

Week 8

The Hobbit

by J. R. R. Tolkien

Unit 1



Week 8

Student Checklist

This week you will Read chapters I-V of *The Hobbit*:

- Chapter I (“An Unexpected Party”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook page 155
- Chapter II (“Roast Mutton”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook page 160
- Chapters III-IV (“A Short Rest”-“Over Hill and Under Hill”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook page 164
- Chapter V (“Riddles in the Dark”)
 - Answer comprehension questions, workbook pages 170-171

Complete lessons on:

- Character
- Character development through conflict
- Internal details
- Characters’ points of view

Write the beginning of a personal essay:

- Brainstorm
- Prepare an outline
- Begin the rough draft
- Finish the rough draft

Do extra activities (optional)

- _____
- _____

Reading

Read chapter I (“An Unexpected Party”) of *The Hobbit*.

Questions

1. There are three reasons other hobbits consider the Bagginses respectable. Name at least one.

2. Other hobbits do not consider the Tooks (Bilbo’s mother’s family) respectable. Why?

3. Why does Bilbo decide that Gandalf is not his sort?

4. After Bilbo fondly remembers Gandalf’s stories and fireworks, we read that Bilbo “was not so prosy as he liked to believe.” What does prosy mean?

- A. stubborn
- B. forgetful
- C. unimaginative
- D. well-read

5. What brings the dwarves to Bilbo’s house?

6. According to Thorin, what do dragons do with the gold they steal?



Lesson: Character

Characters are the people (or animals or mythical creatures or sometimes even objects) who inhabit the fictional worlds writers create. They are the ones who have conflicts with each other (or their society or nature or themselves). While we want to know what happens in stories, we usually want to know because we are interested in the characters and what happens to them.

Characters can be realistic, like in *Prairie Lotus*. They can be fanciful, like the gossiping animals in “It’s Quite True!” While many children’s stories are populated by talking animals, stories can have realistic ones too, like the snake and dog in “The Snake.” Many of the characters in *The Hobbit* aren’t quite human, but they are human-like. They aren’t as realistic as the people in *Prairie Lotus*, but they aren’t completely fanciful either.

In spite of his being a hobbit, many people identify with Bilbo Baggins. He enjoys his quiet life, but he’s also open to a bit of adventure. He’s overwhelmed by so many strangers entering his home, as most of us would be, but he still tries to be a good host, as most of us hope we would be. The fact that he’s not human is overcome by Tolkien’s skillful development of his character. But how do writers develop their characters?

Perhaps the first way you might guess is through description. Bilbo and Gandalf are well described because we don’t spend every day around hobbits and wizards. In *Prairie Lotus*, Park describes Hanna more thoroughly than the other characters, not only because she’s the central character, but also because a crucial part of the story is that most people judge her unfairly based on her appearance. But not all characters get such detailed descriptions.



Consider what we learn about Mark Twain’s physical appearance in “Taming the Bicycle,” or that of Nicholas or his aunt in “The Lumber Room.” There is a lot of physical comedy in Twain’s essay, but other than his being uncoordinated and weak we don’t have much physical sense of Twain. The same is true of the characters in “The Lumber Room.” In this story, appearance is not important to the story or the author’s purpose. Pretty much any young boy can be Nicholas and any woman his aunt. Saki allows us to fill in those details.

When we meet someone, how do we get to know them? Often we learn about them by talking to them, and that’s a primary way writers develop their characters – through their speech. Hanna speaks respectfully to people, but she is also willing to speak her mind. Nicholas also speaks his mind, but while Hanna asserts herself, particularly when she thinks people are being unfair, Nicholas is more interested in getting the upper hand in a humorous fashion. Their speech develops them as characters.

We haven’t gone far in *The Hobbit*, so there hasn’t yet been much speech. (In chapter V, you’ll meet a character who is greatly developed by his speech.) But the dwarves speak similarly to each other, or at least seem to. This isn’t necessarily because all dwarves are

the same, but because we're seeing them through Bilbo's eyes, and he's never spent time around dwarves before. When he's suddenly inundated with a dozen of them, he naturally sees them as nearly indistinguishable.

