Lord of the Rings

**Group Discussion Chapters 1-4**

**General Analysis**

1. As you continue to read, be aware of the details of history and geography. How does Tolkien create a sense of a real world with real landmarks and a real history?
2. How does Gandalf prove that Frodo’s Ring is especially powerful?
3. Frodo is alarmed when he hears the evil story of the Ring. Why does Gandalf caution him against throwing the Ring away? Describe the only way to destroy the Ring. What would your group do? Explain your reasoning.
4. Sometimes, a character in *The Fellowship of the Ring* makes a general statement about life, which is a **universal truth** that can be generally applied to creatures of Middle-earth. For example, a generalization about life that applies to humans might be, “All men are created equal.” Find a generalization about life spoken by Gildor in chapter 4. Explain what the generalization may imply.
5. As a group, what does POWER mean to you? What are 2 advantages of having power and 2 disadvantages of having power? Consider the term, sacrifice. What are 3 reasons your group would sacrifice themselves for someone else—or, group of people--?

**Analyzing the text: Literary Elements**

1. What is **ironic** about the birthday party Bilbo is throwing on September 22? What is ironic about the number of guests who were invited? **Supply one additional example** of irony that deals with the birthday party and Mr. Bilbo Baggins.
2. Find and explain a use of **foreshadowing** in chapter 2.
3. Find an example of **personification** and a **simile** in one sentence on page 55.
4. How is the alias Gandalf tells Frodo to use a **pun**?
5. At the start of The Lord of the Rings, we already know that the good people of the Shire are under threat. (Prologue. 3. 7) The threat is so subtle that even they do not see it: “strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them…” What is **ironic** about the Shire being the initial setting for this epic? How does Tolkien increase our **suspense** in chapter 1? What is heading towards the Shire? Why would the Shire be of particular interest to these “strange persons and creatures”?

**Analyzing the text: Characterization**

1. Why is it important that Bilbo give up the Ring to Frodo? Why does he have so much difficulty doing so? (Refer to page 35-36)
2. Why is Gandalf so concerned about the Ring and its effects on the person who possesses it?
3. **Characterization:** Analyze the character of Gandalf, Gollum, Bilbo and Frodo. List at least 3 **character traits** about each. Then consider their **inner character** in conjunction with the power the ring holds. Why do you suppose the ring chose these individuals…if it did in fact “choose” them…or was it Fate? And if so, why them?
4. What is the significance of Gollum's having been a hobbit before acquiring the Ring?
5. Why do you suppose Gandalf is the wizard who has to carry the weight of protecting the Shire and overseeing the quest? What qualities do we see in him (from our reading as well as viewing of the Hobbit) that makes him a good “leader”.
6. Consider Frodo’s servant Sam Gamgee. Are Frodo and Sam social equals? Sam is Frod’s servant. So is Sam’s loyalty to Frodo the loyalty of a friend to a friend? Or of a servant to a master? Explain.
7. List some **character traits** common to Elves.

**Analyzing the text: Theme**

1. Cite 2 incidents from chapters 1-4 to support the following statement of **THEME**:

Evil can be resisted through personal strength and the exercise of free will.

1. **Theme:** Many critics believe that there is a force for good in this story that seems to be working against evil. For example, Frodo seems to know that his fiftieth birthday is significant and begins to feel restless as his birthday approaches. The reader understands that some force is guiding Frodo, under the surface, to leave his home. **Find a passage** in this chapter that supports the idea that there is a guiding force for good in the story.
2. What does Gandalf mean when he says of Sméagol, "The Ring had given him power according to his stature?" Is the Ring itself evil and destructive, or may its powers be used for good or evil, depending on the moral character of its bearer?
3. In earlier chapters, Tolkien describes the Dark Lord as being alike a shadow. For example, Chapter 2 is titled “Shadow of the Past” and is referring to the Dark Lord. Gandalf tells Frodo about Sauron the Great, the Dark Lord:

*“The rumors that you have heard are true: he has indeed arisen again and left his hold in Mirkwood and returned to his ancient fastness in the Dark Tower of Mordor. That name even you hobbits have heard of, like a shadow on the boarders of old stories. Always after a defeat and a respite, the Shadow takes another shape and grows again.” (55)*

**Find a passage** in this chapter illustrating Tolkien’s use of shadows to alert the reader to the presence of the Dark Lord or his followers. Why do you think Tolkien uses this image to describe the enemy? State a theme for this novel based on your understanding of this image.

1. How can greed, envy, and other vices—especially when associated with an object of great beauty or value—transform someone?

