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**What Dragons and Hobbits (and teachers) have in common; Or the
evils of hoarding:
How Tolkien's *The Hobbit* informs classroom practice**

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Spring 2016

Abstract

This thesis explores how to teach literature in a way that relies on true internal cognition from students and values their unique responses and identities. This is accomplished through an analyzing the theme of power distribution in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* alongside the educational theories of Paulo Freire, Maren Aukerman, Louise M. Rosenblatt and Lawrence Sipe to present a more equitable distribution of power when teaching texts within a classroom. The literary analyses work with pedagogical analysis to outline four pedagogical principles that can be used to inform a potential unit on *The Hobbit* for a 6th grade Language Arts class.

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Introduction

*“Go back?” he thought. “No good at all! Go sideways? Impossible! Go forward? Only thing to do! On we go!” So up he got, and trotted along with his little sword held in front of him and one hand feeling the wall, and his heart all of a patter and a pitter. -J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (p. 69)*

This thesis explores how to teach literature through educational practice that relies on internal cognitive processing from students, and values their unique responses and identities through classroom discussion. This is accomplished through an analysis of themes in Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* that work with educational theory to present a more equitable distribution of power when teaching texts within a classroom.

Chapter one provides a traditional analysis of Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* that is based on a common literary lens: Joseph Campbell’s *hero’s journey* “monomyth.” This chapter both summarizes important plot points in the story and follows the physical and personal growth of the main character, a hobbit named Bilbo Baggins. Chapter two analyzes *The Hobbit* by exploring the themes of greed, power, and hoarding that are emphasized by the story’s villain, a malevolent dragon called Smaug. This analysis works with the hero’s journey motif to present a more complex understanding of *The Hobbit*. Furthermore, the literary analysis of chapter two works with educational theories presented in chapters 3 and 4 to suggest a dialogic teaching model instead of a monologic model: student interpretation guides the classroom instead of teacher lecture and guidance toward a singular communal interpretation. The goal of combining these analyses is to present an approach to teaching texts, like *The Hobbit*, that emphasizes student interpretations through discussion and deemphasizes the amount of power a teacher holds.

Additionally, the literary analyses work to inform a potential unit on *The Hobbit* for a 6th grade Language Arts class. The fourth chapter of this thesis outlines four pedagogical principles of dialogic teaching and provides an example of how these principles inform the teaching of text. The literary analysis in the first two chapters acts as an example of foundational knowledge about *The Hobbit* that a teacher may use to contribute to classroom conversation, encourage discussion, and challenge ideas. Ultimately, all four chapters work together to illustrate how teachers can use dialogue to encourage the development of students' own interpretations to strengthen their own understandings of texts.

It is my hope that this thesis will help teachers recognize and rectify imbalances of power within the classroom, and instead choose to teach in such a way that values the growth and individuality of each and every student.

Chapter 1

The Hero's Journey

*....what is a hobbit? I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow natural leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). -J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (p. 2)*

Tolkien's *The Hobbit; or There and Back Again* follows the journey of a home-loving anthropomorphic creature, Bilbo Baggins of Bag End. Before the wizard Gandalf brings thirteen rabble-rousing dwarves to Bilbo's hobbit hole, our hero never thought much of adventure and spent his days eating tea cakes and smoking pipe tobacco. However, this story is not about a hobbit eating brunch and sipping afternoon tea but rather a tale of a home-loving hobbit who is pushed from his armchair into a journey of adventure and personal growth. After tales of dragon-gold and adventure stir the wander-lust in his chest (and after some prodding from Gandalf), Bilbo agrees to leave his cozy hobbit hole and help reclaim the Dwarf city of Erebor, also known as the Lonely Mountain.

Decades before Bilbo sets out on his quest, the dragon Smaug invaded the lavish riches of Erebor, killing scores of Dwarves and pushing others into exile. Smaug lusted for the endless piles of gold and precious gems that the dwarves had smithed and destroyed the lives as he devastated the mountain. The dragon spent his days guarding

his hoard in the heart of the Lonely Mountain. The dwarves hire Bilbo, upon Gandalf's recommendation, as their burglar to find a way steal into the mountain and help return Erebor to dwarf-kind. Only Bilbo has never burgled a day in his life. While the company of thirteen dwarves, Gandalf, and Bilbo venture toward the Lonely Mountain Bilbo's burglary skills are tested and honed against cave-trolls, goblins, and giant spiders. These adventures and encounters cause Bilbo to grow tremendously in courage, wisdom, and furtiveness during his journey, and he saves the many lives quite a time or two. Despite the excitement and vast mystery of the outside world, Bilbo never once ceases to long for the sound of his kettle boiling at Bag End.

The Hero's Journey

The story of *The Hobbit* easily falls into categories of other adventure stories as they align with Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey Monomyth. Campbell claims that the heroes of most journey stories fit a preset pattern of growth, challenge, and peril before returning home having gained knowledge, wealth, or power; the idea also suggests that many tales are part of one larger tale about life and growth. The Hero's Journey Monomyth is useful to identify common tropes in a text and thus elicit meaning from plot points but also allows readers to compare and contrast across texts as well as to consider possible literary/mythological allusions that may be present. For example, Campbell deems this the ultimate narrative archetype and attributes this monomyth to stories of Moses, Jesus, and Siddhārtha Gautama (Buddha) among others, and allows a clear way to make connections to important cultural stories:

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man. (Campbell, 1949, p. 30)

This formula can be easily applied to the story of Bilbo Baggins. Bilbo leaves his world of everyday comfort in his village of Hobbiton, and finds himself meeting trolls, elves, goblins, and dragons. Bilbo even is caught in a battle that defeats the evil goblins and wolves, and he returns home rich with gold and knowledge; so Bilbo can be painted as a mythological hero.

Departure

Campbell's Hero's Journey Monomyth is separated into 17 stages divided into three rites of passage, all of which may not apply to every journey narrative or myth as is the case with *The Hobbit*. However, several of these stages seem to apply directly to Bilbo's tale. Campbell's first rite of passage, "Departure", entails several elements that are directly applicable to Tolkien's work. This rite includes "The Call to Adventure," where something or someone marks a new period and urges the hero to undertake a task; this is then followed by a "Refusal of the Call" from the hero before an acceptance of the adventure. Next comes "Supernatural Aid" where the hero is encountered and is assisted by "a protective figure" (usually an old man) (Campbell, 1949, p. 69), and finally the hero is described as "Crossing the Threshold" from the known into the unknown and entering "The Belly of the Whale" or is "swallowed by the unknown, and would appear to have died" (Campbell, 1949, p. 90). These stages of "Departure" can be attributed to Bilbo's experience as the hero of the story.