This brings us to another way writers develop characters – other characters' opinions of them. Especially if we've come to trust a character (usually the story's main character) we trust their opinion of other characters. Hanna immediately feels comfortable around the indigenous people she meets, so we know they aren't a threat. She likes Sam, and so do we (though there are other reasons for liking him too). When Hanna's father exhibits some prejudice towards the Dakota, we might start liking him less. Park no doubt realized that, but she wanted to present a realistic picture of people at that time. The fact that Hanna is so close to her father, that she loves and likes him so much, helps offset some of his negative character traits. We know Hanna has a long history with her father, and our trust in her affects our opinion of him.

But just as people can lie to us or misjudge someone else, so can characters fool us with their words or opinions. How then to know what these characters are like? The most important way authors develop their characters is through their actions. Hanna's father may argue with her or even yell at her on occasion, but he also gives her a chance to be a seamstress and buys her the mirror. His love and respect for her are made clear through his actions.

I've been speaking about development of character as only a fictional concern, but writers of nonfiction need to think about it as well. It's true that the people they're portraying are (or were) real, but while they're not inventing aspects they're still choosing them. Which aspects of their subject should they share? What should they emphasize?

When Eastman writes about Eyatonkawee there is some description, and her words are important. He also tells us what other people think of her – she is respected, even revered. But most crucial to his portrayal are her actions. Her actions against the attacking tribe were the basis of her renown. Her repetition of this story is important, but not because of the words. She thrusts herself between fighting men, stopping them in order to tell her story. Her brave actions throughout are the basis of her character, and Eastman emphasizes these traits rather than others to create a tight focus for his essay.

Whether fiction or nonfiction, we want characters who almost seem like they could be real – even if they're fantastical. We want them to amuse or delight us, or make us think, or even make us angry. Sometimes characters suffer the same problems we do, and watching them work through those problems gives us hope for our own suffering. As you read more, you may even find characters who seem more real, or who you like better, than many of the actual people you know. Often that is why we read the same books over and over again.



Summary

- Characters are the people, animals, or other creatures who inhabit fictional worlds.
- Writers develop characters through description, dialogue, action, conflict, and other characters' opinions.
- Nonfiction writers use these same techniques.
- When writing, make your characters – even if they're fantastical – seem as real and relatable as you can.



Using only chapter 1 of *The Hobbit*, choose either Bilbo or Gandalf. Provide a bit of description, an action (of the character), a sentence of dialogue (that the character speaks) and another character's opinion of this character that show us something about him. You can quote from the book or you can summarize. My example is from "The Lumber Room" because I don't want to take any of your ideas, especially since I've only given you one chapter to work with. I have used quotes from the story for the first three and a summary for the last one.

Example:

Character: Nicholas

Description: His face took on an expression of considerable obstinacy.

Action: Nicholas made one or two sorties into the front garden, wriggling his way with obvious stealth of purpose towards one or other of the doors, but never able for a moment to evade the aunt's watchful eye.

Dialogue: "You said there couldn't possibly be a frog in my bread-and-milk; there was a frog in my bread-and-milk" he repeated, with the insistence of a skilled tactician who does not intend to shift from favourable ground.

Other character's opinion: Nicholas's aunt does not trust him. She knows he likes to cause trouble.

Character: _____

Description: _____

Action: _____

Dialogue: _____

Other character's opinion: _____



Reading

Read chapter II (“Roast Mutton”) of *The Hobbit*.



Questions

1. When Bilbo awakes and thinks the party has gone without him, he has two feelings about this. What are they?

2. Which of the party disappears suddenly?

3. What does Bilbo try to do when he sees the trolls?

4. What do the trolls want to do with Bilbo and the dwarves?

5. Who tricks the trolls into fighting until dawn?

6. What happens to the trolls when the sun shines on them?

Lesson: Character Development Through Conflict

A primary method of character development is conflict. Conflict can bring in all the methods mentioned yesterday, especially dialogue and action. Conflict has many roles in most stories, and one of those is to reveal character.