**Analyzing the text: specific quotes**

Study the following set of quotes. Then, connect them to a theme, symbol, the Anglo-Saxon Code, Epic trait or literary element and cite (highlight) the specific lines that prompted your connection. **\*\*Some may have multiple connections within them.**

**Quote #1**

1. “That name [Mordor] the Hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories, but it was ominous and disquieting. It seemed that the evil power in Mirkwood had been driven out by the White Council only to reappear in greater strength in the old strongholds of Mordor.” (Chapter 2)

**Quote #2**

1. “Bilbo drew his hand over his eyes. "I am sorry," he said. "But I feel so queer. And yet it would be a relief in a way not to be bothered with it anymore. It has been growing on my mind lately. Sometimes I have felt it was like an eye looking at me. [...]  
     
   "Then trust mine," said Gandalf. "It is quite made up. Go away and leave it behind. Stop possessing it. Give it to Frodo, and I will look after him." (Chapter 1)

**Quote #3**

“But Sméagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. […] He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature. […] He took to thieving, and going about muttering to himself, and gurgling in his throat. So they called him *Gollum*, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole.” (Chapter 2)

**Quote #4**

"If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's certain," said Sam. "*Don't you leave him!* they said to me. *Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon, and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they'll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with,* I said. They laughed." (Chapter 4)

**Quote #5**

"Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought." (Chapter 2)

**Quote #6**

“I've only just remembered, sir. It was like this: when I go back to our hole yesterday evening with the key, my dad, he said to me: *Hallo, Sam!* he says. *I thought you were away with Mr. Frodo this morning. There's been a strange customer asking for Mr. Baggins and Bag End, and he's only just gone. I've sent him on to Bucklebury. Not that I liked the sound of him. He seemed mighty put out, when I told him Mr. Baggins had left his home for good. Hissed at me, he did. It gave me quite a shudder*. *What sort of fellow was he*? says I to the Gaffer. *I don't know,* says he; *but he wasn't a Hobbit. He was tall and black like, and he stooped over me. I reckon it was one of the Big Folk from foreign parts. He spoke funny*.” (Chapter 3)

**Quote #7**

"A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last, every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark power will devour him." (Chapter 2)

## Quote 1----Good vs. Evil Questions About Good vs. Evil

1. How do Hobbits define good and evil? How about the Elves, or the Dwarves? What sense do we get of different moral world views among the good peoples of Middle-earth?
2. What are some of the behavioral signs that indicate that Saruman and Boromir have gone over to the dark side? How do their speeches of temptation (Saruman to Gandalf and Boromir to Frodo) overlap stylistically?
3. What makes Tom Bombadil exempt from Middle-earth's wars between good and evil? Why does he not participate in these moral conflicts? Does Tom Bombadil's neutrality in the face of Sauron become, in itself, a moral problem?

# The Fellowship of the Ring Theme of Friendship

The friendships between the major characters of The Fellowship of the Ring are adorably bromantic. And although the more emotion-allergic among us may blush a little at the soulful sentiment between Sam and Frodo or Merry and Pippin, it's this strong feeling of friendship that makes the Ring Quest possible. After all, at the end of Fellowship, Frodo doesn't take Aragorn (strong, brave) or Legolas (fast, also brave) with him. Instead, it's Sam who joins him. Sam insists on coming along because he loves Frodo, and Frodo allows him to come because he can't bear to go into Mordor without his dear friend by his side. It's the emotional bonds between these guys that give them the strength they need to resist Sauron. As in the Harry Potter stories, the only weapon Sauron doesn't have is love, which the Hobbits share in abundance.

## Questions About Friendship

1. How does The Fellowship of the Ring depict friendship as a tool against the power of Sauron? How does friendship help to make the long struggle of the Ring quest better for Frodo?
2. How is Sam's friendship for Frodo different from Merry and Pippin's? What role does Sam's class status play in the nature of his relationship to Frodo?
3. Sam and Frodo's friendship is obviously the defining one of this series, but what other pairs of friends appear in The Fellowship of the Ring? How do these friendships reveal aspects of the individual characters' personalities to the reader?
4. How do the friendships in The Fellowship of the Ring compare to, or contrast with, romantic love?

# The Fellowship of the Ring Theme of The Home

The word "home" is supposed to inspire warm and fuzzy feelings in us. But when we're torn from our home, it takes on a whole new meaning. While at Bag End, Frodo is "in love with the Shire, with woods and fields and little rivers" (1.1.84). But Frodo loves the Shire even more when he has to leave it behind to go on his great quest. In fact, a lot of The Fellowship of the Ring focuses on the painful emotions of various people leaving or losing their homes. Rivendell is home to the Elves, but we know that it's fading even at this early stage of the trilogy. Lothlórien is a beautiful place, but it is also diminishing in power. The Elves are clearly on their way out of Middle-earth, and their realms are dying away. And as for the Dwarves, their great ancestral home of Khazad-dûm is crawling with Orcs; there is no way they can go back. This horrible sense of loss that the traveling Hobbits, Elves, and Dwarves all feel shows us how much they value the places they come from. Middle-earth seems even more precious (and worth defending from Sauron) because it is so loved by its inhabitants.

