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Tolkien Studies for Advanced Readers: A Less Traveled Road
“On Fairy-stories” Exercise

Assigned Sections of the Essay

1. Intro and Fairy-story 2. Origins 3. Children

Part 1 – List and Define

Working with the section above assigned to the number at which you counted off, complete the following.

Vocabulary (10 minutes)

What vocabulary do you need to know to understand Tolkien’s essay?

Make a list of 5-10 vocabulary words from your section of the text that you judge readers need a clear definition of in order to understand fully Tolkien’s intentions. Focus primarily on words that relate to ideas central to your section of the text. List both words you know as well as those you may not be completely sure of their meaning in this context. Compose a brief definition of that word in the context of how Tolkien means it in his essay. As needed, look up your words in a dictionary or online to be absolutely sure of your definition.

Source Materials (10 minutes)

Which sources and materials does Tolkien use to build his discussion?

Make a list of all types of sources and outside references that Tolkien uses in your section of the essay. Include as many specific materials or categories as you can possibly find. Whenever possible, write down anything else you know or that Tolkien tells you about those sources, such as what country or culture they come from, when they were composed, what genre or field the source fits into (poetry, psychology, anthropology, fiction, etc.), or anything else that helps you grasp the reason Tolkien includes this source.

Part 2 – Analyze

Working with the vocabulary and source data you listed above, complete the following.

Concepts (10 minutes)

What are the most important concepts in your portion of the essay?

Using the vocabulary and source lists you composed above, identify the 3 most important concepts Tolkien discusses in your section of the essay. Write 2-5 sentences for each concept in which you analyze and explain why you consider that concept to be so important to this essay.

Part 3 – Discuss (for the rest of class)

Be prepared to share and discuss with the whole class at least one of your responses from each of the 3 topics above.

After Class – Blog About It

Select one concept raised in class discussion today from any section you were not assigned. Write a blog posting in which you expand upon the ideas raised in class about that concept, either in relation to your analysis of the concepts you discussed in your section or in relation to aspects of Tolkien’s other works.