It's similar in real life. People act one way when everything is fine. When your life is going well, when you have no problem with anyone, it's easy to be kind, responsible, and thoughtful. But often we learn more about people when we see them struggling. If we have an argument with a friend, we may see them in a whole new light. If a favorite uncle

suddenly loses his job, he may no longer be the cheerful man we knew. It's not that people are more real when there is conflict, but they aren't less real either. We're seeing a different side that wasn't revealed before.

In the same way, writers use conflict to reveal new aspects of their characters. Some characters are even defined almost entirely by conflict. In "The Peace-Maker," Eyatonkawee is defined almost completely by her initial conflict and how this conflict enables her to win conflicts through the rest of her life. While this is a true story, remember that Eastman still had to choose what to tell us about Eyatonkawee. There was more to her than her role as the peace-maker. She was a wife, a mother, and no doubt had her own pursuits and joys. But in his portrayal of her, Eastman builds her character almost entirely on her conflicts.

Nicholas and his aunt are developed through their conflict with each other. It's true that both of them have conflicts with other children (Nicholas finding them younger and tiresome; his aunt having no patience with any disobedient children), but we see only hints of this. Their verbal sparring and Nicholas's actions and his aunt's responses tell us a lot about them.

All of these are examples of character vs. character conflicts. But any form of conflict develops character. Hanna's conflict with her society reveals a lot about her. She has a well-developed sense of fairness and justice, and this is sharpened because she is in a society which does not. She can't coast along, accepted by the town as the White characters are. Instead, she has to wrestle with difficult questions and problems. Each time she does, we learn something new about her.

The conflict in "The Snake" is character vs. nature. Had the man and the dog merely walked along without encountering the snake, we would have learned little about the man (unless there was some other way to reveal his character). From this confrontation we learn that he is brave. He is not unafraid of the snake, but he doesn't run away. The man has no sentimental feelings about the snake. He expresses no sorrow at having to kill it (contrast this with what we learn about the speaker in the poem "Snake"). He has a certain amount of competence and physical strength (it's not easy to kill a rattler).

Internal conflicts reveal a lot about a character. If someone is single-minded (like the man in "The Snake") that gives us information, but an internal struggle can reveal a lot more. We learn a lot about Hanna when she struggles with going to school. She wants to go to school – she wants to learn, to have friends, to have a normal life – but she also feels discouraged and tired by how some of the children treat her. She wants to be treated fairly, but she also worries about causing too much trouble for herself and her father. Her struggles reveal many aspects of her character.



"Taming the Bicycle" is another nonfiction piece built almost entirely around conflict, and that conflict reveals a lot about Twain's character. We learn that he has a sense of humor about himself, he's persistent, and he evaluates situations rationally (he doesn't blame

his instructor but recognizes the difficulty of the task and his own limitations). Notice that not blaming the instructor is important even though it's an absence of an action. Not all absences are important, but when a character doesn't act like you know many other people would— that too tells us something about them.

When reading, notice what character traits are brought out through the conflicts. When writing a story or profile of someone (including yourself), consider how to use conflict to reveal aspects of your characters.

Summary

- A primary method of character development is through conflict.
- Conflict can reveal new aspects of a character not revealed through the other methods.
- Internal conflicts can be particularly useful in developing character.



The following are conflicts found in the first two chapters of *The Hobbit*. Identify each type of conflict (character vs. character, character vs. society, etc.) and tell something it reveals about the character. Again, I will give you an example, but from a different story.

Example from *Prairie Lotus*:

Dolly's father sees her walking with Hanna and drags Dolly into their wagon while yelling at her.

This type of conflict is: character vs. character

What does this reveal about Dolly's father?

Dolly's father is prejudiced against Hanna and is comfortable being harsh with Dolly.

1. Bilbo's mother, Belladonna Took, was part of a family that other hobbits said must have had a fairy in it long ago. They were not entirely hobbit-like and would sometimes go on adventures.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Belladonna and her family?

2. When Gandalf arrives at Bilbo's the first time, he mentions adventures and Bilbo firmly tells him he's not interested in that talk. But he still invites him to tea.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Bilbo?