## Questions About The Home

1. What contributes to the Shire's overall sense of homeyness? How do the Hobbits remember the Shire once they have left it?
2. What traits do the homes of the Elves and Hobbits share? How are they different? What do these similarities and differences indicate about Elven and Hobbit cultures more generally?
3. How do language and song help to create a sense of home in Tolkien's Middle-earth? What role does culture play in defining the idea of "home"?

# The Fellowship of the Ring Theme of Fear

Fear is one of Sauron's primary weapons in The Fellowship of the Ring(though he also likes to exploit people's pride, arrogance, and anger when he can). As soon as the Black Riders start appearing, the first thing anyone mentions is that they are frightening. When the Black Riders attack Frodo, Merry, Pippin, and Sam at Weathertop, Merry and Pippin both throw themselves to the ground in horror, and Sam can't lift a finger to fight them. Clearly, the agents of Sauron use fear to their advantage: they are, literally, terrorists. Does the Fellowship have tools at their service to combat this fear? What protection is there against the deadly fear of Sauron's servants? (Bonus question: Do you think Tolkien's sensitivity to the inevitability of fear in horrible situations is the result of his own familiarity with fighting in the trenches of World War I?)

## Questions About Fear

1. As a storyteller, how does Tolkien use fear to increase suspense? What are the most frightening chapters of The Fellowship of the Ring to read? Are they also the most suspenseful?
2. If fear is a weapon of Sauron, can the servants of Sauron feel fear? If so, what does the dark side fear? What signs do we see of the dark side's fear in The Fellowship of the Ring?
3. Everyone is right to be afraid of the Black Riders, certainly: they are both evil and scary. But what examples are there in The Fellowship of the Ring of misguided fear? When do the characters fear what they shouldn't? How does this misguided fear lead them to behave in unproductive ways?

# The Fellowship of the Ring Theme of Strength and Skill

There are many varieties of skill in The Fellowship of the Ring. The most obvious skills come from the different characters' races: Legolas is an Elf, so he can run on top of snow. Gimli is a Dwarf, so he can find his way around underground. And the Hobbits are expert smokers, because all Hobbits love their pipe-weed. But some characters have skills in spite of what they are: for example, Frodo is a good talker, especially for a Hobbit. Sometimes, Tolkien uses these contrasts between a character's abilities and his race to make jokes, like when Sam blushes in self-consciousness as he recites the beginning of the Elven song The Fall of Gil-galad. Frankly, if we were Hobbits (in our dreams!), we would start to feel insulted that the norm everyone assumes for Hobbits is complete, bumbling stupidity. Every time a Hobbit shows any kind of skill with language or storytelling, everyone else stares at him like he's a talking fox. But Tolkien seems to be making a point here: anyone can excel and become better, regardless of their natural strengths and talents. After all, Frodo is our hero. No offense, Frodo.

## Questions About Strength and Skill

1. What strengths or skills do the Hobbits have that the other characters may not expect? How might it be advantageous for Frodo not to look strong or skilled on the outside?
2. How does Boromir's strength affect him? What problems are there in relying too much on your own strength to get you through difficult times?
3. How might Gandalf's strength and skill interfere with the development of the narrative of The Fellowship of the Ring? Why does Tolkien remove his character so early in the novel?

Book.Chapter.Paragraph) / (Prologue.Section.Paragraph)

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| At the time when this story begins the Bounders, as they were called, had been greatly increased. There were many reports and complaints of strange persons and creatures prowling about the borders, or over them: the first sign that all was not quite as it should be, and always had been except in tales and legends long ago. Few heeded the sign, and not even Bilbo had yet any notion of what it portended. (prologue.3.7) |

At the start of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we already know that the good people of Shire are under threat. The threat is so subtle that even *they* don't see it: "strange persons and creatures" have been trying to get into this peaceful and sheltered place. By portraying the threat to the Shire as a subtle one that we can see but the Shire's residents can't, Tolkien is increasing our suspense: what is heading towards the Shire? Why would the Shire be of particular interest to "strange persons and creatures"?

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| **Quote #2**  *The Road goes ever on and on Down from the door where it began. Now far ahead the Road has gone, And I must follow, if I can, Pursuing it with eager feet, Until it joins some larger way Where many paths and errands meet. And whither then? I cannot say.* (1.1.121) |

Bilbo sings this song as he sets out toward Rivendell in the first chapter of the novel. This song is notable because it foreshadows one of the major themes of the book. Bilbo's actions (picking up a magic ring in the goblin tunnels, sparing Gollum's life, leaving Bag End at eleventy-one) are all part of his individual experience – his Road, if you will. But these actions also have a huge effect on everything that goes on around him: the "larger way/Where many paths and errands meet." We have no way of judging what the ultimate effects of our deeds might be, good or bad. All we can do is "follow" the Road as best we can. This is why the cut-and-dried approach that the Hobbits take to morality is wrong: the world's events are so huge and complicated that we can't know for sure how our choices will effect the world around us. We have to do the best we can in the middle of uncertainty.