As the story opens and enters into rising action, Campbell's stages of his first rite of passage fit nicely with the hobbit's activities; our hero is seen comfortable in his home, happily smoking a pipe and enjoying the plenty from his pantry and cellars. This is disrupted when the Gandalf the Grey (a wizard who looks like an old man) invites

thirteen Dwarves into Bilbo's home with the expectation that the hobbit will act as a burglar and help reclaim the Dwarf kingdom of Erebor from the dragon Smaug. Bilbo, who knows as little about burglary as he does dragons, is reasonably wary of such a task and does refuse the adventure. However, that night Bilbo's Tookish side from a line of adventurous ancestors is aroused. The dwarves sing of the dragon's mighty destruction, and talk of great battles; they sing of wondrous wealth and enchanting foreign lands. That night Bilbo falls asleep with these ballads ringing in his ears, and wakes up the next morning with a push out the door from the graying, mysterious enchanter Gandalf. He finds himself excitedly crossing over from his familiar home in the shire into the unfamiliar and most perilous wild; almost immediately after Bilbo is out of the Shire, he experiences the gluttony of cave trolls as well as the enchanted wisdom of elves. From the expository narrative, we clearly see Campbell's stages of "The Call to Adventure," "Refusal of the Call," "Supernatural Aid", and "Crossing the Threshold" applied almost seamlessly. As Bilbo finds himself further away from the Shire and nearer to strange and unusual landscapes, he falls during a skirmish with Goblins deep in the lightless heart of the Misty Mountains. This instance fills Campbell's "The Belly of the Whale" stage, as Bilbo is separated from the Dwarves (who are unsure if he is still alive) and enters into the dark and windless world of the creature Gollum; all alone, he leaves the world of grass and sky and life for a time.

Initiation

Once a hero emerges from "The Belly of the Whale," he enters into the rite Campbell calls "Initiation". The classifications for the stages in this rite do not fit as neatly as do the initial "Departure" experiences, but many of the stages pertain to Bilbo's internal and external ordeals. The first stage of the Departure Rite is "The Road of

Trials” where the hero must pass a series of tests; “The Meeting with the Goddess” and “Woman as Temptress” are not as easily applicable because these two stages describe a marriage of some sort between the hero and a Goddess figure as well as spurning a kind of sexual temptation; the “Atonement with the Father” stage relies mostly on a confrontation of a powerful male figure, often a father; “The Apotheosis” stage describes a transformation to God-like status, or even a fear-less state of awakening and wisdom as happens with Hercules, Jesus, and others; and the final stage of the “Initiation” rite is when the hero gains his “The Ultimate Boon”, or the achievement of his goal. Most of these align, in mostly chronological order, as Bilbo treks toward the lonely mountain. However, not all of Bilbo’s actions fit perfectly into Campbell’s ideal.

When Bilbo is lost from Gandalf and the Dwarves, he finds himself in a riddle contest for his life with the dark cave-creature Gollum and thus begins the trials and “The Initiation.” While with Gollum, Bilbo is faced with a test of riddles: the two creatures attempting to stump the other. Bilbo’s prize is a way out, and Gollum’s prize is having Bilbo for dinner. Instead, Bilbo realizes he has a strange object in his pocket and accidentally fools Gollum with the unanswerable question “What have I got in my pocket?” (Tolkien, 1966, p. 78). Gollum, unsurprisingly, does not exhibit the best integrity when Bilbo wins thus compromising the legitimacy of Bilbo’s trials; still Bilbo bests Gollum and escapes the caves leaving with Gollum’s most prized possession: a magic golden ring that makes its wearer invisible. Once Bilbo passes this test, he is faced with various new trials that he must overcome in the form of goblins and wolves, spiders, elves, and, of course, Smaug the Dragon.

Campbell’s next two stages around heterosexual love are not as easily applicable. This does not occur with Bilbo, in fact there is not a single woman character Bilbo

encounters while out of the Shire. However, one could see Bilbo's relationship with his magic ring as both a marriage and a temptation. It becomes a part of him that the conquers while also a crutch and a source of dishonesty. Bilbo's father is not alive when the story occurs, thus he does not need to "atone" with an actual father; however, Bilbo does have to defy and confront Thorin Oakenshield, the leader of their quest and rightful heir of Erebor who becomes blinded with greed once in the mountain. Bilbo lies to Thorin and disobeys his orders in order to maintain diplomacy and collaboration with the Mirkwood Elves and men of Lake Town, or Esgaroth, the town under the mountains shadow. In Bilbo's case, his "god-like" transcendence could apply to what he can accomplish with his magic ring of invisibility. It does not make him immortal or indestructible but it does make it much easier for him to avoid and escape perilous situations (we also find out from LOTR that the ring prolongs life). There is a particular instance when the dwarves are caught by monstrously giant spiders in the depths of the dark forest of Mirkwood. Bilbo is able to avoid capture through slipping on his ring and he rescues everyone from being eaten by the spiders; later he uses the ring to help the company escape the seemingly inescapable enchanted Elven stronghold. It is clear that Bilbo has not transcended Hobbit-ness completely, but he is able to escape impossible situations and defeat more than formidable enemies due to the new found power of the ring.

Bilbo achieves his "boon" through help from others but not without a massive battle where he loses many close friends. The dragon has been defeated and the mountain reclaimed by Dwarf-kind but not without the extreme sacrifice of lives lost; Thorin, the dwarf prince, is killed along with many of his kin. Yet, with his dying breath, Thorin admits to his wrongful obsession with greed and praises Bilbo's wisdom in

desiring home and fellowship, and the dwarf prince utters these last words to the hobbit:

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 above hoarded gold, it would be a merrier world. (Tolkien, 1966, p. 290)

What Bilbo gains or achieves, as Thorin acknowledges with his dying breath, is an understanding of how consuming greed not only destroys its host but also devastates those affected by the host's avaricious ambitions. Thorin's life is not the only life lost in his effort to protect the gold, countless men, elves, and dwarves died to protect the dragon-less mountain. On the other hand, Thorin is also acknowledging that one's devaluation of wealth combined with an appreciation of life positively changes the world. Ultimately, Bilbo's pursuit of peace, fellowship, and the simple pleasures of home are what cause the hobbit to avoid greed's consuming grasp and return to Bag End changed for the better.

Return

The third rite of passage on the hero's journey focuses on the return trip home. This includes "Refusal of the Return" when the hero may be reluctant to head home; sometimes the return is an escape or "Magic Flight" with an enchanted item; sometimes the hero needs a rescuer or a "Rescue from Without" as he is on his way home; when the hero experiences the "Crossing of the Return Threshold" as he returns with wisdom from his journey and enters back into his original society he becomes a "Master of Two Worlds" when readjust and balances his new identity and continue dwelling at home without fear or regrets in the final stage of the hero's journey "Freedom to Live".

Bilbo's adventure from the Shire to the Lonely mountain and back again falls well into the monomyth, and the "Return" rite is no different. However, if there is any one

aspect of Campbell's formula that does not fit is Bilbo never once does audibly refuse to go home; Bilbo repetitively conveys that he would do anything to be in his armchair by the fire. There is a period of time, however, after Smaug the Dragon is killed when one would imagine the quest has been completed and Bilbo can journey home. Yet, due to the imminent threat of war from elves, goblins, and the men of Lake Town, Bilbo chooses to remain as he realizes that the adventure is not over, and he has another role to play: Thorin, the Dwarf Prince, is overtaken by Dragon sickness and greed, causing him to lose the ability to think clearly or diplomatically therefore leaving Bilbo with the responsibility of making allies with elves and men. The magic flight as Bilbo experiences it comes with the need to alleviate the tension between Elves, Dwarves, and Men in order for them to band together to fight off the evil Wargs and Goblins. In order to make peace Bilbo flees to the Elves and Men with the Arkenstone and thus is kicked out of Erebor by Thorin and nearly loses his life. The Rescue from Without comes when Gandalf steps in to prevent the Dwarves from killing Bilbo and later as the giant Eagles and Beorn the Skin-changer rush in during the final battle to conquer the goblin army. When Bilbo "Crosses the Return Threshold" as he begins to head to the Shire, he weeps for his friend Thorin and slowly makes his way back as he rests at Beorn's and heals in Rivendell. Bilbo masters both worlds as he is able to value his home in hobbiton; "the sound of the kettle on his hearth was ever after more musical than it had been even in the quiet days before the Unexpected Party." (Tolkien, 1966, p. 304) Yet Bilbo also understands a new aspect of his identity: "for ever after he remained an elf-friend, and had the honour of dwarves, wizards, and all such folks as ever passed that way" (Tolkien, 1966, p. 303-304).

