



# THE LORD OF THE RINGS *the fellowship of the ring study guide*

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for the novel by J.R.R. Tolkien



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## Synopsis

*The Fellowship of the Ring* begins where *The Hobbit* left off: with a quaint little hobbit named Bilbo Baggins who has happened to gain possession of a magic Ring. Bilbo is now 111 years old, but he doesn't look a day over 50, which many of his neighbors consider quite unfair. But Bilbo is not his old self; he feels stretched quite thin, he tells his friend, Gandalf the wizard, "like butter that has been scraped over too much bread." Bilbo decides to leave his home in the Shire to travel, and he gives his home, Bag End, and all his possessions to his nephew and heir, Frodo Baggins.

But it is difficult for Bilbo to leave the Ring. Bilbo wants it—it is *his*, after all—his precious. The echo in Bilbo's words and manner of the evil, loathsome creature who had last possessed the Ring awaken fear in Gandalf. What influence has it had on Bilbo? After much persuasion he convinces Bilbo to leave the Ring, but he warns Frodo to never wear it. And Gandalf goes in search of more information about this Ring of Frodo's.

What he learns brings horror to the young hobbit and the peaceful Shire. For the Ring is the One Ring, created by the Dark Lord Sauron in ages past to bring all people under his dominion. It corrupts all who wear it, and it longs for its maker. Lost for generations, the Ring was thought by the Dark Lord to have been destroyed, but Sauron now knows it has been found. And he knows who has it.

So begins the quest of a small hobbit to destroy a token of immense power and evil. Crossing Middle-earth with a few loyal friends, chased by the Ringwraiths—once-human servants of the Dark Lord—Frodo makes for Rivendell, the Elvish sanctuary of wisdom and power. There he hopes to deliver the Ring to those who can better use it and judge its fate.

Arriving mortally wounded, Frodo finds that others also have come to Rivendell, for the Dark Lord is again growing in strength and influence, and the people have come for counsel. In a council of the wisest of the four free races—Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits—Frodo discovers that he alone can dispose of the Ring—by delivering it to the source of its power, the land of the Dark Lord Sauron, and casting it into the fires in which it was made.

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With reluctance, but recognizing the need, Frodo accepts this charge, and the council gathers a company of nine, led by Gandalf, to go with Frodo—the Fellowship of the Ring. They accompany Frodo across perilous mountain passes and down into the ruins of ancient Dwarf halls deep in the roots of the mountains, but not all survive to reach the outer doors. And of those who survive, not all remain true.

Though they find comfort and rest for a time in the golden forest of Lothlórien, center of Elven power, they must eventually leave to continue their journey and decide how best to carry the Ring to its doom.

*The Lord of the Rings* continues in *The Two Towers* and *The Return of the King*.

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5. What happens in the Downs that delays the hobbits until sunset?
6. List three odd traits or powers of Tom Bombadil.
7. What confuses the hobbits' sense of direction in the Old Wood? What confuses their sense of direction as they cross the Downs?

### **Thinking About the Story:**

8. How might the Old Forest be seen as a metaphor for Frodo's situation or mindset since learning the true nature of the Ring?
9. As Frodo and his friends travel through the Forest, they begin to feel an oppressive stillness that weighs on them. In an attempt to encourage them, Frodo sings a song. Why does Frodo's attempt fail? What was wrong with the song?
10. It can be argued that Chapters 6–8 give very little plot progression. The hobbits leave their relatively sheltered life in the Shire, where life is plain, obvious, and



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simple, and things are pretty much as they appear. The Shire is a practical place. But when they leave the Shire, Frodo and his friends immediately step into what might be characterized as a malicious fairy tale—the very ground and plants are alive and malevolent. They are rescued from this natural evil by Tom Bombadil, who spends the next couple of days telling them stories of the deep past, of the history of the land and trees, of the rise and fall of men and kingdoms. After they leave Tom Bombadil, they travel through the Downs, a region of death and hoarded treasure, and once again have to be rescued by Tom.

Though there is some interesting narrative in this section, the plot all but stands still. What do you think the author was trying to accomplish in these chapters?

11. *Anthropomorphism* is the giving of human characteristics to a nonhuman object or creature. Mickey Mouse is an anthropomorphic mouse because he talks, acts, and dresses as a person would. What is the most striking example of anthropomorphism in these chapters? Give descriptive examples from the book to support your answer.
12. Examine the words and speech of Tom Bombadil. What makes his speech different from that of others in these chapters? See if you can write a sentence that sounds like Tom's speech.
13. In *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, edited by Humphrey Carpenter (1981, Houghton Mifflin), Tolkien writes

**Dig Deeper:**

14. Though Frodo and his friends are trying to get to Rivendell, they really have no clear, specific idea of how to get there; and since Gandalf has disappeared they are relatively leaderless. When they try to get their bearings in the Old Forest, they find the horizons obscured by haze:

[T]he autumn haze still prevented them from seeing much in other directions. . . . Northwards, where they looked most hopefully, they could see nothing that might be the line of the great East Road, for which they were making. They were on an island in a sea of trees, and the horizon was veiled.

