because the artwork that he was creating, and just see more clearly what was in his mind.

Catherine McIlwaine:

Sometimes it's hard to tell which comes first. Is it the illustration and then the text, or does the text come first and then the illustration? Certainly the two are working in tandem and seem incredibly important to Tolkien's visualisation of the scenes that he's writing about.

Alan Lee: It was all part of creating a kind of a total sort of artistic expression of this kind of ancient mythology that he had invented.

Mark Atherton, lecturer in English, University of Oxford:

Some of the landscapes he has inspired, you know, ecologists and people like them because of the way he thought nature had a voice.

Stuart Lee: What worried him was the senseless destruction of nature which he'd witnessed from a boy as he grew up through really the 20th century. There's film clips of him walking through Merton College, looking at where the trees used to be, and talking about how they used to be these wonderful trees in there.

Jonas, Oxford University

Tolkien Society: So am I right in thinking that where we're heading to a destination that is of major importance a JRR Tolkien?

Joseph, Oxford University

Tolkien Society: So the Merton Stone Table, which is a spot where he would commune with one of the other Inklings, Lewis. It was actually Lewis's inspiration for the stone table in Narnia. This is somewhere where they would go and talk and hash all of their ideas.

Jonas: Imagine if you knew you're going write these books and you knew that someone was going to come here several years later and pop a ring down in your name.

Joseph: (*Reciting in Black Speech, the language of Mordor invented by Tolkien*) One ring to rule them all. One ring to find them. One ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them.

Stuart Lee: Tolkien started inventing languages when he was a young boy, and he said that, you know, that's what came

first, inventing a language and then he wanted a world to set those languages in.

Catherine McIlwaine: I think somebody's tried to decipher that and it is a curse against somebody steals the gold.

Mark Atherton: And then you can create names in those languages and you can create concepts. You can create ideas that are difficult to translate from one language to another. In fact it's impossible to conceive that he could have written *The Lord of the Rings* without being a professor of Anglo-Saxon and it's just got all gone into the writing of his fiction.

Catherine McIlwaine: We can see that he's taken some of the themes from *Beowulf* the Old English epic poem that he taught as an academic at Oxford for over 20 years.

Mark Atherton: It's hard to imagine his writing without *Beowulf*, *Beowulf* is there all the time somewhere. (*Reads an extract in old English*):

Onscreen translation: Time passed on. Afloat upon the

waves was the boat beneath the cliffs. Eagerly the warriors mounted the prow.

Mark Atherton: It's this attitude of courage in adversity which is one of the messages which Tolkien and people like CS Lewis in the Inklings thought was really a real contribution of this kind of ancient literature.

Stuart Lee: The little people, in the case of the hobbits, literally do stand up in that sense to take on the great armies of darkness, and they defeat them. And that's what he was trying to say, that you can stand up and take on evil and there is a chance it will be defeated.

Joseph: He always said he despised allegory in all its forms and he hated the idea that people would read this kind of symbolism into his works, but you look at huge amounts of what he wrote especially parts of *The Silmarillion*, this is clearly inspired by your experiences in the war. This horrible, mechanised destruction of human life.

Stuart Lee: What he was seeing through that first half of the 20th century was a passing of the old world as we moved into the new world, and the whole of Middle-Earth, particularly in *The Lord of the Rings*, is filled with a similar tone, this sense of passing. The Third Age of Middle-Earth will go. Once the ring is destroyed, all the beauty that the elves had created will begin to fade and diminish and then the men will take over. So there's this sense of an elegy overriding the entire book.

Collectively reading:

Roads go ever, ever on.

Over rock and under tree.

By caves where never sun has shone.

By streams that never find the sea:

Over snow by winter sown

And through the merry flowers of June.

Over grass and over stone

And under mountains in the moon.

Roads go ever, ever on.

Under cloud and under star.

Yet feet that wandering have gone

Turn at last to home afar.

Eyes that fire and sword have seen

And horror in the halls of stone

Look at last on meadows green

And trees and Hills they long have known.

Solutions

Detailed Reading Comprehension

1. illustrations for his stories, timelines of his stories, detailed maps and new languages.
2. understanding ancient texts and languages, and telling stories.
3. chronologies and documents created by the author.
4. for him to write his books.
5. never needed for publication.
6. patiently and meticulously collected his father's work, and helped publish his father's later work posthumously.

7. hobbits

B.1. f 2. g 3. a 4. d 5. h 6. b

C.1. his four children.

2. small, quiet people with large, hairy feet, living in fertile countryside very like England in medieval times.

Watch your language!

A.1. *has read* – present perfect – the fact of reading (in the past) has an influence on the reader's knowledge at present

knows – simple present - knowledge of the reader at present

was – preterite – Tolkien, subject of this verb, is no longer alive

shows – simple present – the exhibition exists at present time

is – simple present, it still exists

give – simple present – still existing material

spent – preterite – Tolkien, subject of this verb, is no longer alive

inventing – a gerund – See activity B.

B.1. Mountains surround the elvish town of Rivendell. A river flows nearby and between the mountains. There are steps across the mountains to get to the town. The vegetation is lush.

2. A dragon is sitting on a pile of gold and precious stones. He seems annoyed as smoke is coming out of his nostrils and he is breathing fire out of his mouth. Bilbo Baggins is wearing his ring as he looks transparent (or surrounded by mist). They are having a conversation where clearly Smaug is getting angry. This illustration of a famous scene in the book has influenced greatly the film director Peter Jackson, who filmed *The Hobbit* between 2012 and 2014.

Activity 2

1. f 2. d 3. g 4. e 5. g 6. d 7. d 8. a 9. d 10. d
11. a