Home

The stage that perhaps resonates with most readers when reflecting on Bilbo's journey falls under Campbell's "Freedom to Live" stage. This stage demonstrates how Bilbo, with the new insight and perspective his journey gave him, reflects on his experiences and journeys now that he has returned home. The wizard Gandalf acknowledges the change in Bilbo and remarks, "You are not the hobbit that you once were!" (Tolkien, 1966, p. 302), thus providing the reader with an overt signifier of the dynamic nature of Bilbo's character. Later, in the novel's final lines, Gandalf emphasizes another aspect of Bilbo's perspective and insight that his journey expanded:

"Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit? You are a very fine person, Mr. Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!" "Thank goodness!" said Bilbo laughing... (Tolkien, 1966, p. 305)

Through this exchange, we acknowledge that Bilbo was indeed a significant agent in his adventures while also only occupying a small role and space in humanity's entirety. Yet Tolkien not only acknowledges this for the reader, but also displays Bilbo's understanding and acceptance of this truth when he responds positively to Gandalf's comment. Through this brief conversation, the reader is urged to reconsider the hero's role in the story as it pertains to something greater than an individual while also giving Bilbo freedom to live out his days as a changed and liberated hobbit.

Chapter 2

Gold, Rubies, and Power; or Things Dragons Hoard

*His rage passes description - the sort of rage that is only seen when rich folk that have more than they can enjoy suddenly lose something that they have long had but have never before used or wanted. His fire belched forth, the hall smoked, he shook the mountain-roots. -J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (p. 217)*

As Bilbo sets out on his journey, Smaug the dragon is portrayed as ultimate evil that he will confront; Smaug kills, usurps, and devours. He is the force that caused Thorin and his company of dwarves to lose loved ones, lose their kingdom in the Lonely Mountain, and to wander homeless for years. Yet, these violent acts are not the sole, or even main, distinctions of evil. Smaug's acts are not what cause evil; rather they are manifestations of the dragonish spirit of greed. To be Dragonish is: to hoard gold and other treasures; to count and know every piece, to kill and destroy for one's hoards, and then sit on all alone, in the dark and the damp without sharing or utilizing treasure, without interacting with another creature unless it is to fulfill one's own basic needs or selfish desires. It is Smaug's lust for treasure and desire to maintain his hoard that leads to his attack on Lake Town and his hate for Dwarves:

To hoard vast wealth and to keep it all to one's self is one of the greatest vices an individual can be guilty of, with the eventual end proving that no good will come from it. The same can be said of the Dwarves themselves, many of whom do not learn the destruction of the dragon. (Larimore, 2012, p. 64)

This evil of hoarding and selfishness is not only present in Smaug's nefarious decisions and actions, but can be seen as the root evil driving most misfortunes and negative consequences experienced by the characters in this tale.

Power as Dragon Treasure

Hoarding and greed do not exist simply for material objects of wealth; Smaug also hoards power. He maintains his hold on Erebor by keeping others in fear and awe, and he justifies his actions with vainglorious thinking. Bilbo uses this to his advantage as he flatters and compliments Smaug; because of this flattery and obvious fear from Bilbo, Smaug does not choose to kill Bilbo immediately (also because Bilbo cannot be seen due to the ring). Smaug's own accumulation of self-confidence and ego becomes destructive for the people of Lake Town as he seeks to demonstrate his power; yet it also is his very own downfall. Because of the power and wealth that Smaug has pulled around him, and the death and destruction that got him there, he feels indestructible and invincible:

“Revenge!” he snorted, and the light of his eyes lit the hall from floor to ceiling like scarlet lightning. “Revenge! The King under the Mountain is dead and where are his kin that dare seek revenge? Girion Lord of Dale is dead, and I have eaten his people like a wolf among sheep, and where are his sons’ sons that dare approach me? I kill where I wish and none dare resist. I laid low the warriors of old and their like is not in the world today. Then I was but young and tender. Now I am old and strong, strong, strong, Thief in the Shadows!” he gloated. “My armor is like tenfold shields, my teeth are swords, my claws spears, the shock of my tail a thunderbolt, my wings a hurricane, and my breath death!” (Tolkien, 1966, p. 226)

It is his very own greed and delusions of grandeur that lead Smaug to his death. He felt that because of the power he accumulated through his aggressive amassing of gold and jewels, he had proven himself indestructible. Immediately after his revenge monologue, Smaug smugly rolls onto his back and shows Bilbo his “impenetrable” armor. Yet the dragon is unaware that Bilbo is searching for weaknesses and spots “a large patch in the hollow of his left breast as bare as snail out of its shell” (Tolkien, 1966, p. 227). As Smaug flies to Lake Town to wreak destruction Bilbo’s findings are overheard by a

messenger thrush. Consequently, the news of the dragon's weakness is delivered to Bard the Bowman who then slays Smaug the Magnificent with a black arrow.

Sentient Greed

Despite holding the only title of "dragon" in this tale, Smaug is not the only creature to hold dragonish qualities. Other evil creatures such as Gollum and the Mirkwood spiders display greed-driven, dragonish actions and are marked as evil. The creature Gollum has been consumed with greed for one item of extreme power and wealth: a golden ring. Gollum's obsession with this object has driven him into the darkest and deepest cave in the heart of the mountains; he hides away from even the company of orcs and goblins and kills any creature for food. As seen in the riddle game, Gollum even lacks a code of ethics in keeping to his word: he promises to lead Bilbo to the exit if Bilbo wins, but when Bilbo wins, Gollum tries to eat him. Additionally, the Mirkwood spiders live deep in the dark forest of Mirkwood, untouched by light. Here they lie in wait to capture anything that might be a meal for them. Their drive and purpose is to capture something to store in their webs for future consumption and abundant feasting. They seem to have little other purpose beyond hoarding and destroying.

Smaug, Gollum, and the Mirkwood Spiders do have something in common beyond their greedy hoarding and consumption: they are all sentient beings; they are not merely acting on animal instinct. Each of these creatures speaks in some way or another and expresses reasoning and logical thinking. This suggests that each of these creatures is able to choose their evil; their destructive and murderous, and also gluttonous, actions are premeditated and consciously selected. These creatures are acting in a purely animalistic manner in their violence and self-preservation, but this is

something they actively decide by allowing themselves to be driven by greed. It is this agency in the evil creatures that truly causes them to *be* evil and allows them to be compared alongside the story's protagonists.

