

A Wrinkle in Time Study Guide

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*For the novel by
Madeleine L'Engle*



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Synopsis

It is a dark and stormy night. Alone in her attic bedroom, Meg Murry lies awake worrying about the storm, her troubles at school, and her many faults. When she joins her brother, Charles Wallace, and their mother in the kitchen for a midnight snack, they are interrupted by the arrival a strangely dressed woman. The stranger, Mrs. Whatsit, upsets Mrs. Murry when she announces, “There *is* such a thing as a tesseract” before hurrying out the door.

Two years earlier, Meg’s father disappeared while experimenting with tesseracts. Mrs. Whatsit, and her friends Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, know where Mr. Murry is, and they enlist Meg, Charles Wallace, and their friend Calvin O’Keefe to help rescue him.

Traveling by tesseract, the three children are taken on a journey through space to the distant planet of Camazotz where a shadow of evil—a “Black Thing”—has enslaved the population. Though Mr. Murry is found and freed from his prison, Charles Wallace is ensnared by a powerful enemy known only as IT.

Because she shares a close relationship with Charles Wallace, only Meg can save him, but to do so she must rely on her faults and her weaknesses, and learn to trust when hope seems lost.

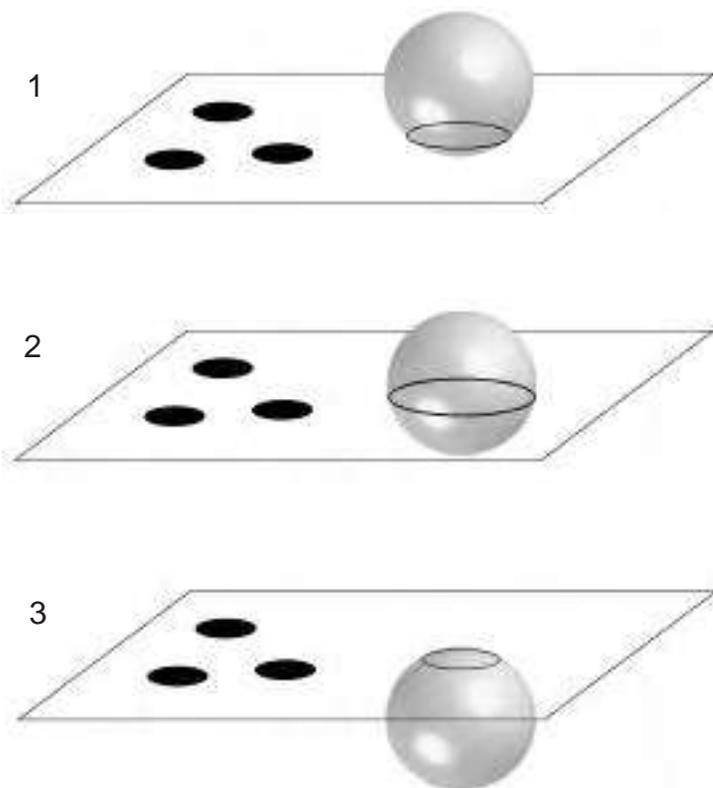
Although *A Wrinkle in Time* can be classified as science fiction, it also contains elements of fantasy, philosophy, Biblical truth, and a glimpse of the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil waged in a distant galaxy.

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The second dimension is a plane. It has length and width, but no height. Try this example: use a large sheet of paper as a representation of a two dimensional “world.” Cut a number of small circles from another sheet of paper and place them on this “world.” Imagine that these circles are the inhabitants of the two-dimensional world. Assuming that they have some means of mobility, it’s easy to see that these circles have much more freedom of movement than the residents of a one-dimensional world. They could conceivably move around and visit all their neighbors. Without the dimension of height, imagine how these circles must appear to each other.



Now imagine a three-dimensional object, such as a sphere, intersecting this two-dimensional world. To any of the circles living in that world, a sphere would appear as just another circle. (Fig. 1) But as the sphere moved down through their world, it would seem to mysteriously change its size. (Fig. 2, 3). Perhaps this is the reason Mrs. Whatsit can easily change her shape: she is a being from a higher dimension, but appears merely three-dimensional when she enters our three-dimensional world.



Now pick up one of the circles and put it down someplace else on the two-dimensional world. From the point of view of one of those inhabitants their circular friend would have seemed to disappear from one location only to magically reappear in another. Though this movement through “space” is completely normal to you, to

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the inhabitants of a two-dimensional world, it is virtually impossible because they have no conception of “up” or “down.”

In the same way, Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Whatsit use a higher dimension to easily transport Meg, Charles, and Calvin to another planet. Like the circle you moved, Meg, Charles, and Calvin moved through a dimension they did not understand to arrive at a location far from their starting point.

Allusion:

An *allusion* is a brief reference to a literary or historical person or event with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. Authors can add meaning to a story by drawing upon the thoughts and feelings a reader associates with the allusion.

Identify the original source the author alludes to in the following passages from *A Wrinkle in Time*.

