Thank you for downloading my study guide Teaching History and Literature with J.R.R. Tolkien. For the complete guide with links to books, as well as the copywork download, visit the original website page here. If you wish to share this study, please share that link, and not this guide. Thank you!

Personal History

Tolkien was well-educated, with a major focus on languages. "He went to Exeter College, Oxford, where he studied Classics, Old English, Germanic languages, Welsh, and Finnish. He quickly demonstrated an aptitude for philology and began to create his own languages." (Source) It's no surprise, then, that he was able to create new languages for his books!

After a short time in the British Army during WWI, he became a professor and a serious author. Not only did he write his famous stories, he wrote versions of Beowulf and King Arthur, and helped to draft the Oxford English Dictionary.

Master of the Rings is a wonderful documentary about the life and work of Tolkien. You can purchase the DVD or stream it on Amazon Prime.

World War I

Tolkien served in the Great War for five months in 1916, before becoming ill with trench fever. During that time, he fought in the Battle of the Somme. (Source) He was deeply affected by the horrors of battle and the loss of personal friends. It is clear that this war influenced his literature, specifically the evil worlds in his stories. This is why I like a study of Tolkien right after a study of World War 1. He fought in that war; he lived it; and it influenced his stories immensely.

This war (the siege of Gondor) has the very quality of the war my generation knew. It is all here: the endless, unintelligible movement, the sinister quiet of the front when 'everything is now ready,' the flying civilians, the lively, vivid friendships, the background of something like despair and the merry foreground, and such heaven-sent windfalls as a cache of choice tobacco 'salvaged' from a ruin. The author has told us elsewhere that his taste for fairy tale was wakened into maturity by active service; that no doubt, is why we can say of his war scenes (quoting Gimli the Dwarf), 'There is good rock here. This country has rough bones.' – C.S. Lewis, review of The Lord of the Rings (On Stories)

"...when [Tolkien] hears that some people want to identify the Ring with the hydrogen bomb, and Mordor with Russia, I think he might call it a 'hasty' word. How long do people think a world like his takes to grow? Do they think it can be done as quickly as a modern nation changes its Public Enemy Number One or as modern scientists invent new weapons? When Professor Tolkien began there was probably no nuclear fission and the contemporary incarnation of

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Mordor was a good deal nearer our shores. But the text itself teaches us that Sauron is eternal; the war of the Ring is only one of a thousand wars against him. Every time we shall be wise to fear his ultimate victory, after which there will be 'no more songs.' Again and again we shall have good evidence that 'the wind is setting East, and the withering of all woods may be drawing near.' Every time we win we shall know that our victory is impermanent. If we insist on asking for the moral of the story, that is its moral: a recall from cacile optimism and wailing pessimism alike, to that hard, yet not quite desperate, insight into Man's unchanging predicament by which heroic ages have lived." – C.S. Lewis, Review of Lord of the Rings (On Stories)

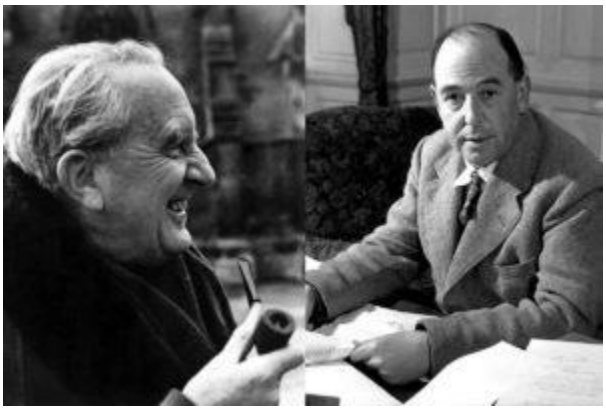
Read: A Hobbit, A Wardrobe, and a Great War

Tolkien's Books

- *The Silmarillion*
- *The Great Tales of Middle-earth*: *Children of Húrin, Beren and Lúthien,* and *The Fall of Gondolin* (these are three of the most famous stories in The Silmarillion expanded into their own books)
- *The Hobbit*
- *The Lord of the Rings*
- *Unfinished Tales* (a wonderful fan-favorite with extra information about many of the characters in Middle Earth)
- *Tales From the Perilous Realm* (a collection of short stories)
- *The Histories of Middle Earth* (everything you could possibly want to know about each place, race, event, and character in Tolkien's writings)
- *The Atlas of Middle Earth* is indispensable for fans of these great tales

I recommend new readers begin with *The Hobbit* and follow that with *The Lord of the Rings*. *The Silmarillion* is the amazing tale of the first two ages of Middle Earth, but it's written in a different style and may be a challenge for young readers. I read it aloud to all of my kids, but high schoolers and adults can probably handle it *if they are really interested*. Try the Audible version of *The Silmarillion*.

Friendship with C.S. Lewis



The story of the Inklings is like something out of a Hollywood film, where two very famous authors and a circle of their friends would meet weekly to discuss all things writing and literature.

"The group started informally—Lewis and Tolkien found that they greatly enjoyed one another's company, and so they cultivated the habit of meeting on Monday mornings for beer and conversation. Lewis wrote about it in one of his letters: "It has also become the custom for Tolkien to drop in on me of a Monday morning for a glass. This is one of the pleasantest spots in the week. Sometimes we talk English school

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politics: sometimes we criticise one another's poems: other days we drift into theology or the state of the nation; rarely we fly no higher than bawdy and puns." (C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and the Inklings – Read the entire article here)

One day in conversation, Lewis remarked to Tolkien: "Tollers, there is too little of what we really like in stories. I am afraid we shall have to write some ourselves." (Approx 1937, -*The Inklings*, by Humphrey Carpenter, 1978)

I'd say they more than accomplished their goal.

Resources

On Faerie Stories - When studying literature and the works of Tolkien, I highly recommend his essay On Faerie Stories. "*In his essay On Fairy-Stories, Tolkien discusses the nature of fairy-tales and fantasy and rescues the genre from those who would relegate it to juvenilia" (from the publisher).* It's included in different compilations of his shorter works, including The Tolkien Reader. He writes in a very advanced, intelligent style, but it's worth a read, especially for a high school student or adult.

The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien - Tolkien shares many thoughts about his life and work (and literature in general) in this enlightening collection of letters!

Tolkien fans owe a great debt to Christopher Tolkien, James' son and fellow writer/editor. Christopher finished the Silmarillion from his father's copious amounts of notes, as well as other works. This article *"The Steward of Middle Earth"* is a wonderful read.

Copy work

Tolkien wrote so many wonderful stories that are just infused with quotable lines from his characters. I really encourage students to copy down the quotes they love most in their neatest handwriting. They are much more personal this way.

However, I have also chosen some great ones and put them in a printable PDF. Copy work is one of my favorite ways to reinforce great writing, grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary, and spelling, and who better to imitate than the greatest authors of the world? You can read my complete post on using copy work here.

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