Smaug in particular demonstrates an active avarice. Bilbo's interactions with the dragon paint us a picture of a complex character able to create and decipher riddles, utilize sarcasm, and convey intense emotion and calculated anger. John D. Rateliff's *The History of the Hobbit* compares Tolkien's dragon Smaug to that of other tales. Rateliff conveys to his readers that dragons in lore, such as in the epic *Beowulf*, generally serve a symbolical role with little agency or purpose beyond conveying corrupt indulgence or overt nefariousness. However, Tolkien takes these common portrayals of dragons in legend and myth and transforms them to demonstrate something beyond symbol:

Tolkien's allegiance and approval are wholly reserved for "dragon [as] real worm, with a bestial life and thought of his own" (*Beowulf* essay, pages 14-15), albeit being willing to allow him to be invested with a certain amount of symbolism as an embodiment of "malice, greed, and destruction" (*ibid.*, page 15). His most significant change that transforms *Beowulf*'s bane into Smaug is to grant the latter individuality, indeed a "rather overwhelming personality". (Rateliff, 2007, p. 534)

Smaug does not merely symbolize destructive greed; he embodies it and actively lives it. By giving Smaug agency and a personality, Tolkien demonstrates that greed is not merely symbolic or derived merely from animal instinct. Greed can consume rational and sentient beings; greed exists beyond simply myth and monster.

Dragon-Sickness

Thorin Oakenshield, the Dwarf Prince of Erebor and leader of the Lonely Mountain quest, is a clear example of the obsession with wealth poisoning and destroying a potentially "good" and agentive individual. As the company nears Erebor,

Thorin begins to show signs of enchantment with treasure. The Dwarf prince enters a dream-like state when merely on the doorstep of the great treasure hoard and is consumed with yearning toward the line of Durin's greatest jewel:

“The Arkenstone! The Arkenstone!” murmured Thorin in the dark, half dreaming with his chin upon his knees. ‘It was like a globe with a thousand facets; it shone like silver in the firelight, like water in the sun, like snow under the stars, like rain upon the Moon! (Tolkien, 1966, p. 231)

As the company moves deeper into the treasure hoard after Smaug has flown to Esgaroth, Thorin and the other dwarves adorn themselves in jewels and admire the vast wealth around them. Thorin even forgets Smaug for a while in his admiration and has to be reminded by Bilbo to be wary of the dragon's return; the gold is initially captivating in rapture, distraction, and delight to Thorin but later proves to have a much darker and avaricious influence. He is searching for the prized dwarf treasure “the arkenstone”; a jewel that Thorin values above even the safety of his friends.

After Smaug is slain in Lake Town, Thorin Oakenshield is consumed with greed and “dragon-sickness”; he largely embodies the characteristic expressed by Smaug. With Smaug dead, large troops of Elves and men gathered at the lonely mountain to lay a claim on a share of the treasure. Bard the Bowman, the defeater of Smaug, approached Thorin to seek monetary compensation for the destruction of their town. Thorin seems justified in fearing the weapons of elves and men and thus keeping to himself; however, he refuses to budge at the signs of friendship and pleas for help to rebuild their town. Thorin becomes consumed with anger and distrust toward any other non-dwarf individuals, and holes himself inside the mountain to sit with his treasure and seethe. Thorin chooses aggression and treasure hoards over peaceful negotiation and friendship. He turns away Bilbo, his trusted friend, for using the Arkenstone as a

bargaining chip; Thorin is so bewildered by the treasure (pg. 278) that he fails to work toward peace and diplomacy. Many of the dwarves follow Thorin's lead, and none speak out against him. The dwarves choose gold over celebrating and fellowshiping after the end of the dragon's cruel reign:

It is plain to see, for example, that the Dwarves in *The Hobbit* are not driven by a desire for freedom from tyranny, or to create a utilitarian utopia, but are rather driven almost completely by greed, to recover the hoard of treasure guarded by the treat dragon Smaug in the depths of the Lonely Mountain. The dragon made many enemies in his own lust and greed... (Larimore, 2012, p. 64)

By choosing greed and treasure, Thorin and company create divides and mistrusts that lead to blindness in decision making and reasoning. Warmongering goblins have also heard of Smaug's demise and attack the mountain shortly after Thorin refuses to cooperate with Bard's men and Thranduil's elves. In this battle Thorin and his nephews Fili and Kili lose their lives. Before he passes, Thorin recognizes his fault in valuing hoarded gold above all else and even praises Bilbo for valuing home and cheer, but like Smaug, he pays for his greed with his life as well as the lives of some of his kin.

Our hero, Bilbo himself, is not completely void of dragon-like qualities, but unlike the others, Bilbo makes the choice to not let greed and accumulation of wealth consume him. In the story's exposition, Bilbo is presented to us a small human-like creature that dwells in well-kept hole in the earth: "In a hole in the ground there live a hobbit." (Tolkien, 1966, p. 1). Bilbo is painted as someone who keeps to himself for the most part and does not think well of adventures. He would rather be left to his tea and cakes. In Bilbo's hobbit-hole there are hoards of different kinds: he has a pantry overstocked with cheeses, meats, pies and cakes; he has vast collections of antique furniture, spoons, and books; and he sits comfortably in his armchair or on his porch in a way

guarding his hoards of comfort. It is not until Bilbo uses his hoards that he begins to grow in character as he learns to use his wit and think of others beyond himself. This begins with a nudge from Gandalf when thirteen dwarves show up at Bilbo's doorstep and proceed to partake of his hoards of food and eat from his collection of antique dinnerware. He has to share and utilize his wealth (his pantry is literally emptied) in order to exit his hole and experience the richness of adventure and fellowship. It is because Bilbo learns to value friendship, the well-being of those he cares for, and good cheer over his previous comforts that he is able to avoid the same consuming greed experienced by Thorin:

All the same Mr. Baggins kept his head more clear of the bewitchment of the hoard than the dwarves did. Long before the dwarves were tired of examining the treasures, he became weary of it and sat down on the floor; and he began to wonder nervously what the end of it all would be. "I would give a good many of these precious goblets," he thought, "for a drink of something cheering out of one of Beorn's wooden bowls!" (Tolkien, 1966, p. 240)

When Bilbo encounters the treasure, he is not entirely free of its charms, however his concern for the well being for himself and his friends is not overpowered by greed as it is in Thorin and the other dwarves.

Despite Bilbo's good naturedness and prioritization of fellowship that ultimately saves the dwarves, Bilbo may not be entirely free of consuming greed and or able to dismiss its evil. We learn from the Lord of the Ring's trilogy that the magic ring Bilbo "won" from Gollum is indeed full of consuming power and therefore valued above almost any treasure. Bilbo, however, holds onto this ring and chooses not to part with it. The ring is powerful but latent. Bilbo doesn't know its true power, but he does know that it gives him a certain kind of power through invisibility. In being invisible Bilbo holds power over those who cannot see him: power to hide and withdraw—to steal and destroy

with impunity if he chooses. One might argue that the desire to be invisible and withdraw from fellowship as well as the accompanying power over others are small dragonish characteristics Bilbo never forsakes.

Bilbo's struggles with these issues of greed and power paint a picture of unrecognized selfishness. However, this somewhat flawed hobbit still seeks to serve his friends and to serve those who his friends have cast aside. Tolkien demonstrates through Bilbo that no one person, no matter their goodness, is void of self-serving tendencies. Yet, regardless of these faults, each of us holds an ability to cherish others with our service and to value fellowship as we share the small comforts of home. These choices are what determine the self-destructive fate of sitting solitarily on our hoards blowing smoke.