1. “When shall we three meet again, / In thunder, lightning, or in rain,” came Mrs. Who’s voice. (Chapter 4)
2. The resonant voice rose and the words seemed to be all around them so that Meg felt that she could almost reach out and touch them: “*Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, . . .*” (Chapter 4)
3. Mrs. Who seemed to evaporate until there was nothing but the glasses, and then the glasses, too, disappeared. It reminded Meg of the Cheshire Cat. (Chapter 5)
4. Mrs. Who’s spectacles shone out at them triumphantly, “*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*” (Chapter 5)

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9. What “gifts” did each of the three Mrs. Ws give to the children? Complete the table below by listing each gift in the appropriate space.

	Calvin	Meg	Charles Wallace
Mrs. Whatsit			
Mrs. Who			
Mrs. Which			

10. Why does Mrs. Whatsit say that the danger is greatest for Charles Wallace?
11. In general terms, describe the appearance of the town on Camazotz and the behavior of its citizens. What is unusual about the boy bouncing the rubber ball?
12. What is the mother’s reaction when the children knock at the door to return the rubber ball?

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16. Read Matthew 25:14–28. The term “talent” found in this parable was originally a unit of weight and then later became a monetary unit. The modern-day usage of “talent” to refer to one’s innate abilities is derived from this original usage. What does this parable teach about how we should use our talents?

17. What talents do you think you have? If you aren’t sure, ask your parents or friends. How can you use your talents in a way that is pleasing to God?

18. Meg tells the Happy Medium that her anger helps her, because when she’s mad she hasn’t got room to be afraid. Later Mrs. Whatsit tells Meg, “Stay angry—you will need all your anger now.”
Can you think of a situation where being angry helped you? Can you think of another time when being angry was harmful? Write about these situations in two or three paragraphs.

19. Read Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:9, Romans 12:16–21, Ephesians 4:26–27. In one paragraph, summarize what these verses—taken together—teach about anger.

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14. Charles says that everyone on Earth is confused and unhappy because they all live separate, individual lives. However, on Camazotz there is no individuality. Everyone has submitted to IT. There is no suffering or unhappiness because their troubles are over once they let IT take over their minds and their lives. IT also kills anyone who feels pain or discomfort.

15. The spelling-machine operator fears being sent to IT, so IT must be something that elicits fear. Charles Wallace calls IT “the boss.” He also says that IT “calls ITself the Happiest Sadist.” He says that all individuality on Camazotz has been done away with, and now Camazotz is just one mind: IT. IT apparently controls all minds on the planet.

Dig Deeper:

16. Answers will vary. Early in the novel, Meg attributes her problems to being different from everybody else in school and in her family. She sees herself as the oddball. It might be particularly tempting for Meg to join a society where all problems are solved by making everyone all alike. While differences can create problems if we let them, we read in Romans 12:1–8 and 1 Corinthians 12 that we were all created different with different gifts, and those differences are what make the body of Christ function.

17. Answers will vary. Absence of pain or trouble is not the same thing as happiness. Some people remain happy even in the midst of great difficulties. Others have neither pain nor troubles and still are not happy.

18. Rather than having a trouble-free life, Jesus reminds his followers that they *will* have troubles (see John 16:33) but that they may also have peace. Troubles will never separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35–39) and the eternal glory we will achieve far outweighs these temporary troubles (2 Corinthians 4:17–18).

19. We should learn to see difficulties as opportunities for growth. The passage from Romans tells us that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope. The passage from James tells us to rejoice when we face different kinds of trials because it will test our faith and we will develop perseverance. The verses from 1 Peter tell us that we should not be surprised if we suffer grief because of trials we go through. We should remember that our faith is more precious than a trouble-free life and that our genuine faith will result in glory, praise, and honor when Jesus is revealed. Suffering and having the right attitude toward difficulties that come into our lives makes our faith stronger.

Chapters 9 & 10

Vocabulary:

1. hopeful / foreboding, fateful
2. exacerbated / relieved, alleviated
3. genial, gentle / acerbic, caustic
4. tolerating / hating, detesting
5. withstand, oppose, resist / yield, assent, accommodate
6. congeniality, sociability / hatred, aversion, horror

Questions:

1. He wore no glasses, which had been a trademark, his eyes seemed to look inward. He had grown a beard and his hair was long, almost to his shoulders, with a touch of gray. He looked like a shipwrecked sailor with an expression of suffering endurance on his face.

2. Charles says that to help her father Meg must surrender to IT.

3. Calvin remembers from his study of *The Tempest* at school that Ariel was stuck in a cloven pine and that it was the witch who put her there. Calvin told Charles, “You are like Ariel and IT is the witch who put you in there.” Mr. Murry is trapped in a tubular shaped column, like a pine, and Meg suggests that the quote applies to both Charles and her father.

4. Meg puts on Mrs. Who’s glasses and is able to pass through the wall into the cell with the transparent column. Apparently the glasses allow her to rearrange the atoms in the wall just as Charles had done earlier.

5. Meg expects everything to be all right once she reaches her father. (“Father will make it all right, Meg thought. Everything will be all right now.”) All her efforts had been wrapped up in finding him. After she’s found him, she realizes that their struggle is not over, and that he has no easy solutions to their predicament.

6. IT is a disembodied brain, somewhat larger than normal. IT is “completely revolting,” and “the most horrible, the most repellent thing” Meg had ever seen. IT emits a pulsing, overwhelming rhythm, and Meg struggles to avoid falling into this rhythm.