3. The dwarves and Gandalf descend on Bilbo's house and begin demanding a variety of food and drink which Bilbo rushes around to give them in spite of his annoyance.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Gandalf and the dwarves?

4. When Bilbo travels through rainy, stormy, miserable weather he thinks fondly of his home. He continues on though, in spite of his homesick feelings.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Bilbo?

5. The trolls have captured all the party (except Gandalf), and Gandalf frees them by tricking the trolls into thinking they're hearing each other's voices.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Gandalf?

6. Bilbo is uncertain whether to go on the adventure. He loves his home and is in some ways a proper hobbit, but he also has his mother in him. He finally decides to go.

This type of conflict is: _____

What does this reveal about Bilbo?

Reading

Read chapters III-IV ("A Short Rest"-“Over Hill and Under Hill”) of *The Hobbit*.

Questions

1. How does Bilbo feel about elves? How do dwarves feel about them?

2. Why is there not much to tell about the party's stay in the Last Homely House?

3. The time they spend at Elrond's house helps the travelers in several ways. Name at least three.

4. Why does the party enter the cave?



5. Who is the only member of the party not captured by the goblins?

6. Why do the goblins have a grudge against Thorin's people?

7. What does Thorin have that enrages the goblins?

Lesson: Internal Details

Internal details – characters’ thoughts and feelings – are another aspect of character development. A character’s thoughts and feelings are often communicated through their speech, like ours are. Sometimes other characters report on a character’s thoughts or feelings (though you have to be careful, because that character could be mistaken or lying – just like we sometimes think we know what someone is thinking or feeling but are wrong). Thoughts and feelings can also be described by the author and sometimes we can discern a character’s thoughts or feelings through their actions.



The most trustworthy source for a character’s inner life is usually description by the author (or narrator). Sometimes that description is simple and obvious:

The poor little hobbit sat down in the hall and put his head in his hands, and wondered what had happened, and what was going to happen, and whether they would all stay to supper.

Bilbo rushed along the passage, very angry, and altogether bewildered and bewuthered...

“Seems to know as much about the inside of my larders as I do myself!” thought Mr. Baggins, who was feeling positively flummoxed, and was beginning to wonder whether a most wretched adventure had not come right into his house.

In these examples Tolkien tells us exactly what Bilbo was thinking or feeling. In the first, his thoughts are a little more vague, but we still know the general idea. In the third, his thoughts are written as precisely as if he had spoken them. The second and third passages tell us his feelings.

Sometimes the narrator or author knows even more about the character than they know about themselves: “You will notice already that Mr. Baggins was not quite so prosy as he liked to believe...” This is at the beginning of our story, and it’s important that we understand that Bilbo starts by thinking of himself as a proper hobbit who would never go on adventures. But the narrator knows better and tells us Bilbo is not as prosy (ordinary) as he thinks. In fact, on the next page, Bilbo tells Gandalf he doesn’t want any adventures. Soon after that we’ll see that wasn’t as true as Bilbo thought.

How do we know when to trust characters when they tell us their thoughts or emotions? Much in the same way we do in real life. We evaluate what they say against what they do and against what else we know about them, and we consider the situation they’re in. Do they have some reason to lie? Do they seem to understand themselves well?

Gandalf doesn’t believe Bilbo when he says he doesn’t want any adventures. He returns, accompanied by a dozen dwarves. Gandalf knows something that Bilbo doesn’t. Nobody coerces Bilbo to go on this adventure. He could say, “No, thank you,” and stay home. But

he doesn't. A part of him wants to go, and Gandalf knows this. Here, we trust Gandalf's knowledge over Bilbo's.

Why would we do this? Bilbo is grown, he's not stupid, he's not lying. Why is it so easy for us to trust Gandalf's dismissal of Bilbo's words? Tolkien sets this up for us. First, he develops Gandalf's character enough to make him trustworthy. He's not just anyone – he is a renowned wizard, and that means he probably has insights others lack. But more important is what the narrator tells us about Bilbo's ancestors. Bilbo knows all this too, but he doesn't think about it in the same way. Those are other hobbits, and even though they're his ancestors he doesn't think this fact impacts him. Within a few pages, Tolkien has created a situation where we understand things about Bilbo that he doesn't, so we know how much to trust his words.



