

The Hobbit Discussion Questions

(The following Questions have been adapted from the excellent [Random House Teacher's Guide](#) for The Hobbit)

Chapter 1

1. What does the word hobbit make you think of? (Note: The possibilities include rabbit, hobby, Babbit, habit, and hob. The word is probably best seen as a blend of rabbit and hob, an obsolete British word meaning "a rustic, peasant" or "sprite, elf.") How does Bilbo resemble a rabbit in this chapter? When you finish the book, ask yourself if he still reminds you of one.
2. What is it about adventures that causes Bilbo's Tookish and his competing Baggins sides to reemerge? Explain those two sides. Can you relate to Bilbo's feelings of ambivalence? Do you think everyone has similar "Tookish" and "Baggins" sides to their personalities?
3. Why do you think Tolkien "grouped" some of his characters' names (e.g. Kili & Fili, Bifur, Bofur & Bombur) while others (e.g. Thorin, Bilbo, Gandalf) remain unique? What might the significance of this be?

Chapter 2

3. Begin paying close attention to the way that Tolkien uses the presence and absence of the character of Gandalf to develop both the plot and the character of Bilbo Baggins. Why is it important that Gandalf is not present when the expedition meets the trolls?
4. Myths, legends, and folktales often reflect the values of a given culture. At this point in the story, what can you infer about the character traits that Tolkien considers positive? What character traits are viewed in a negative light? What is more important at this point: intelligence or physical strength?

Chapter 3

5. What is the difference between the ways Bilbo and the dwarves react to Rivendell? How does Elrond feel about the expedition, and what does he say about the dwarves' love of gold and the wickedness of dragons? What values are important to the elves?

Chapter 4

6. What does Tolkien tell us about goblins? Why do you think he does not give specific details about their appearance? Discuss what you think goblins look like, and explain which details in the book give you that idea.
7. Discuss the role that music plays in the development of the different magical beings. Compare the songs sung by the dwarves, the elves, and the goblins. How do the songs differ, and what they reveal about the creatures that sing them?
8. Consider the following quote: "It is not unlikely that [goblins] invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once." What is Tolkien suggesting by linking his fantasy world to the reader's modern world? What commentary is he making about the use of military technology?

Chapter 5

9. How are Bilbo and Gollum alike? Can you call Gollum evil? Discuss the concept that Gollum is the negative side of Bilbo with which Bilbo must come to terms before he can achieve his identity. What skills does Bilbo show in dealing with Gollum? Should Gollum be considered a sympathetic character?

Chapter 6

10. How would you describe the character traits of the dwarves? Why doesn't Bilbo tell them about his ring at first? What do you think might have happened if he had told them?
11. At this point in the story, how much of an asset does Gandalf seem to be? Why doesn't Gandalf do more to "save the day"? Are his powers limited, or is he intentionally refraining from using them? Why is it necessary to the story that he leave the expedition in the next chapter (7)?

Chapter 7

12. Discuss Beorn's character. What are his virtues and vices? How does Bilbo come to understand him? In what way is Beorn similar to the beauty-and-the-beast archetype?

Chapter 8

13. Discuss Mirkwood. Is the forest evil? Consider the enchanted stream—what other objects in myth, legend and folktales does it recall? Why are those objects to be avoided...and why, despite warnings, do characters tend to fall victim to them? What symbolic purpose do you think these sorts of enchanted objects might serve?

14. After Gandalf leaves, who do you think should have become the leader of the expedition? What makes the expedition lose hope...and why is their despair unjustified?

15. Why does Bilbo tell the dwarves about his magic ring? What does his reluctance to do so tell us?

Chapter 9

16. Why does the Elvenking imprison the dwarves? Why won't Thorin tell the Elvenking what his mission is? What characteristics does his refusal reveal about him? Do you think these characteristics are true for all dwarves or only for Thorin?

17. Is Bilbo a burglar now? What, if any, are his ethical dilemmas about stealing? How do the words burglar and thief differ in connotation? Is Bilbo's type of burglary different from stealing?

18. The escape plan is completely Bilbo's. How good is it? Can you think of an alternate plan? How much does it depend on luck? Does he deserve this luck?

19. At this point in the book do you think the dwarves have treated Bilbo fairly? Why do you think Bilbo is loyal to them? What does his loyalty reveal about his character?