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| **Quote #3**  That name [Mordor] the Hobbits only knew in legends of the dark past, like a shadow in the background of their memories, but it was ominous and disquieting. It seemed that the evil power in Mirkwood had been driven out by the White Council only to reappear in greater strength in the old strongholds of Mordor. (1.2.10) |

Even in the Shire, Frodo starts to get news that all is not well with the world. The Shire is sheltered, but not *that* sheltered. We like the way that Tolkien keeps establishing continuity with the events of *The Hobbit*: the reason that Gandalf is drawn away from Bilbo and his Dwarf friends at a key moment in their anti-dragon quest is that he is off with the White Council fighting the Necromancer in the South. Now, that dark force is re-establishing itself once more in "the old strongholds of Mordor." Tolkien's obsession with the timelines of his own stories gives us another reason to respect the whole universe of the *Lord of the Rings*: Tolkien always wants to get it right, not only morally but also in terms of continuity.

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| **Quote #4**  As they listened [to Tom Bombadil], they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home. [...] It was not called the Old Forest without reason, for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it they lived yet, aging no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords. (1.7.41) |

We've argued that the Tom Bombadil chapters are a good set-up to the adventures to come: they give the Hobbits a chance to experience the world outside the Shire without the safety net of the rest of the Fellowship. At the same time, this sudden digression into the ancient history of the Old Forest does seem a little tangential. Why do you think Tolkien includes Tom Bombadil and Old Man Willow? How does Tom Bombadil provide a larger context to Sauron and the events of Middle-earth? How does Tom Bombadil's sense of time differ from that of all the other characters? What purpose does he seem to play in starting out the series as a whole?

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| **Quote #5**  "Hey there!" cried Tom, glancing towards him with a most seeing look in his shining eyes. "Hey! Come Frodo, there! Where be you a-going? Old Tom Bombadil's not as blind as that yet. Take off your golden ring! Your hand's more fair without it. Come back! Leave your game and sit down beside me! We must talk a while more, and think about the morning." (1.7.60-1) |

What do *you* think Tom Bombadil is? Why does the Ring have no power over him? What keeps him free of its influence? Why does Tom Bombadil get a free pass as far as Sauron's evil is concerned? Can you imagine anything that would threaten Tom, or is he invincible?

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| **Quote #6**  At last Frodo spoke with hesitation. "I believed that you were a friend before the letter came," he said, "or at least I wished to. You have frightened me several times, tonight, but never in the way that servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand." (1.10.85) |

Frodo's weird logic here is that, *because* Aragorn is frightening, he must be a good guy. Bad guys would seem nicer but be crueler, he feels. What do you think of the idea that evil likes to appear good? Are there examples in the *Lord of the Rings* of enemies who seem fair and are foul? After all, many of the agents of Sauron whom they meet on the road to Rivendell actively look evil: consider arrogant-looking Bill Ferny and his goblin-faced southern friend. And of course, the Ringwraiths don't exactly seem friendly.

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| **Quote #7**  For the black horses can see, and the Riders can use men and other creatures as spies, as we found at Bree. They themselves do not see the world of light as we do, but our shapes cast shadows in their minds, which only the noon sun destroys; and in the dark they perceive many signs and forms that are hidden from us: then they are most to be feared. And at all times they smell the blood of living things, desiring and hating it. Senses, too, there are other than sight or smell. We can feel their presence – It troubled our hearts, as soon as we came here, and before we saw them; they feel ours more keenly. (1.11.116) |

At last, we find out something useful about how the Ringwraiths see the world; though, how Aragorn knows these things, we can't imagine. We doubt the Ringwraiths are volunteering information about desiring and hating the blood of living things. In the moral system of *Lord of the Rings*, it seems as though the worlds of dark and light are actually separate: the Ring draws Frodo briefly into the world of the dark, which makes him invisible in the world of the light. Are there other characters that seem to occupy both the light and dark worlds? How do you think the two are different?

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| **Quote #8**  "As the Power grows, its proved friends will also grow, and the Wise, such as you and I, may with patience come at last to direct its courses, to control it. We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends. There need not be, there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means. (2.2.156) |

In Saruman's speech to Gandalf attempting to tempt him to the dark side, there are several classic signs that he's gone evil. First of all, the whole idea of progress for the sake of Rule and especially *Order* sounds distinctly authoritarian. Second, buried in all of his fine talk, Saruman is claiming that the end justifies the means: "there would not be, any real change in our designs, only in our means." But what possible goal could justify joining Sauron and turning on all of his friends? Third, Saruman is already planning to "come at last to [...] control" the Power he plans to join; in other words, he wants to betray Sauron before he's even finished joining him. Saruman's evil is spectacularly easy to see through. Do we see any more successful deceptions over the course of the novels?