Chapter 3

The Pedagogy of Smaug

So comes snow after fire, and even dragons have their ending. -J.R.R. Tolkien, The Hobbit (p. 296)

Like Smaug sits on his treasure hoard, many teachers sit on information instead of allowing students to harness their own intellectual processes. The teacher's responsibility is to help foster skills and knowledge in his or her pupils so that the students may build upon and develop these skills during their lives' courses. However, this role of teacher often becomes one of keeper of knowledge; the teacher holds all knowledge and simply deposits information for students to memorize and return. This method requires little thinking, agency, or growth on the student's part and places power entirely into the teacher's hands. I argue that this method of education, coined "the banking method" by Paulo Freire provides little room for student voice and agency and thus little room for growth of intellect and character development. Instead, I suggest that when teaching a text, teachers take a lesson from Bilbo to forego their metaphorical dragon-hoards and instead utilize unique student interests, voices, and experiences in the classroom.

The Banking Method

Freire's description of "the banking method" of education describes teaching practices that are "monologic" (Freire, 1993; Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013): classroom information is not transferred through dialogue and group construction but rather through verbal expression solely from the teacher. In this instance teachers are the holders of all knowledge and in turn simply deposit correct answers into students as if placing money into an account. According to Freire this creates a classroom dynamic

that “turns [students] into... ‘receptacles’ to be ‘filled’ by the teacher. The more completely she fills the receptacles, the better a teacher she is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.” (Freire, 1993, 53). Furthermore, Freire typifies this kind of pedagogy as a sickness, not unlike the vocabulary Tolkien uses to describe the consuming greed experienced by those longing for Smaug’s treasure heaps. Tolkien describes greed as “dragon sickness” where an individual’s obsession with gold causes them to develop dragon-like characteristics. Similarly, Freire describes the kind of teacher-driven, teacher-facilitated, and teacher-focused “education as ‘suffering from narration sickness,’” (Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013, p. 52) in which the teacher is overcome with a power to individually dictate any knowledge that the class encounters; his “task is to ‘fill’ the students with the contents of his narration” (Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013, p. 52). Yet this description suggests that the teacher is not only misleading the students, but misguided and ill with the power she has constructed for herself as the keeper and distributor of information. From this, it is clear that not only is this “banking” method bad for student growth but it is damaging for the teacher as well.

Freire’s theory connects education to the perpetuation of oppression within society: “Banking education maintains and even stimulates...oppressive society as a whole.” (Freire, 1993, 54). The teacher who acts as an overseer and keeper of knowledge aligns themselves with the greedy and self-serving acts of political oppressors, dictators, or tyrants. This method of education places a classroom teacher in the role of an oppressor marked by destructive and autocratic characteristics. We see these characteristics exhibited by the greed driven actions of Smaug, and eventually Thorin, in *The Hobbit*. It also positions the student “...passively, as someone who needs to be

brought to the teacher's vision of what key textual ideas are" (Aukerman and Schuldt, 2016, p. 286) thus taking away agency. Freire suggests that "banking education" be replaced with discussion and dialogue that more evenly distributes power in the classroom, and even more importantly, provides students with opportunities to grow uniquely into their individualized selves; "The solution is not to 'integrate' [students] into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire, 1993, p. 55).

This development of "beings for themselves" comes through students experiencing partnership and true communication that is impossible through the one-sided narrative that is the "banking method":

"Yet only through communication can human life hold meaning. The teacher's thinking is authenticated only by the authenticity of the students' thinking. The teacher cannot think for her students, nor can she impose her thought on them. Authentic thinking, thinking that is concerned about reality, does not take place in ivory tower isolation, but only in communication." (Freire, 1993, 58)

Freire instead proposes an alternative model of "education [that] regards dialogue as indispensable to the act of cognition" (Freire, 1993, p. 64) and consequently emphasizes genuine communication as an imperative to intellectual growth. This classroom dialogue then must take into account the processes of internalizing and processing the individualized experienced history of students. In order to avoid perpetuating dragonish oppression teachers must understand that each student is consistently "unfinished" and in the "process of becoming".

Distributing Power Through Discussion

Paulo Freire's ideals can be implemented in the classroom when approaching text and have been found to be more beneficial for the student's intellectual growth. When

interpreting a text, like *The Hobbit*, within the classroom students will engage more deeply with the analytical process if they are not expected to come to a single correct analysis. Furthermore, the students should not even aim to arrive at a “correct” answer that the teacher expects. Instead, as Maren Aukerman and Lorient Chambers Schuldt suggest, the teacher should create a space that allows for various interpretations to be expressed by the students: “...children’s ideas about texts should lead rather than follow the teacher; if they do, then these ideas might well lead to multiple close readings of classroom texts rather than just a single communal one” (2016, p. 287). It is important to note, that this does not suggest that any and all interpretations are perfectly correct, but rather that students should have room to consider how they are coming to their interpretations and to think critically about how their ideas may be supported. Many students will assume an answer is correct because they are told by the teacher, or because another ‘star’ student has stated the claim. Merely judging the correctness of an answer based on a stated narrative leaves out important cognitive processes that cause an individual to arrive at a conclusion:

We believe that, when teachers strive for a communal close reading, both students and teacher may be less likely to treat reading as a process where internal persuasion really matters, and therefore less likely to attend to the ways in which even similar perspectives might challenge, extend, and enrich one another. (Aukerman and Schuldt, 2016, p. 297)

It is important in these discussions for students to test their ideas against the ideas of others and to be encouraged to pull information from whatever text they are analyzing. Without the opportunity to test interpretations against one another and against the text students will not have an occasion to develop their own conclusions. Instead, students will look to the person in power to feed them information. This further perpetuates the

uneven power imbalance in the classroom, placing power solely in the hands of the teacher.

Student-driven discussion can diffuse the power imbalance created by “banking education” and increase cognitive functioning for students (Aukerman and Schuldt, 2016). This means that students should have an opportunity to reflect closely and critically on the texts they are reading themselves in order to engage in classroom discourse and, consequently, to further their ideas. This analysis of a text is constructed from a what a student brings to the text; “Reading closely, we argue, should mean pondering what a text offers in order to determine what the reader believes to be its meaning, always in light of one’s own experiences and reasons for reading” (2016, 289). This supports Freire’s argument that students’ history and experiences should be on the forefront of classroom dialogue in order for students to grow into agentive beings. Not only is it important to avoid a singular, communal interpretation, but it is also important to consider how students uniquely engage and respond to texts to construct meaning (Aukerman and Schuldt, 2016).

Understanding and Facilitating Dialogue

The process of dialogue is important for meaning making, but how a student processes and responds to texts internally and independently is important to understanding the dialogue a text elicits. In order to create productive discussion, teachers need be able to understand, recognize, and validate the many responses students have to any particular text. This is an essential understanding for the productive facilitation of discussion. Louise M. Rosenblatt provides a framework for understanding reading as “innumerable separate transactions between readers and texts” (1994, p. 1057); readers make meaning through interacting with the the text itself

by applying personal knowledge and purpose to create meaning. Rosenblatt's argues that what a person gleans from a reading depends on the reader: "‘meaning’ does not reside ready-made ‘in’ the text or ‘in’ the reader but happens or comes into being during the transaction between reader and text" (1994, p. 1063). This means that interpretation of a text does not reside in a text. Rather, the text lacks meaning without a reader granting it significance. According to Rosenblatt "text" is merely a term that denotes "a set of signs capable of being interpreted as verbal symbols" that "actually remains simply marks on paper...until some reader transacts with it" (1994, p. 1063). Students constantly bring an innumerable combination of knowledge and experience to a text whenever they read. The same text will never evoke identical responses and consequently it will never produce the same exact meaning for any two individuals. Therefore, text interpretation cannot be narrated or dictated by the teacher alone.

