

Guided reading

SECTION

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Before reading

Knowledge that *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* can be interpreted as an allegory of Christ's passion should not put off those who wish to read it purely at face value, as a fantasy adventure-cum-moral fable.

It is rare in a 20th-century children's book for an author to promote Christianity. However, in this book, the words of the famous Bible passage from Corinthians I are exemplified: (*Love is patient, kind...never selfish; and ...there are three things that last forever: faith, hope, and love; but the greatest of them all is love.*) The values that the story promotes are common to all mainstream religions and to any humanistic set of moral principles. It offers scope for discussion regarding shared values and common ground between religions and non-believers' humane morality.

Meanwhile, the book, which begins in wartime Britain and was published soon after the end of the war, reflects many wartime experiences of hardship, loss, separation, tension and danger in a world of metaphorical winter and oppression.

Chapter 1: Lucy looks into a wardrobe

Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy arrive as wartime evacuees. Invite observations of how Edmund differs from his siblings, being argumentative and bad-tempered. Discuss how they list creatures they expect to see, learned by rote, not experience. Ask: *What shows the house is old and historic?* (A suit of armour, a harp and well-stocked library.)

Explain dated phrases: *mothballs* (to discourage moth larvae from nibbling holes); *wireless* (radio) and idioms such as *fallen on our feet* (been lucky) and *ten to one...* (there's a good chance...). Discuss why the author gives safety warnings about wardrobes. Such furniture would have had a catch or a key so they could only be opened from the outside.

When Lucy meets the faun, ask: *How does the author show that he is more human than animal?* (Through dress, manner, speech and actions.)

Chapter 2: What Lucy found there

Do the children recognise the source of *Daughter of Eve* as a synonym for a human female? Explain Adam and Eve: biblical names that represent the first humans on Earth.

Encourage the children to read aloud the word play of *Spare Oom* and *War Drobe*, comparing the real words. Ask: *What sorts of things remind you of fairy tales and myths?* (The stag who grants wishes; the winter enchantment; and references to mythical characters.)

Check children understand *under her thumb* (in her control). Ask the class for modern equivalents of Lucy's *Rather!* such as, *You bet!*

Chapter 3: Edmund and the wardrobe

Ask: *Why start a new chapter with the same dialogue as the previous chapter ended?* Suggest it urges readers to read on.

Edmund's behaviour is, again, at odds with that of his siblings. Ask: *How does it feel when people don't believe you?* Compare Lucy's hurt.

Explain *batty*, *goose* and *make it pax* meaning, respectively, 'mad', 'silly' and 'make friends'. Draw attention to use of the 'royal we' when the Queen says: *You shall know us better hereafter.* Ask: *What did Edmund think the Queen wanted to know when she asked What are you? that made him reply, I'm at school?* (He was probably thinking of trades and professions, such as, 'I am a butcher'.)

Chapter 4: Turkish Delight

Again the action and the conversation that close one chapter, open the next, encouraging reading stamina. Can the children work out the Queen's character from her condescending speech?

Ask: *What clues suggest the Queen is the witch?* Point out how, unlike Edmund, the reader knows Mr Tumnus' possible fate caused by indiscreet talk. Ask: *What, among the Queen's instructions*

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