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| **Quote #9**  "And now we must enter the Golden Wood, you say. But of that perilous land we have heard in Gondor, and it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed."   "Say not *unscathed*, but if you say *unchanged,* then maybe you will speak the truth," said Aragorn. "But lore wanes in Gondor, Boromir, if in the city of those who once were wise they now speak evil of Lothlórien [...] Perilous indeed [...] fair and perilous; but only evil need fear it, or those who bring some evil with them." (2.6.53-54) |

We're getting some serious foreshadowing at this point that something is wrong with Boromir: his reluctance to enter Lothlórien is certainly a bad sign. But we are also intrigued by Aragorn's claim that the only evil on Lothlórien comes from the outsiders who visit there. Is it possible for an Elf to turn evil? Are there examples in *The Hobbit* or the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy of such a thing? Or is evil just absolutely genetically incompatible with Elfhood? If you are evil, do you just *stop* being an Elf? What do you become, then?

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| **Quote #10**  Suddenly Boromir came and sat beside him. "Are you sure that you do not suffer needlessly?" he said. "I wish to help you. You need counsel in your hard choice. Will you not take mine?"  "I think I know already what counsel you would give, Boromir," said Frodo. "And it would seem like wisdom but for the warning of my heart." (2.10.24-5) |

Boromir tempts Frodo to take the easy way out of his troubles, to bring the Ring to Gondor and let it be used as Boromir wishes. But Frodo is (a) not that stupid, and (b) starting to learn to make his own decisions. Frodo began this quest needing counsel at every turn. When he travels through the Old Forest with Merry, Pippin, and Sam, he needs Tom Bombadil to save him from his bad decisions not just once, but *twice*. Frodo leans on Gandalf while he can. But then, Galadriel refuses to act as a counselor for Frodo. And now, Boromir offers Frodo counsel that he rejects. Frodo is developing the self-reliance he needs to go into Mordor with Sam, just the two of them. This confrontation with willful Boromir, who wants to take Frodo's difficult decisions away from him, is a key milestone in Frodo's development into a determined and decisive character in his own right.

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| **Quote #11**  "We of Minas Tirith have been staunch through long years of trial. We do not desire the power of Wizard-lords, only strength to defend ourselves, strength in a just cause. And behold! in our need chance brings to light the Ring of Power. It is a gift, I say; a gift to the foes of Mordor. It is mad not to use it, to use the power of the Enemy against him. The fearless, the ruthless, these alone will achieve victory. What could not Aragorn do? Or if he refuses, why not Boromir? The Ring would give me power of Command. How I would drive the hosts of Mordor, and all men would flock to my banner!" (2.10.36) |

In one dense paragraph, we see an excellent example of someone starting with good intentions and going straight to an evil place. Boromir is right to long for something to help Gondor. As the country bordering Mordor, the Gondorians pay a heavier price than everyone else to keep Middle-earth safe from Sauron. But Boromir quickly goes from "defend[ing] ourselves" to victory, and then to "the power of Command" for Boromir himself. We wonder what he imagines will happen after he drives "the hosts of Mordor" out: will all of those men who "flock to [his] banner" conquer the rest of Middle-earth? Does he want to be King of the world? Like Saruman, Boromir justifies seizing the Ring using an abstract ideal. For Saruman, that ideal is knowledge; for Boromir, it is strength. Clearly, Tolkien has taken to heart the old saying that the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

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| **Quote #12**  Horsemen were galloping on the grass of Rohan; wolves poured from Isengard. From the havens of Harad ships of war put out to sea; and out of the East Men were moving endlessly: swordsmen, spearmen, bowmen upon horses, chariots of chieftains and laden wains. All the power of the Dark Lord was in motion. Then turning south again he beheld Minas Tirith. Far away it seemed, and beautiful: white-walled, many towered, proud and fair upon its mountain-seat; its battlements glittered with steel, and its turrets were bright with many banners. Hope leaped in [Frodo's] heart. But against Minas Tirith was set another fortress, greater and more strong. Thither, eastward, unwilling his eye was drawn. It passed the ruined bridges of Osgiliath, the grinning gates of Minas Morgul, and the haunted Mountains, and it looked upon Gorgoroth, the valley of terror in the Land of Mordor. (2.10.54) |

