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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
1987 Volume II: Epic, Romance and the American Dream

Glory Road: Epic Romance as an Allegory of 20th Century History; The World Through the Eyes of J.R.R. Tolkien

Guide for Curriculum Unit 87.02.11
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The world of J.R.R. Tolkien is a wonderful medium to awaken interest in fantasy in the world of literature. This area is especially appealing to middle school students. This unit centers itself around “The Hobbit” (Tolkien’s first work); this was the beginning of Tolkien’s creation of a fantastic world, later labeled Middle-Earth. In this unit, I discuss allegory. However, the teacher, with all his/her fine skills, can turn the lesson to an investigation into many literary techniques. Some of them are: (1) author as story-teller pure and simple; (2) author as borrower of source material; (3) fantasy versus science fiction in literature; (4) the novel versus the film; and (5) the use of alliteration, characterization and creative plot invention.

The question of good vs. evil is a theme in which Tolkien masterfully indulges throughout “The Hobbit” and he expands it in the trilogy for which he is famous. Students can discover how the creative process is influenced by history and events, and then it shows up in the story by the author’s exposure to his times. In order to bring “The Hobbit” into the classroom a VHS cassette (video) of this story is available. There is also a 16mm. film of the same. Lessons and classroom activities are included within the unit’s text. There are also the appropriate bibliographies.

(Recommended for English literature classes, grades 6-8; Special Education Reading classes, grades 6-8; and Reading classes, grades 7-8, level I or II)

Key Words

Romance Literature Tolkien J.R.R. The Hobbit

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