While thoughts are always revealed through words, feelings can be revealed through actions:

He [Gandalf] scowled so angrily at Gloin that the dwarf huddled back in his chair; and when Bilbo tried to open his mouth to ask a question, he turned and frowned at him and stuck out his bushy eyebrows, till Bilbo shut his mouth tight with a snap.

Tolkien gives us help with that “angrily” for Gandalf, but how do Gloin and Bilbo feel? What makes someone huddle back in their chair or snap their mouth shut? They feel afraid, or at least intimidated. Tolkien never labels their feelings, but the situation and their actions make them clear.

Sometimes authors give even less help than this. What may appear simple dialogue often has feelings running underneath it that the author doesn't specify:

“Is that *The Mountain*?” asked Bilbo in a solemn voice, looking at it with round eyes. He had never seen a thing that looked so big before.

“Of course not!” said Balin.

No emotions for either character are given, so what are our clues? The first you might have noticed is Bilbo's “solemn voice,” and that is an excellent clue. But the first clue in the sentence is the way Tolkien writes “*The Mountain*” – capitalization and italics. Bilbo is emphasizing it, clearly thinking this mountain is special. Our next clues (after “solemn voice”) are his round eyes and the fact that this is the biggest thing he has seen. What emotions do these add up to? Awe, wonder, excitement – any of these are likely.

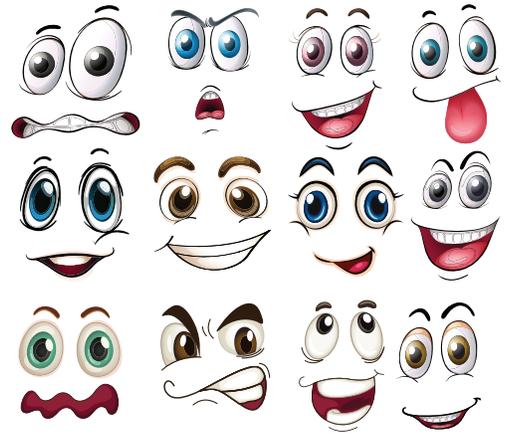
How does Balin respond? He doesn't say, “No,” but exclaims, “Of course not!” I frequently instruct students to tone down their use of exclamation points, but they do have their place. Here, one is needed to convey Balin's emotion. It is most likely impatience, irritation, possibly some disbelief.

When you are writing a story – fiction or nonfiction – think about how to convey the thoughts and feelings of your characters (this is true even if the character is yourself). The

first impulse is to simply state, “Ethan was irritated” or “I was thrilled” or “Nona thought the plan would never work.” And that can work, but don’t limit yourself to that.

Let your characters speak their thoughts and emotions sometimes. Or other characters can voice their perceptions of a character’s emotion. Describe a character’s bodily feelings to convey emotion. A racing heart can show fear or excitement, a shiver down the spine comes from terror or a thrill, and when we’re nervous we might shake or have sweaty palms. Hint at a character’s emotions without spelling them out.

Do you have trouble discerning characters’ emotions when you read? In a story you like, take a passage where you know a character is having emotions and work out all the ways the author shows you these emotions. Take out your trusty notebook, and identify as best you can the emotions in the passage. Copy down all the text the author uses to communicate those emotions. Identify each – is it the character’s speech, description from the narrator, another character’s opinion, or the character’s actions? Look for the obvious first, then see if you find more subtle clues.



Try to have a good understanding of characters’ emotions when you read. Remember that characters may be mistaken about their thoughts or emotions or may even be lying. Don’t expect everything to be spelled out for you – sometimes you’ll have to work for it. But understanding characters’ thoughts and emotions is necessary to a more thorough understanding of your reading.

Summary

- Internal details are characters’ thoughts and feelings.
- Internal details can be communicated through the character’s own speech or actions, another character’s speech, or description.
- Sometimes these sources are misleading about a character’s true internal details, so read carefully.
- When you are writing a story, communicate internal details in a variety of ways.