After his confrontation with Boromir, Frodo climbs Amon Hen and looks over what appears to be the whole of Middle-earth; Galadriel wasn't joking when she said that the One Ring has made his sight keener. This moment just before the breaking of the Fellowship reminds the reader of what is at stake. Because*The Fellowship of the Ring* is character-focused, and because the Company has been trying to keep their business secret and private, we haven't gotten very much perspective on what is currently happening in the world beyond what they experience for themselves. This panoramic view of southern Middle-earth shows all of the doings and activities of Sauron. Middle-earth is caught up in a world war, and Frodo's decision to take the Ring straight to Mordor is a central part of it. His individual actions will have an effect on everything he sees before him in this scene. By stopping the action to give us a snapshot of the current state of affairs in Middle-earth, Tolkien is ramping up the suspense by reminding us what is at stake in Frodo's decision to ditch the Company and take the Ring quest right to Sauron's door.

Friendship theme

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| **Quote #1**  Bilbo drew his hand over his eyes. "I am sorry," he said. "But I feel so queer. And yet it would be a relief in a way not to be bothered with it anymore. It has been growing on my mind lately. Sometimes I have felt it was like an eye looking at me. [...]  "Then trust mine," said Gandalf. "It is quite made up. Go away and leave it behind. Stop possessing it. Give it to Frodo, and I will look after him." (1.1.105-6) |

There's some serious foreshadowing in Bilbo's words about the ring – that it "has been growing on [his] mind," and that it is "like an eye looking at [him]." Clearly, this is an evil ring with mind-control powers. But besides Tolkien's skill at setting up the plot of the rest of the novel, this section is intriguing because of the friendship it portrays between Gandalf and Bilbo. Without Gandalf's help, Bilbo would never have been able to give up the ring willingly to Frodo. And later in the books, without Sam's support, Frodo would never be able to bear the burden of the ring. Even in this early scene, we can see that the bonds of friendship are one weapon against the evil powers of the ring.

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| **Quote #2**  But Sméagol returned alone; and he found that none of his family could see him, when he was wearing the ring. […] He became sharp-eyed and keen-eared for all that was hurtful. The ring had given him power according to his stature. […] He took to thieving, and going about muttering to himself, and gurgling in his throat. So they called him*Gollum*, and cursed him, and told him to go far away; and his grandmother, desiring peace, expelled him from the family and turned him out of her hole. (1.2.98) |

Once Sméagol commits his sin of murdering Déagol, he immediately starts living a cursed life. We can't be sure what Sméagol was like before seeing the ring, since Gandalf specifies that he "*became* sharp-eyed [...] for all that was hurtful." Sméagol is twisted and corrupted by the ring; and yes, it's his own fault, since he murdered his friend to have the ring. But at the same time, if the ring hadn't appeared in front of Sméagol at that precise moment, perhaps he *wouldn't* have committed murder and become the Gollum we all know and despise today. It's such strange chance that Déagol happens to fish out the ring right then, on Sméagol's birthday, just at the right time to tempt Sméagol into ruining his life. No wonder Gandalf goes on to say that "it is a sad story" (1.2.103): Sméagol's fate (much like Frodo's own) is both cruel and unasked-for.

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| **Quote #3**  "If you don't come back, sir, then I shan't, that's certain," said Sam. "*Don't you leave him!* they said to me. *Leave him!* I said. *I never mean to. I am going with him, if he climbs to the Moon, and if any of those Black Riders try to stop him, they'll have Sam Gamgee to reckon with,* I said. They laughed." (1.4.21-2) |

The basis of Sam's loyalty to Frodo is a bit ambiguous: he promises Frodo that he'll follow him no matter where Frodo might go, and that he'll die if Frodo dies. But they are not social equals: Sam is Frodo's servant. So is Sam's loyalty to Frodo the loyalty of a friend to a friend? Or of a servant to a master? Does the nature of that loyalty change over the course of the novels? Do they become more like equals as they continue on their quest? Or does Sam continue to think of Frodo as his superior?

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| **Quote #4**  "But it does not seem that I can trust anyone," said Frodo.  Sam looked at him unhappily. "It all depends on what you want," put in Merry. "You can trust us to stick to you through thick and thin – to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours – closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo. Anyway, there it is. We know most of what Gandalf has told you. We know a good deal about the Ring. We are horribly afraid – but we are going with you, or following you like hounds." (1.5.71-2) |

After Frodo discovers that Merry, Sam, Pippin, and Fatty all know about the Ring and intend to help him with his quest as best they can, he feels deeply shaken. But Merry insists that they will stick by him. If Frodo won't let them come with him, they will follow him "like hounds." This show of loyalty is deeply moving. Clearly, Merry and Pippin's friendship for Frodo is what leads them to Rivendell in the first place.