They have a similar problem in the Downs, though they think they see their goal in sight:

Certainly the distances had now all become hazy and deceptive, but there could be no doubt that the Downs were coming to an end. A long valley lay below them winding away northwards, until it came to an opening between two steep shoulders. Beyond, there seemed to be no more hills. . . . The hobbits sprang to their feet in alarm, and ran to the western rim. They found that they were upon an island in the fog.

In both circumstances, Frodo and his friends try to guide themselves by their surroundings, “feeling their way by the rise and fall of the ground.” What would have solved their problems with losing their way?

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15. Have you ever been in a situation in which you knew your final goal, but you couldn't figure out how to get there, or in which you felt as if you were in a fog and feeling your way by "the rise and fall of the ground"—just trying to figure it out as you went? What did you do? How did you cope?
16. Read Judges 2:6–23, 3:5–6, 21:25. How were the experiences of the Israelites in these passages similar, in a spiritual and moral sense, to the hobbits' experiences in the Old Forest and the Downs?
17. Sometimes in our lives we can feel as if we are wandering spiritually or emotionally, much as Frodo and his friends wandered lost in the Forest and Downs in these chapters. Read Philippians 2:1–8; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17; James 1:22–25; and Hebrews 12:2, 3. How do these scriptures relate to such times in our lives? What maps or landmarks do they give us?



## *The Fellowship of the Ring Study Guide Answer Key*

19. Paraphrases will vary. In essence, Elrond is saying that Frodo is bound by oath to complete his mission and never turn back, or at least to never give up the Ring; the others are to accompany him freely as far as possible, but they are free to turn aside or return at any time. Gimli says a person that leaves when things get difficult is a coward or traitor. Elrond says a person should not pledge to something when he cannot see the consequences or the full situation. Gimli responds that a person may gain strength from such a pledge. Elrond says such a pledge may make a person despair and fail in a time of hardship. Personal answers will vary.

20. Interpretations may vary, but should be along these lines: If we make an oath or promise we are to keep it, period, particularly if the promise is made to God. Breaking a promise is sin, and God equates breaking a promise with being a fool. It is better to not vow than to make a vow and not keep it, says Solomon; but Jesus and James are more direct: don't vow, treat all your statements as oaths or pledges and keep your word.

21. Gandalf put the lives and well-being of his friends and companions before his own life. Though he seemed to have little hope of success ("I have never felt such a challenge. . . . It nearly broke me." "A Balrog. . . . Now I understand. . . . What an evil fortune! And I am already weary.") Gandalf stopped on the Bridge of Khazad-dûm between his friends and the Balrog and challenged the creature, giving the Company time to escape. Even as he fell, Gandalf was telling them to escape, clearly thinking of them even in the face of imminent death. Clearly he knowingly risked and ultimately gave up his life to save them and their mission.

22. Paraphrases will differ slightly, but should be similar to "Whatever the consequences, we have to go the way that is open to us." A simpler paraphrase might be "We have to do what we have to do." Personal assessments will vary concerning whether the Company had a choice in its routes after all this. They were forced off Caradhras by the weather, they were attacked by Wargs and needed to find immediate protection from them, and the creature in the lake forced them into Moria and buried them within, so the strongest case can be made for the group really having little choice in their route.

23. Answers will vary. Good arguments may be made for both positions. Accept well-reasoned responses.

### ***BOOK II, Chapters 6–10***

#### *Vocabulary:*

1. g; 2. e; 3. d; 4. i; 5. h; 6. j; 7. c; 8. a; 9. b; 10. f

#### *Questions:*

1. They believe that Gollum was somewhere in Moria and picked up their trail as they were going through. They fear that he is following them, drawn by the Ring.

2. Only Boromir seemed feel the need to tell anyone what his decision had been: "It need not be said that I refused to listen. The Men of Minas Tirith are true to their word." Gimli said that it seemed "my choice would remain secret and known only to myself." Answers will vary about Boromir's temptation. Considering later events, it would seem likely that he was tempted by the power of the Ring, the great things he could do with it.

3. Celeborn gives boats to the Company so they can float down the Anduin and so they do not have to decide yet whether to cross over the river and strike out for Mordor or travel to Minas Tirith.

4. Answers may vary slightly. Boromir comes to Frodo as he is trying to decide his course, and