

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Magician's Nephew by C.S. Lewis

Book Information

C.S. Lewis, The Magician's Nephew

Quiz Number: 622

HarperTrophy,2002

ISBN 0-06-447110-1; LCCN

221 Pages

Book Level: 5.4

Interest Level: MG

When Digory and Polly try to return the wicked witch Jadis to her own world, the magic is mixed up; they all land in Narnia where they witness Aslan blessing the animals with human speech. Book #6

Topics: Animals, Misc./Other; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Series, Chronicles of Narnia

Main Characters

Aslan an omnipotent and spiritual Lion; the creator of Narnia

Aunt Letty Digory's aunt, an old maid, who is somewhat suspicious of her brother Andrew's activities

Cabby (King Frank) and Nellie (Queen Helen) ordinary people from London who become King and Queen of Narnia

Digory (Son of Adam) a boy with an ill mother, an absent father, and a "mad uncle," who befriends Polly

Polly the girl friend with whom Digory travels to Narnia and other worlds

Queen Jadis (the Witch) the beautiful Queen and evil Witch the children meet in Charn

Strawberry (Fledge) Cabby's horse

Uncle Andrew Digory's uncle, the magician, who selfishly sends Digory and Polly to another world

Vocabulary

hansom a two-wheeled, covered, horse-drawn cab, with an outside seat for the driver at the back

minion a flattering servant or follower

pax peace

sagacious of keen intelligence

Synopsis

When Polly Plummer first meets Digory in the back garden of a row house neighborhood in London, she is unimpressed. In fact, she criticizes him for crying and for his "grubby appearance." However, after the boy explains his sad story to her, Polly becomes empathetic. Digory is disheartened because his father is far away in India, his mother is seriously ill, and he is living away from his beloved country home with his Aunt Letty and "mad" Uncle Andrew in their London residence. Polly takes an interest in Digory and his unique lifestyle, and the two become friends. During an unusually cold and wet summer, the two play together daily and share many adventures.

One adventure leads them to Uncle Andrew's private attic. Their adventure turns frightening when Uncle Andrew tricks Polly, and she is transported into another world by touching a magic ring. Digory, concerned for Polly's safety, must then do the same in order to rescue her.

The two children land in a mysterious Wood Between the Worlds. They discover how to return to London, but decide to go on another adventure instead. They land in a new, dark, and deserted world, where they encounter Queen Jadis, who is unwittingly released from a sleeping spell by Digory. She shares the tale of her conquest of Charn and her desire to escape to another world. The children quickly realize her powers are great, that she is an evil witch, and that taking her to London would be disastrous.

The evil Jadis outwits Polly and Digory and lands in Uncle Andrew's attic with them. Andrew is terrified by Jadis, but enamored of her uncommon beauty.

While in London, Jadis causes quite a stir. She ends up being cornered by the police, where Digory and Polly are able to transport her back to the Wood with them. To their surprise, Andrew, the Cabby, and his horse have also been transported.

From the Wood, they all are transported to a strangely beautiful world, called Narnia. They

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witness a magnificent lion, Aslan, creating the inhabitants of this new world. Jadis tries to kill Aslan, but fails, and she runs away.

Digory is heartened by Aslan's powers and hopes he can obtain a cure for his ailing mother from the great beast. Before Aslan will comply with Digory's request, Digory must admit to introducing the force of evil, in the form of Jadis, into Narnia.

Digory is sent on a journey and returns with the fruit and its seeds to grow a great tree that will protect Narnia from future evils. He is rewarded, for resisting the temptation to eat the fruit himself, with the cure for his mother.

Digory, Polly, and Andrew return to London; Digory's mother is cured, and good fortune comes to his family. He and Polly remain life-long friends.

Digory follows Aslan's orders to bury the Rings, and he does so at the base of the tree that grows from the magic fruit from Narnia. The wood from the tree eventually is made into a wardrobe, which becomes the starting point for more Narnia adventures....

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

What does Uncle Andrew think of Queen Jadis?

He has a mixed reaction. Although he is frightened by her aggressiveness, he is in awe of her as well. He admires her beauty, strength, and magical powers.

Literary Analysis

While Polly, Digory, the Cabby, and even Strawberry enjoy Narnia, Uncle Andrew struggles there. When the others hear Aslan's song, Uncle Andrew only hears roars from the lion. He suffers greatly, too, when he is planted as a tree. Uncle Andrew is suffering for his sins. What sins has Uncle Andrew committed?

Uncle Andrew is selfish. He cares little for others if he knows he will profit. For example, he risked Polly's safety when he made her vanish. All he cared about was finding out if his experiment worked. Later, in Narnia, he actually speaks of shooting Aslan, so he can set up a sanatorium and get rich on the land.

Inferential Comprehension

When Digory tells Aslan about his sick mother and his need to find a magic fruit for her cure, Aslan shows the boy sympathy, but he does not immediately tell Digory that he will help him. Why do you think he keeps the boy in suspense?

Aslan wants Digory to prove to himself and to everyone else that he is strong and can resist temptation and that he is worthy of Aslan's favor.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the story, Polly, Digory, and Uncle Andrew return to London, while Strawberry, the Cabby, and his wife remain in Narnia. If you had the choice to stay in Narnia or return home, what would you do?

Some students might say they would want to return to their homes and to their friends and family. Others might say that they would want to stay in Narnia because it is like paradise.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting When Polly and Digory visit The Wood Between the Worlds, they discover that the land is dotted with pools. They also realize that if they wear their Green Rings and jump into the pools, they have the ability to travel

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to other worlds. The one time they intentionally jump into a pool to experience a new world, they end up in Charn, an ancient and deserted place. Ask the students to imagine Polly and Digory jumping into a different pool to experience yet another unique world. Assign them to write a story about that world. Require them to give details about what the world looks like, its characters, and the experiences Polly and Digory have there. Require them to draw a picture of the world they have created.

Understanding Characterization Polly and Digory are good friends. However, they do have different personalities, and they sometimes clash. For example, Polly is much more cautious than Digory. When he wants to ring the bell in Charn, Polly, sensing that the effect might be dangerous, pleads with Digory to resist. Digory is too curious and willful to stop. List the personality traits of each character, and ask students which character they relate to most.

Comparing and Contrasting Many parallels can be drawn between *The Magician's Nephew* and the Bible. For example, in one scene in the book, Digory is tempted by the Witch to eat a forbidden apple. The Bible story of Adam and Eve can clearly be compared to this scene, with Digory representing Eve and the Witch representing the devil. Also, Aslan's ability to create animals, landforms, and flowers is God-like. Ask students to compare the book to the Bible. Have them point out other scenes, characters, words, and actions that relate to the Bible.

Responding to Literature In one scene of the book, Digory resists temptation in the garden and later is rewarded for it. Discuss how everyone faces temptation in their lives and that by resisting it, a person becomes stronger. As a short writing assignment, ask students to describe a time when they were able to resist temptation and how they felt after the experience.