

The Fellowship of the Ring **Reading Guide**

1. Keep a character list that will help you keep the names and types of characters straight.
2. *The Fellowship of the Ring* begins with a prologue on Hobbits, and the first half of the novel takes place mostly in or near the Shire. What do you think of the pacing of this early section of the novel? How would the tone and style shift if we started in Rivendell, with the Council of Elrond?
3. Tolkien claims that the Tom Bombadil chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring* have a purpose to them: to show the natural pacifism that grows from renouncing material objects and enjoying "things in themselves without reference to yourself." Be that as it may, if you had a choice over the shape of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, would you keep the Tom Bombadil chapters? What do they add to the narrative? How would the book change without Tom Bombadil?
4. Tolkien's work has often been criticized for the absence of major female characters in his conception of Middle-earth. There *are* women in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, but they live mostly on the margins of the story. Can you imagine the *Lord of the Rings* with a female Dwarf or Elf as a member of the Fellowship? How would the Ring quest change if either Frodo or Sam were female?
5. One thing that strikes us when we read Book 2 of *The Fellowship of the Ring* is that the pacing is *really* fast, especially compared to, say, the Tom Bombadil chapters of Book 1. In the space of ten chapters, we get the Council of Elrond, the Fellowship's failure to cross Caradhras, the disaster at Moria, *and* their trip through Lothlórien. Is there any portion of this second book that you would like to see more of? What would you sacrifice in the first book to make room for expanded chapters in the second?
6. What are the major conflicts of the *The Fellowship of the Ring*?
7. What are the themes of the *The Fellowship of the Ring*?
8. Do you see any connections between *The Fellowship of the Ring* and any other works of fiction, especially those of fantasy?
9. Check out the praise for this trilogy. Choose one statement and expand, explore, comment, or disagree.

"Among the greatest works of imaginative fiction of the twentieth century."
— *Sunday Telegraph*

"An extraordinary work — pure excitement."
— *New York Times Book Review*

"One of the great fairy-tale quests in modern literature."
— *Time*

"One of the very few works of genius in recent literature."

— *New Republic*

"A work of immense narrative power that can sweep the reader up and hold him enthralled for days and weeks."

— *The Nation*

"The Lord of the Rings is a narrative of rare imagination, filled with wit, compassion, startling power and lyrical beauty."

— *Commentary*

"The most original and varied creation ever seen in the genre, and certainly the most self-consistent; yet it is tied up with and bridged to reality like no other fantasy . . . Tolkien has made his world a prodigious, and, so far as I can judge, unshakable construct of the imagination."

— Douglass Parker, *Hudson Review*

"Tolkien's stories take place against a background of measureless depth . . . That background is ever-present in the creator's mind and it gives Frodo and company a three-dimensional reality that is seldom found in this kind of writing."

— *Washington Post Book World*

"A masterful story — an epic in its own way—with elements of high adventure, suspense, mystery, poetry and fantasy."

— *Boston Sunday Herald*

"A grim, tragic, brooding and beautiful book, shot through with heroism and hope . . . its power is almost that of mysticism."

— *Toronto Globe & Mail*

"Here are beauties which pierce like swords or burn like cold iron."

— C. S. Lewis

"The first thing one asks of an adventure story is that the adventure should be various and exciting . . . Tolkien's invention is unflagging."

— W. H. Auden