Louise M. Rosenblatt defines two kinds of responses that a text may elicit, and she suggests that they operate on two opposite ends of a spectrum. The responses are typified as analytical and emotional. Rosenblatt's first response, the efferent response, "designates the kind of reading in which attention is centered predominantly on what is to be extracted and retained after the reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1994, pp. 1067). The experience in school often demands an efferent response from the reader—there is a focus on what information one could glean from a text. Rosenblatt argues that when a student responds efferently it is due to an intended purpose of "extracting" and/or "retaining" information. At the other end of Rosenblatt's spectrum is the aesthetic response, which includes "what is being lived through" or "the qualities of the feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities, and emotions that are called forth (Rosenblatt, 1994, pp. 1067)." This occurs when a reader appears to connect personally or express

how they feel. This response appears to align with the arguments Freire makes regarding the importance of validating student history and experience.

The teacher's job is then to recognize and affirm the myriad of responses expressed during discussion, allowing for multiple interpretations formed through both efferent and aesthetic responses (Sipe, 2008 and Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt suggests that both the efferent and aesthetic responses work together to make meaning at any given point. Teachers often only validate efferent responses from student as correct, and within this kind of response are searching for a particular "correct answer". In many classrooms, it is often enforced as the only purpose for examining a text. When a student responds aesthetically, that response is often dismissed as unintellectual and unimportant because it is emotionally based. Some student responses may lean more toward one end of the spectrum than the other at any given time. This is dependent on the individual's purpose and mindset in approaching the text at that moment. Nevertheless, both kinds of responses (as well as any combination of the two) should be recognized as legitimate in the classroom and should be validated by the teacher.

Building upon Rosenblatt's reader-response theory, Lawrence Sipe explores the various ways that children respond to literature in *Storytime: Young Children's Literacy Understanding in the Classroom*. Teachers may find his categories helpful for encouraging individual growth and facilitating literary discussion. He details his five faceted theoretical model of young children's literary understanding by type of response: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative.

The first of Sipe's five categories is the analytical response, defined as "dealing with the text as an object or cultural product" (Sipe, 2008, pp. 182); essentially finding meaning and facts from what is present in the text. Sipe's second facet, the intertextual

response is defined as “relating the text being read to other cultural products (2008, pp. 182).” This kind of response occurs when a child compares the story to known knowledge of other texts—while this is further on the efferent side, this category begins to move closer to Rosenblatt’s theory of aesthetic response. Sipe’s third response classification, the Personal Response is defined as “connecting the text to one’s own life, moving either from life to the text or from text to one’s life (Sipe, 2008, pp. 182)”. This response is not purely aesthetic or efferent. It falls somewhere on the middle of Rosenblatt’s response spectrum. The personal response relies on an analytical understanding of the text that works in conjunction with a reader’s lived experiences. The transparent response is defined as “entering the world of the story and becoming one with it (Sipe, 2008, pp. 182).” This occurs when children respond in a way that appears to show difficulty separating what is fiction from what is occurring presently—Rosenblatt would say this is an aesthetic response because the students are living in and through the story, and seeing the text as pleasurable. The notion of using a story as a playscape also falls into the performative response category defined as: “entering the text-world and manipulating it for one’s own purposes (Sipe, 2008, pp. 182).” Sipe says this response sees the text function “as a platform for creativity (2008, pp. 182)”—a playground of sorts that would most likely be labeled by Rosenblatt as an aesthetic response. If teachers acknowledge and utilize these ways of responding as valuable to meaning making and valid as interacting with text regardless of “correct” answers, students will experience more affirmation and freedom to arrive to their own conclusions.

The work of Rosenblatt and Sipe opens up the classroom space that allows teachers to acknowledge a variety of responses to text that usually escape notice and

validation. Freire's theories present an understanding of the dangers of power belonging to the teacher alone, and they encourage educators to provide educational experiences that are student driven. Due to the nature of a classroom setting, teachers start off in a position to hold all power, just like Smaug holds the gold. Teachers have to be aware of this power dynamic in order to actively pay attention to the needs and voices of their students and adjust accordingly; it is not until the gold was shared fairly that dwarves, elves, and men could rebuild in the way that best helped their people. It is imperative that teachers distribute power in the classroom *among* students. Therefore, creating space for individuals to experience intellectual processes that utilize and value their unquities.

Chapter 4

Sharing the Wealth

*There is nothing like looking, if you want to find something...You certainly find something if you look, but it is not always quite the something you were after. - J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (p. 57-58)*

In order to avoid teaching like a dragon, teachers can apply the philosophies presented by Freire, Aukerman, Rosenblatt and Sipe to everyday teaching practices. I suggest teachers teach in such a manner that is aware of unequal power dynamics and thus intentionally values students' ideas and individual identities. The following four pedagogical principles provide an approach to teaching that works to combat the hoarding of power and instead values and validates student contribution through dialogue.

Principle One: Shared Evaluation Pedagogy

Maren Aukerman's Shared Evaluation Pedagogy encourages teachers to open up cognitive space through dialogue in the classroom that allows for difference of interpretation; it also does not push the teacher's singular interpretation as the only answer. The teacher can do this by displacing his or her self as the keeper of knowledge or "primary knower" and allowing students to no longer be pushed into the space of "secondary knower" (Aukerman, 1997). Instead students work with their teacher and other students to construct an answer. This is similar to Freire's emphasis on avoiding "monologic teaching" or "narration sickness" where the student is dependent on the teacher to verify answers. According to Aukerman (1997) teacher-heavy teaching often dismisses students' own interpretations and teaches them that reading is a process that does not rely on their engagement:

By making the child's evaluative stance toward the text irrelevant (which is what happens when reading instruction principally focuses on the teacher's interpretations and interpretive techniques), we misrepresent to children what reading actually is. The child need not be a primary knower, but needs to recognize herself/himself as someone whose evaluation matters, as a *possible knower*...a reader who is not positioned to evaluate a text is not positioned to comprehend it. (Aukerman, 2007, p. 90-91)

Aukerman suggests teachers break the primary and secondary knower dichotomy by allowing students to evaluate their responses and interpretations; this begins by avoiding the approach to teaching that begins with a model from the teacher, and instead the students begin a discussion of the text the teacher then follows.

Within Aukerman's work, she acknowledges that there is not one correct way to apply this in the classroom through a structured activity; teachers should be open to unstructured conversation in response to texts. Instead of relying on teachers dictating and modeling a strict approach to interpretation, Shared Evaluation Pedagogy is:

...sometimes the disorderly refraction of student voices [in which] meaningful learning takes place. Shared evaluation pedagogy is primarily defined through an epistemic stance that takes student intentions around text very seriously, that provides a space for children's own evaluative stances to come to the fore, and sees that the construction of "internally persuasive" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 345) textual understanding as dialogic process without a predesignated (or necessarily common) outcome (Aukerman, 2007, p. 92).