These are passages from your earlier reading this year. For each passage, underline any parts that communicate a character's emotions. After each, name at least one emotion you think the passage communicates. Some will be obvious, others less so.

Example:

He [Gandalf] scowled so angrily at Gloin that the dwarf huddled back in his chair; and when Bilbo tried to open his mouth to ask a question, he turned and frowned at him and stuck out his bushy eyebrows, till Bilbo shut his mouth tight with a snap.

Gloin and Bilbo feel: afraid or intimidated



From "The Snake":

1. Suddenly from some unknown and yet near place in advance there came a dry, shrill whistling rattle that smote motion instantly from the limbs of the man and the dog.

The man and the dog feel _____

2. Presently [his fingers] closed about [a stick] that seemed adequate, and holding this weapon poised before him the man moved slowly forward, glaring.

The man feels _____

From "Taming the Bicycle":

1. I was at the end of my course, at last, and it was necessary for me to round to. This is not a pleasant thing, when you undertake it for the first time on your own responsibility, and neither is it likely to succeed.

Twain feels _____

2. Your confidence oozes away, you fill steadily up with nameless apprehensions, every fiber of you is tense with a watchful strain, you start a cautious and gradual curve, but your squirmy nerves are all full of electric anxieties...

Twain feels _____

3. ...then suddenly the nickel-clad horse takes the bit in its mouth and goes slanting for the curbstone, defying all prayers and all your powers to change its mind – your heart stands still, your breath hangs fire, your legs forget to work...

Twain feels _____

4. It took time to learn to miss a dog, but I achieved even that.

Twain feels _____

From "The Lumber Room":

1. "How she did howl," said Nicholas cheerfully, as the party drove off without any of the elation of high spirits that should have characterized it.

Nicholas feels _____

2. Nicholas sat for many golden minutes revolving the possibilities of the scene...

Nicholas feels _____

From "The Eyes Have It":

1. The line (and I tremble remembering it even now) read: ...his eyes slowly roved about the room.

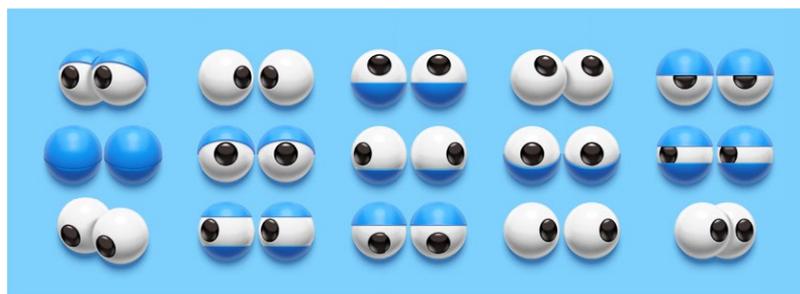
The narrator feels _____

2. My heart pounded and my breath choked in my windpipe.

The narrator feels _____

3. Flushing crimson, I slammed the book shut and leaped to my feet.

The narrator feels _____



Reading

Read chapter V ("Riddles in the Dark") of *The Hobbit*.

Questions



1. What does an elvish sword or dagger do when goblins are around?

2. Who lives in the lake that Bilbo stumbles upon?

3. What competition does Bilbo have with this creature? What are the prizes for each of them?

4. Has Gollum always lived in his underground lake? If not, where else has he lived?

5. How does Bilbo win the competition? Why is it not quite fair?

6. What does Gollum go to get from the island? Why?

7. Why does Gollum leave the island and attack Bilbo in a rage?

8. How does Bilbo escape the goblins?

Lesson: Characters' Points of View

When you hear the phrase “point of view” you may think of first person point of view vs. third person point of view. These are important terms in literature, and we will have a lesson on them later this year. But this lesson is about determining the characters’ points of view in a story.

The main character in *The Hobbit* is Bilbo, so we are almost always in his point of view. Why do you think Tolkien would choose Bilbo for that role? Why not tell the story from Gandalf’s point of view, or that of one of the dwarves? They’re all on this adventure together, but how is Bilbo different? Bilbo is different because this is his first adventure. He’s never been to these places, seen these things, met the different races and creatures the party will encounter. And neither have we.