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| **Quote #5**  "With your leave, Mr. Frodo, I'd say *no*! This Strider here, he warns and he says take care; and I say *yes* to that, and let's begin with him. He comes out of the Wild, and I never heard no good of such folk. He knows something, that's plan, and more than I like; but it's no reason why we should let him go leading us out into some dark place far from help, as he puts it." (1.10.30) |

Sam has an instinct to protect his friends and himself by not trusting too quickly, while Frodo appears more likely to have faith in strangers – he opens up to Aragorn (a.k.a. Strider) pretty quickly, after all. Are there other examples in the series in which Frodo is quicker to trust than Sam? Are there examples of the opposite? What do these contrasts show us about the differences in Frodo and Sam's characters?

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| **Quote #6**  When he had dressed, Frodo found that while he slept the Ring had been hung about his neck on a new chain, light but strong. Slowly he dew it out. Bilbo put out his hand. But Frodo quickly drew back the Ring. [...]  The music and singing round them seemed to falter, and a silence fell. Bilbo looked quickly at Frodo's face and passed his hand across his eyes. "I understand now," he said. "Put it away! I am sorry: sorry you have come in for this burden: sorry about everything. (2.1.127-8) |

This confrontation between the old Ring-bearer, Bilbo, and the new Ring-bearer, Frodo, is clearly necessary to convince Bilbo of exactly how evil the Ring truly is. Without seeing the Ring's effects with his own two eyes, he cannot believe that the Ring can turn an adopted father and son against one another, for example. But once Bilbo sees the Ring again, he gives Frodo a heartfelt apology that, frankly, Frodo deserves: he didn't ask to carry this Ring, though he has to. And the fate that has brought the Ring to him will forever change him.

**Home: Theme**

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| **Quote #1**  At no time had Hobbits of any kind been warlike, and they had never fought among themselves. [...]  Nonetheless, ease and peace had left this people still curiously tough. They were, if it came to it, difficult to daunt or kill; and they were, perhaps, so unwearyingly fond of good things not least because they could, when put to it, do without them, and could survive rough handling by grief, foe, or weather in a way that astonished those who did not know them well and looked no further than their bellies and their well-fed faces. (prologue.1.17-8) |

Tolkien uses the Prologue of *The Fellowship of the Ring* to establish what's normal for Hobbits so that we get a strong sense of contrast between the Shire and Frodo's later adventures with the Ring. Hobbits are even more peaceful – much more peaceful – than humans are, so we know that it has to be something really extraordinary to get a Hobbit to leave his home. This juxtaposition between the extreme peace that Frodo is coming from and the danger into which he will go raises our appreciation for the aura of danger and risk that Tolkien is trying to create for the world of *Lord of the Rings*. But we also get foreshadowing that Frodo will be equal to his tasks: Hobbits are "difficult to daunt or kill" and can "survive rough handling by grief, foe, or weather." Clearly, those skills are going to come in handy as this adventure unfolds.

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| **Quote #2**  "You see: Mr. Drogo, he married poor Miss Primula Brandybuck. She was our Mr. Bilbo's first cousin on the mother's side (her mother being the youngest of the Old Took's daughters); and Mr. Drogo was his second cousin. So Mr. Frodo is his first *and* second cousin, once removed either way, as the saying is, if you follow me. And Mr. Drogo was staying at Brandy Hall with his father-in-law, old Master Gorbadoc, as he often did after his marriage (him being mighty partial to his vittles, and old Gorbadoc keeping a mighty generous table); and he went out *boating*on the Brandywine River; and he and his wife were drownded, and poor Mr. Frodo only a child and all." (1.1.14) |

The Gaffer's homely accent and relative kindness towards the people he's gossiping about ("*poor* Miss Primula Brandybuck," "*poor* Mr. Frodo") makes this feel like a pleasant and cozy scene (even if there *is* a lot of talking going on behind other people's backs). What also makes these early scenes in the Shire seem so homey is the Hobbits' obsession with family history and lineage. The fact that the Gaffer knows exactly how Frodo is related to Bilbo shows a high level of intimacy among all the different people living in the Shire. They don't just know one another; they know everyone's fathers and grandfathers and even great-grandfathers like they know their own. To achieve that degree of mutual familiarity, you'd have to have a small community in which no one ever leaves or arrives from elsewhere: in other words, the Shire.

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| **Quote #3**  A few creatures came and looked at them when the fire had died away. A fox passing through the wood on business of his own stopped several minutes and sniffed.  "Hobbits!" he thought. "Well, what next? I have heard of strange doings in this land, but I have seldom heard of a Hobbit sleeping out of doors under a tree. Three of them! There's something mighty queer behind this." He was quite right, but he never found out any more about it. (1.3.58-9) |

This moment from the perspective of a random, passing fox is totally bizarre: we can't think of any other scene in the *Lord of the Rings* series that takes the perspective of an animal. This may be a fantasy novel, but it's not the talking-animal kind of fantasy. Still, this brief shift of perspective allows the narrator to remind us that it's really, *really* weird for Hobbits to leave their homes – so weird that even passing foxes notice.