This "internally persuasive" understanding is the work of students coming to their own conclusions because they have done the intellectual work to arrive at an answer. Shared Evaluation Pedagogy gives students the opportunity to work metacognitively to know why they think what they do and how they arrived at an answer.

Principle 2: Response Valuation and Validation

The Teacher's valuation and validation of the various kinds of responses from students is imperative to creating a space for Shared Evaluation Pedagogy. This means teachers need to be cognizant of the various ways that students respond, regardless of

whether the response is written, oral, or even physical. Louise M. Rosenblatt (1994) gives us the spectrum of response that allows us to understand reading as a transaction; students will engage differently with a text depending on their purpose for reading and depending on their identity. These transactions appear as any combination of efferent or aesthetic (Rosenblatt, 1994): the efferent response is an analytical response typical of what is expected in the traditional classroom; and the aesthetic response is often associated with reading for pleasure and is thought of as purely emotional. Rosenblatt argues that the transaction of reading is valuable regardless of the kind of response.

Lawrence Sipe (2008) recognizes five distinct categories of response and argues that they are all imperative to meaning making and should be valued in the classroom. These responses are: analytical, intertextual, personal, transparent, and performative. Each kind of response is a part of the internal persuasion students engage in therefore teachers should be ready to recognize these responses as part of the intellectual processes students through which students are working. For example, a performative response could accidentally be dismissed as acting out or begging for attention when, in actuality, a student is immersing themselves in the text and engaging deeply with any literary elements.

Teachers should be prepared to recognize these responses and acknowledge them as valid. Understanding and valuing these responses will aid teachers to better follow and facilitate the the dialogue that arises when utilizing Shared Evaluation Pedagogy. Teachers also have the opportunity to help students think about how their responses fit into Sipe's categories, and therefore, provide students with tools to recognize their own internal persuasions.

Principle 3: Valuing and Validating the Intertextual and Intercontextual

In order to truly value the variety of responses from students, teachers must value and validate students' unique past experiences. Part of valuing these past experiences is valuing the different cultural and textual works students have previously encountered. Teachers can encourage an *intertextual* response from students, which is defined as “relating the text being read to other cultural products (Sipe, 2008, pp. 182).” An obvious example of this response is when a student makes a connection, or alludes, to another book they have read in class or in school. However, students are often able to make connections to other kinds of texts, such as: movies, shows, songs, art, or stories they have encountered in their lives. These texts will vary among students based on culture, family, class, race, interest, gender and many other identity factors. Beyond making connections to other texts, students may use the text to understand experiences in their own lives, or use their own life experiences to understand a text. This means the connections students make between texts will not look the same for each student, and will contribute differently to each of their interpretations and questioning of a text.

With this in mind, teachers should consider the different contexts in which students are living and thinking. The daily contexts, such as culture, family, class, race, interest, or gender, that surround each student will differ as widely as the texts they read outside of school. These contexts shape how students think and how they approach ideas gleaned from a text. Teachers should take the opportunity to learn as much as possible about student's communities and learning styles in order to more deeply understand the variety of responses. Given these differences, it is extremely unlikely that each student's internal persuasions will be the same and consequently neither will their true interpretations.

Principle 4: Emphasizing Student Growth

As Freire argued, the teacher's job is not to force students into a structured hive mind, but rather "to transform that structure so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire, 1993, p. 55). Allowing students to become "beings for themselves" starts with valuing their unique transactions with a text and allowing a space for students to express and develop their ideas through dialogue. Dialogue encourages children to develop into themselves, to grow through experiencing partnership as they communicate ideas equally.

A teacher's goal is ultimately to support student growth; both cognitively and personally. The Shared Evaluation Pedagogy model focuses on encouraging students to think independently rather than relying on a teacher's acknowledgement of a correct answer. This act of shared evaluation based on unique experiences helps student practice critical thinking skills that will benefit their cognitive growth; "...students develop and appropriate additional ways of reading only when they have taken on intellectual, social roles in which they are evaluating the text, that is, when they are already doing the work of comprehension" (Aukerman, 2007, p. 90). When students are able to develop these additional ways of reading and are encouraged to respond in ways that are not purely efferent, students are able to make connections to their own lives. If students are given space and are supported to do intertextual and intercontextual work, as suggested in the section above, he or she is also given space to explore aspects of personal identity. These kinds of connections provide students with the opportunity to understand who they are and how they think. When students respond to a text in aesthetic and personal ways, students have the opportunity to better understand difficulties in their own lives and may even learn ways to approach hardships. Additionally, encouraging students to question and respond based on their own

confusions may give them insight into the complexities and differences of the surrounding world.

Classroom Application

The following description of a week of lessons for a sixth grade language arts class demonstrates how the four pedagogical principles outlined above can be utilized in teaching Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. The week outlined below is part of a larger unit inspired by the analyses of *The Hobbit* presented in this thesis in combination with the four pedagogical principles. This unit is designed to be implemented in any school environment and can be adjusted to include standards that an institution may require. The description below highlights the penultimate week of *The Hobbit* unit as students analyze the final chapters of the novel. Before this point in the unit, students have been reading and analyzing *The Hobbit* in a manner similar to what is detailed below.

Monday

On Monday students will arrive to class having read chapters XVIII and XIX of *The Hobbit* over the weekend, or "The Return Journey", and "The Last Stage" respectively. "The Return Journey" was read in class on Friday, but students were asked to reread this chapter as well as the final chapter and journal as they read. Journaling was explained as focusing on whatever thoughts or questions came into their head about plot, characters, setting, or any aspect of the story. In the beginning of class, students pull out their notes and share their thoughts on the chapters with their partners. If students need help starting discussion, students answer questions in their conversations such as: What happened in this chapter? What did you like? What did you dislike about this chapter? What are you confused about? Students are encouraged to pay attention to their thoughts in comparison with their partner: How are they different? How are they

similar? Students are encouraged to challenge themselves to find detailed differences and similarities. After Talking with a Partner, students take time to write independently and add to their notes from the weekend. Each student is asked to write down three questions about the text that came to mind from their conversations. Students are reminded that they may rewrite a question that they came up with in their notes if they are still searching for an answer to those questions. The question can be something about the way the chapters made them feel, about something they don't quite understand, or perhaps even something they felt the author should have or should not have included!

After students write independently, the class works together to compile a list of questions about the chapter. Questions may look like: what would have been the outcome of the battle if the eagles never arrived? Thorin's death was extremely sad, why would Tolkien choose to write his death? Why does Bilbo call himself a fool for the battle occurring? Why does he say he suppose he cannot be blamed for the battle? Why did Bilbo not take more gold home with him? Why does Gandalf say that Bilbo is a changed hobbit? What does Gandalf mean when he tells Bilbo he is "only a little fellow in a wide world"? What does it mean that Bilbo lost more than spoons? Why does he not seem to care that he lost his reputation? Any kind of question is not discouraged, rather students are asked to say more about their question if it is unclear. The teacher makes a running list and asks which questions the student think can be answered, either by looking at anywhere in the chapter or other parts of the book, or by inferring from other themes, plot points, actions, or dialogue in the story. As students give their answers, the teacher asks students to explain and give reasons for their thoughts. After the list compilation, students are asked to pick a question they think they can answer through

looking in other parts of the story. Students write down their questions on cards to be collected and noted by the teacher. The students will use these questions to be literary detectives tomorrow!