Like Bilbo, we are new to all this. Even though we are people, not hobbits, for the most part he lives the adventure in the same way we would. We can identify with him better than we could any of the others. That’s why Tolkien makes him our focal character.

But it’s important to consider the points of view of the other characters. When you understand the motivations, emotions, and experiences of the other characters you gain a better understanding of the story. Bilbo has gone on this adventure for the sake of adventure. He feels a call, the blood of the Tooks has awoken in him, and he has something to prove, if only to himself. Why are the dwarves and Gandalf on this adventure?

The dwarves’ motivation is the recovery of their gold. This isn’t just money for them, it is the treasure of their ancestors. The quest is primarily theirs, and it’s important to them. When we consider this, it can explain some of the single-mindedness they show. They consider Bilbo a hired hand, and sometimes they treat him accordingly.



Gandalf is different, and in some ways more of a mystery. Why would a wizard go on this quest? So far, we’re not given any real explanation. He has the map, but he could give it to Thorin and be off. Most likely a large part of his reason for going is to keep them safe, but that doesn’t seem to be all of it. As a wizard, it is fitting that his motivations are more mysterious.

It’s not only overarching motivations you should think about, but characters’ points of view in various scenes. Tolkien gives us a thorough look at Bilbo’s thoughts and feelings regarding Gollum, but what about Gollum’s point of view? Tolkien does give us some of

that, noting how he views Bilbo cautiously at first because he's never seen a hobbit before. Then that caution turns to hunger then to rage. But let's consider Gollum's point of view more deeply.

Tolkien alludes to happier times for Gollum. He once lived above-ground with his grandmother. He once had friends. They left him, but we aren't told why. We know he found a ring, but wearing the ring tired him so much that he eventually had to stop in spite of loving it and the immensely useful property of making him invisible. Something has happened to Gollum over time to destroy his life.

Gollum isn't a monster. He's not like the trolls or goblins who as a race are violent and thuggish. (Though even they have their points of view.) He is a clear danger to Bilbo, and our sympathies are with Bilbo, but there is something pathetic about Gollum. He's minding his own business in his home when Bilbo intrudes. He's lived for who knows how long surrounded by goblins who are a constant threat, so it's no wonder he's lost any sense of hospitality.

Gollum plays the riddle game with Bilbo – or what starts out as a game but turns into a deadly competition. When Bilbo poses a riddle that reminds him of his previous happier life, it stirs unwanted emotions in him. His feelings towards Bilbo turn dark. But don't we all have trouble when uncomfortable memories and feelings are aroused? Bilbo poses him a riddle that isn't a proper riddle at all, and Gollum can't answer it. His frustration turns to anger. But if we're in a contest against someone and feel they've won by cheating, we might get angry too.

The last straw for Gollum is realizing that Bilbo stole his ring. From Bilbo's point of view, he only found it, and he realizes now he needs it to stay alive. Of course he keeps it. But all Gollum knows is his birthday ring, his most valuable possession – in part because it helps him get food – has been stolen by this little creature who cheated him in a contest. It's too much, and he goes berserk.



But if we consider Gollum as a whole, remember his past, think about the terrible ways his life has changed, are mindful of what little he now has – then his response to Bilbo doesn't seem so terrible. At the same time we can identify with Bilbo but pity Gollum. This increased understanding of Gollum also gives us an increased understanding of the story as a whole. We now know that there may be something about that powerful ring (and hence something about power itself) that is dangerous.

When you read, consider all characters' points of view. Just as in real life we all have different points of view on an event or situation, so will characters in stories. Understanding these different points of view will increase your understanding of the characters and the story.

Summary

- All characters in a story have a point of view.
- Even though there is usually one main or focal character in a story, it's important to understand the points of view of other characters.
- Try to understand characters' overarching motivations, but also their perspectives in individual scenes.
- Do this not only for the "good" characters but also for the villains or morally grey characters.