**Fear**

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| **Quote #1**  "Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was *meant* to find the Ring, and *not* by its maker. In which case you also were *meant* to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought." (1.2.116) |

When Gandalf speculates about what force brought the One Ring to Bilbo at just the right time, he decides that Frodo was *meant* to have it. Whether he's talking about a divine power or fate, it's unclear. What matters is that Gandalf wants to reassure Frodo by telling him this whole Ring thing is part of a larger plan of the universe. Would it make you more or less afraid to feel that it was your fate to carry the One Ring? Would you find it comforting to know that it was your destiny to go up against Sauron, instead of random chance or bad luck? Why or why not?

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| **Quote #2**  I've only just remembered, sir. It was like this: when I go back to our hole yesterday evening with the key, my dad, he said to me: *Hallo, Sam!* he says. *I thought you were away with Mr. Frodo this morning. There's been a strange customer asking for Mr. Baggins and Bag End, and he's only just gone. I've sent him on to Bucklebury. Not that I liked the sound of him. He seemed mighty put out, when I told him Mr. Baggins had left his home for good. Hissed at me, he did. It gave me quite a shudder*. *What sort of fellow was he*? says I to the Gaffer. *I don't know,* says he; *but he wasn't a Hobbit. He was tall and black like, and he stooped over me. I reckon it was one of the Big Folk from foreign parts. He spoke funny*. (1.3.91) |

This is the first direct image we get of one of the Black Riders: the Gaffer describes one to Sam. He finds this "strange customer" frightening for obvious reasons: the rider hisses at him, and gets really angry when the Gaffer tells him that Frodo has gone to Bucklebury. But the Gaffer also finds it frightening that he can't describe the rider: his face is hidden, and he speaks "funny." The Gaffer can't identify or classify the rider, which makes him frightening. In fact, it is the Ringwraiths' formlessness that makes them intimidating to everyone: they have no definite shape, so they are impossible to pin down or categorize mentally. All we can do is imagine what they look like (at least, until Frodo puts his ring on), and what we imagine is pretty stinkin' terrifying.

**Strength and Skill**

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| **Quote #1**  [T]he old man was Gandalf the Wizard, whose fame in the Shire was due mainly to his skill with fires, smokes, and lights. His real business was far more difficult and dangerous, but the Shire-folk knew nothing about it. To them he was just one of the 'attractions' at the Party. Hence the excitement of the Hobbit-children. 'G for Grand!' they shouted, and the old man smiled. They knew him by sight though he only appeared in Hobbiton occasionally and never stopped long; but neither they nor any but the oldest of their elders had seen one of his fireworks displays - they now belonged to the legendary past. (1.1.27) |

We first meet Gandalf in *The Hobbit*, when he is instrumental in helping Bilbo and his Dwarf friends find the dragon treasure they seek. His appearance at the outset of this book is important because it highlights how out-of-the-way the Shire truly is. In some ways, the Shire seems almost like Eden: the people who live there are completely innocent of the broader world. They suffer very little crime, and life seems lavish, easy, and good. The Shire-folk are so sheltered that they know nothing of Gandalf's "real business," which is "far more difficult and dangerous" than making fireworks. We get hints of Gandalf's skill as a Wizard in this passage, but we don't know the full extent of his abilities. This deliberate withholding increases our sense of suspense over exactly how much Gandalf might be capable of.

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| **Quote #2**  "A mortal, Frodo, who keeps one of the Great Rings, does not die, but he does not grow or obtain more life, he merely continues, until at last every minute is a weariness. And if he often uses the Ring to make himself invisible, he *fades*: he becomes in the end invisible permanently, and walks in the twilight under the eye of the dark power that rules the Rings. Yes, sooner or later – later, if he is strong or well-meaning to begin with, but neither strength nor good purpose will last – sooner or later the dark power will devour him." (1.2.43) |

When it comes to the Ring, it truly does not matter whether or not you are a good person: eventually, it will overwhelm you with evil, no matter how hard you try to resist. Compare the overwhelming challenge of an evil ring that *cannot* be resisted forever, that*possesses* its carrier, with the relatively more manageable threat of J.K. Rowling's Horcruxes. In the Harry Potter series (spoiler alert!), the evil Wizard Voldemort puts a piece of his soul into seven things, including one ring (sound familiar?). But while Voldemort's soul can tempt or twist people's minds, possession is not inevitable. Rowling's Horcruxes seem like a reference back to Tolkien's Rings of Power, but the Rings of Power are much more, well, powerful. The stakes seem higher in the *Lord of the Rings* series than for Harry Potter. What differences do you see between the two series? How does the world of Harry Potter seem influenced by the *Lord of the Rings*?