Tuesday

Today students delve into finding evidence to answer their questions like detectives trying to solve a case. Students work individually to answer their chosen questions but are not kept from talking about their ideas to those around them. Students all have a copy of *The Hobbit* and are encouraged to use early parts of the book, notes from prior discussions, and their own experiences to see if they can make sense of their questions. Students are encouraged to find as much evidence as possible! These are their questions, and there are no specific answers. Students are preparing to make an argument for their point they will present and defend to others tomorrow. The more support they have, the more convincing their answer will be! Students are encouraged to write down page numbers and/or quotes, in order to find passages at a later time.

Wednesday

Using their work from yesterday, students share and test their ideas with someone who has a different question about *The Hobbit*; if one student is explaining Thorin's last words to Bilbo he or she will find a student who is perhaps examining Gandalf's surprise at finding Bilbo alive. Students are encouraged to ask each other hard questions. The partners take turns examining each other's evidence and deciding if they feel like the question has been fully answered with supporting evidence; one student might show another the page where Thorin snaps in anger at Bilbo for stealing the Arkenstone and thus adding to the importance of the characters' reconciliation. Students are encouraged to *kindly* ask questions of each other to test possible holes in

their evidence as if they were trying to prove a detective wrong. If there are holes, students share ideas and discuss whether or not they can help strengthen each other's points. As students feel that their information needs to be changed or added to, students take the time to find new or different evidence that supports their answer. Students work to rewrite out a clear answer to their question, and make sure that they have enough evidence in preparation to share with the rest of the class.

Thursday

Now that students had time to think independently as well as workshop their ideas with a partner, students are able to workshop and discuss their ideas with the whole class. Today students share what they found as a way to lead the full class discussion. As students offer to explore their specific question and explain their answers, other students share if they had similar questions and similar answers. Students contribute different answers and approaches as well as the evidence that supports their point of view.

As the class moves through the various questions, the teacher guides students to see if answers to one question helps the class better understand the story and she acknowledges the value in multiple possibilities. The questions will likely bring up confusions about the story, but also allow students to consider how characters have changed over time and to consider larger themes. When a student suggests an idea, there are occasions when the class needs help responding. The teacher says things like: Mary thought that Bilbo has grown over his journey because he now has an admiration of nature, do others feel that he has not grown at all or that he has grown in other ways? Did anyone find a passage that helped them support or challenge this answer? Has anyone had an experience where they felt they grew in way similarly to Bilbo? Jimmy

thought that Thorin was urging Bilbo to make the world better, do you think people like Bilbo would make our world a better place? There are too many questions for students to finish their discussion in one day. The rest of the questions will be addressed the following day.

Friday

The final day of the week students finish discussing their ideas in the same manner as yesterday. Again, the teacher encourages students to share with each other and asks questions to facilitate conversation and idea sharing between and among students. It is also important to note that the teacher is not presenting one right answer to these questions after the students have presented their answer, and the students are not encouraged to share one communal understanding. Rather, as a student discusses Bilbo's growth when he returns home another student might suggest that Bilbo also share similarities to his previous self. In this way, students are given space to come to their own conclusions. After the questions have been shared, students write down any new understandings students have discovered from their discussion as well as ideas with which they still disagree. Students share what they learned from other students or voice any lingering doubts. As time allows, the teacher will reread the final chapter and encourage students to listen as is comfortable; some students close their eyes and are encouraged to visualize the story if they choose, some students sit on the floor and ask questions or comment in response, while others students simply sit and take in the story.

Pinpointing the Pedagogical Principles

This unit demonstrates the *Shared Evaluation Pedagogy Principle* through: collaborative question forming on the first day, partner discussion, and finally in the

large class discussion late in the week that presents answers to the students' questions. Instead of a traditional classroom where a teacher asks guided questions about a text and expects a specific correct answer, students and teachers work together to come up with questions that are based on genuine student responses and areas of interest. As students work with partners and eventually the whole class to test their answers they are not looking to the teacher for a correct answer. Rather students work *with* the teacher *and* fellow students to evaluate their answers and interpretations of the text.

The principle of *Response Valuation and Validation* is utilized in this unit by allowing for a variety of responses through discussion, writing, and partner sharing. The teacher does not expect only analytical questions to arise from *The Hobbit*, but rather encourages students to consider how the text made them feel as well. Additionally, students have listed thoughts, analyses, and questions in written form as preparation for the week. In these spaces students have had opportunities to respond in a variety of efferent and/or aesthetic ways. As students listen to the final chapter of *The Hobbit* being read aloud they are encouraged to enter the story in a purely a personal, transparent, or performative manner.

This unit *Values and Validates the Intertextual and Intercontextual* by opening up space for students to make connections to their own lives and other texts. As students answer questions and respond to the text, there are a variety of possible ways a student may engage with answering a question. This often depends on life experience. Perhaps as a student reflects on the death of Thorin, he or she expresses understanding of Bilbo's sorrow because it reminds them of losing someone they love. Perhaps an individual has traveled far away for their home, and recognizes Bilbo's desire to return home. Perhaps a student has read another story of a hero's adventures and is able to

compare and contrast such a hero with Bilbo. All of these intertextual and intercontextual responses are encouraged to be utilized with textual evidence as support for their answers to the questions they chose.

The *Emphasis on Student Growth* is demonstrated in several ways. This week of lessons provides students with many opportunities to utilize unique learning styles. Students are given time to think and write quietly, to talk in small groups or with partners, as well as to listen and participate large group discussions. Making a list of questions and talking in a group to answer questions helps support students who may struggle to get started on their own. The individualized work to search for evidence gives students who enjoy working independently a chance to work in the manner that works best for them. The freedom for students to design their own questions values student agency and drive. The push for students to defend their own questions encourages them to develop problem solving and argument-forming skills that will benefit future academic, career, or personal endeavors. Additionally, students are encouraged to reflect on how their thoughts have changed by adding to their answers, considering points they still disagree with, and writing down something they discovered through discussion. In this way, students are given a chance to consider how arguments and perspectives are formed and revised.

The difficulty of implementing this unit arises from students' inconsistency of questions and interpretations: student responses are based on individual processes and experiences that make it impossible for the teacher to predict the conclusions students may produce. This means that the teacher is following rather than leading students and must pay attention to encourage the continuation of discussion among students. The teacher may act as a knower of information and a conversational participant as she

suggests ideas or encourages students to elaborate, but she should never act as the singular knower and distributor of information. The teacher should have done responsive and interpretive work herself to position herself as a possible knower that can contribute to conversation equally. The teacher's own transactions with the text allow her to form thoughtful questions and suggest ideas should the class struggle with discussion. Yet the teacher's interpretations should not be the only ones highlighted and valued. As is suggested through Shared Evaluation Pedagogy, the teacher should not subtly push students toward her own interpretation to encourage dialogue. The teacher should validate the unique ideas each student brings and encourage students to test their ideas with one another. It is not beneficial for students to memorize or be manipulated to arrive at one perfect analysis; it is the process of arriving at a conclusion and testing ideas that supports students to grow as intellectuals and as individuals.

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