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The Hobbit
J.R.R. Tolkien

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Chapter I

An Unexpected Party

1. J. R. R. Tolkien comments on the differences in the families of Bilbo's mother and father, "...but the fact remained that the Tooks were not as respectable as the Bagginses, though they were undoubtedly richer." Write a letter to a person you respect. In your letter, tell him or her what your definition of respectable is, and why you think he or she fulfills your idea of what a respectable person is. You could begin your letter as follows:

Dear _____,

The word "respectable" came up in class today. I wanted you to know that...

2. Bilbo's initial response to the idea of having an adventure is very negative. "We are plain quiet folk and have no use for adventures! Nasty disturbing uncomfortable things! Make you late for dinner! I can't think what anybody sees in them." Imagine you have been asked to write a first person account of an adventure you have had for the magazine *Today's Adventurer*. In your article, tell the story of that adventure and how much risk, if any, is involved. Be sure to tell if you think you would want or not want to repeat that adventure. The title for your article could be, "Experiencing Life at the Edge."
3. Bilbo is offended when he overhears Gloom discussing Gandalf's assessment that Bilbo is fierce. Imagine that your best friend has to write an assessment of your character as a reference for you to receive a scholarship to a college. Then
 - A. Write the assessment that you think your friend would have written.
and
 - B. Write a paragraph about whether you secretly agree or disagree with what your friend has written.

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7. When Bilbo begins his adventure with the dwarves, it is a fine morning, and he is enjoying himself. But then “they came to lands where people spoke strangely, and sang songs Bilbo had never heard before.” Perhaps you have had Bilbo’s feelings when you have found yourself in a place where you have never been before. Suppose that a younger child you know who is afraid of going off to a new place asks you if you have ever had to do that. Complete the following dialogue you might have which you feel would reassure that child:

You: Well, listen here, there’s nothing to be afraid of. When I...

8. When the dwarves see a light in the woods, they decide to risk whatever danger there might be to see if they can find food or a dry place to sleep. Some people are described as being “adrenaline junkies,” i.e., they just love taking risks. Bungie jumpers are one good example. Write a paragraph about how you feel about people who take risks unnecessarily. That last word is important, because there are very brave people who take risks, such as firefighters and police officers, who deserve our admiration for taking risks. Begin your paragraph

The “for-the-thrill-alone” risk taker is, in my estimation...

9. Bilbo starts behaving like a burglar based on expectations, even though he is not really a burglar. Like Bilbo, we often assume different roles at different times. We also, at times, pretend to think or be one way, when we actually believe or actually are the opposite. Think of a time when you were “pretending.” Write about that experience in a long paragraph. Be sure to tell whether or not you enjoyed the experience and whether or not there were any problems as a result of your pretense. Your first sentence could be:

One time, just for fun...

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28. It is said that Bilbo "...felt a different person, and much fiercer and bolder..." after killing the giant spider. What Bilbo has done seems to give him new confidence and courage. Write an email to a friend to tell him or her about some courageous thing you did and the confidence it made you feel after the deed was accomplished Use typical email forms. You might begin your email:

Get out the gold stars! You'll never believe what I did...

29. Tolkien says that Bilbo "is born with a good share of [luck]." There is a well-known song from an old Broadway musical titled, "Luck be a Lady Tonight." Even though we often think that "luck" is only a superstition, many people really do believe in it. Try writing a short poem about how you feel about luck. Your poem can be as long as you wish, but it should not be shorter than six lines.
30. Tolkien scatters songs throughout the book sung by dwarves, goblins, elves, spiders, and Bilbo. A well-known film where dwarves also sang a song is from "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs." If you saw it, you may recall hearing the dwarves sing, "Hi Ho; Hi Ho, It's off to work we go..." when they would leave Snow White at the cottage in the morning. Think about the songs you know and choose the one that has words you really like. Do a bit of research about that song. Then write down:
- A. its name
 - B. who wrote it or sings it
 - C. when it was written
 - D. what it means
 - E. the best single line in it

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38. Tolkien describes Bilbo as he goes into the mountain “as a different hobbit....” There is no doubt that Bilbo has changed since his adventures began. He seems to have grown up and become more responsible, and confident. Think of friends or a family member whom you have known since they were young. Choose one in whom you can see the kind of maturing Bilbo shows. Write about the transformation in that friend or family member in a paragraph.
39. We read that, “Going from there is the bravest thing he ever did.” That sentence about Bilbo from Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* could have been said in our own times about any of the brave firefighters who went blindly up the stairs of the burning World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. Think back to what you remember or know about the many acts of bravery on that day. Write about one which has remained in your memory. If you need to, you can check in your school library for news magazines that wrote articles about that terrible attack for many weeks afterward. Begin your paragraph:

The thing I remember most about September 11th, 2001,...

40. Smaug’s greediness over that stolen cup leads to his rage. Both greed and anger are lowly character traits because they cause so much heartache to others. Imagine you are a member of the clergy and feel that you must speak in confidence to Smaug about his behavior. You have asked him to come to your residence to talk about it. Write what you would say to him when you sit down together. Begin your conversation with:

You: Thank you for coming Smaug. I hope you do....