Chapter 10

20. Does Thorin seem to be changing as he gets closer and closer to the mountain? How?

Chapter 11

21. In what way does Bilbo show that he has more spirit left than the dwarves?

Chapter 12

22. Describe the characteristics of dragons. What is the dragon spell, and why are dwarves so susceptible to it? (Note: In *The Hobbit* Tolkien reimagines the traditional motif of the cursed dragon-hoard. It's not so much that the curse is inherent as it is that treasure brings out the evil and foolish side of dwarves, elves, and men.)

Chapter 13

23. Why does Bilbo keep the Arkenstone? How does he justify his decision to withhold its discovery from Thorin? Does Bilbo have a right to the stone? What does the fact that Bilbo is willing to give up gold and jewels to have it suggest about the worth of the Arkenstone? Can you think of any traditional myths or parables about similar objects that Tolkien may be alluding to? What might be the symbolic importance of the stone?

Chapter 14

24. Characterize Bard and the Master. Who speaks more convincingly? What does their appearance suggest about them? Explain the reason for Bard's pessimism. Who has more courage? Who displays more leadership? Do you believe that some people are natural leaders? Can this ability be inherited?

25. Why does the Elvenking set out from his halls for Esgaroth? What does this tell you about the value he places on treasure?

Chapter 15

26. From the very beginning, Bilbo has assumed that the climax of the adventure would be the recovery of the treasure. Then he realizes that Smaug must also be dealt with. Now he finds that even Smaug's death does not end the adventure. What do you think Tolkien is trying to say about the purpose of trials and tribulations in a person's life?

27. How has the treasure changed Thorin?

Chapter 16

28. Why does Thorin reject Roac's advice?

29. Giving up the Arkenstone is Bilbo's noblest action. Why does he do it? What does it say about his values and ethics? Why does he return to the Mountain? Would you have returned to the dwarves or stayed with Bard and the elves?

Chapter 17

30. Consider the Elvenking's statement: "Long will I tarry, ere I begin this war for gold." Do you think these are wise words? Is gold worth fighting over?

31. Trace Thorin's moral degeneration. What causes him to change? In what ways does he end up being similar to Smaug? Why do you think he is so easily corrupted?

32. Before the arrival of the goblins and wargs, who are the "good guys" and who are the "bad guys" in the standoff around the mountain? How does your opinion change when the goblins arrive?

33. Which would be a greater tragedy: the killing of the armies of men, elves, and dwarves by the goblins, or a war between men, elves, and dwarves?

Chapter 18

34. "There is more in you of good than you know, child of the kindly West. Some courage...and some wisdom, blended in measure. If more of us valued food and cheer and song above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world." Discuss Bilbo's character now that his adventure is completed. Why does he refuse the treasure? Why is he weary of his adventure? How has he proven himself to be a hero in spite of his lack of traditionally "heroic" attributes like strength and assertiveness?

35. Examine the final views we get of Thorin on his deathbed and in his tomb. Is his quest fulfilled? Why is his death necessary? What lesson does he learn? Does he deserve our respect or admiration? Is it right to bury him with the Arkenstone?

36. Examine in detail the various demands and offers made by Bard and the dwarves (and the elves). How does the final solution match what each party wants and deserves? What is the difference between Dain's gift and Thorin's promises?

Chapter 19

37. Gandalf exclaims to Bilbo: "Something is the matter with you! You are not the hobbit that you were." In what way has Bilbo changed? (Don't forget to include the ability and desire to make poetry.) What does he gain from his adventure? How has his attitude toward home altered from the beginning of the book? Is it necessary to leave a place before you can truly appreciate it? Can you relate Bilbo's experience to your own life in any way?

38. At the end of the book, Gandalf makes the following comment: "You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?" If "mere luck" is not responsible for Bilbo's success, what is?

39. Bilbo is pleased that he is "only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" Why is this a comforting perspective? How does viewing oneself as a small part of a larger whole impact the way a person interacts with the world around him?

40. Why didn't Tolkien just end the book after the battle? What is the purpose of devoting two chapters to Bilbo's return? How do these chapters help develop the character and/or important themes?

Works Cited:

Lundquist, Molly. "Hobbit (Tolkien)." *LitLovers*, 2020, www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/9586-hobbit-tolkien?start=3.