

Walking Through *The Hobbit*

A Walk-through is easier, less complicated, and perhaps more fun than actually acting a play.

- It is not intended for performance before an audience.
- It does not require any acting skill, only the ability to read.
- It does not require directorial skill, just someone to keep track of what the characters are doing.
- It can be used to help with understanding the book.
- It can be adapted to various age groups.
- It is more fun and more active than simply reading and so may help anyone who does not enjoy reading.
- It works best with several people, and quite a large group of people may be needed for some chapters and episodes, but if you choose carefully it can be done with just 2 people.
- It is very inexpensive. No one needs to be costumed and there is no need for scenery, props, or a special space, although simple props will make it more fun, and some chapters will need more room for people to move around than others.
- It can be done at home
- It works very well in a classroom
- Or as an activity for a club.
- It could be done in a library.
- If there are more people than characters - for example in a class - those who are not reading can be spectators and join in by commenting on what they see, or by doing the kinds of things done in Pantomimes and calling out 'look behind you', at the appropriate time. This is good fun.



A walk-through is done by choosing a chapter, finding a bit of space, making sure everyone has a copy of the book, and then getting them all on their feet.

The idea is for everyone who wants to join in to take a character and read that character's words while moving about as the character does in the chapter and miming their actions.

The obvious requirement is that everyone reading a character must be able to read the text, but because it is written for children this is not too much of a problem.

It is fun, as well as a learning activity, to discuss together the chapter that has been chosen and decide how the space you have for it will be used, but this is not essential.

The age of the participants may affect the choice of scenes and will certainly control the level of discussion before and/or after the walk-through, but this technique will help children who do not enjoy reading in a static situation. It may even encourage those who do not want to read at first to become involved later.

For older students and adults, it would also be interesting if the walk-through could be filmed on a camcorder as this would allow participants to see themselves. It would also permit the introduction of special effects and tie in with media studies, film studies, as well as literature.

Ideas for chapters and examples of how to proceed follow.

Things you need before you start:

- Everyone taking part will need their own book from which to read.
- If you are organising the walk-through you will need to carefully read the chapter or episode you choose and work out how many characters there are, whether a narrator will be needed, and whether there are any difficult actions, words, or ideas that need to be explained.
- It is helpful, and instructive, to involve the participating group in this discussion.
- You might consider if there are any props that could be used, and whether these can be simply made as a class or group activity. E.g. a map, a cardboard goblet, a cut-out of a thrush, a necklace made of beads or coloured tissue/foil, are all examples of props that could be made easily for walk-throughs of various chapters.

All the chapters in the book can be walked-through, but some are more difficult than others.

- For example, it would be quite hard to walk through 'Out of the Frying Pan into the Fire' because of the flight of the eagles [although readers miming the eagles could simply lead the rescued characters to areas representing nest sites.]
- 'Flies and Spiders' is also hard because the dwarves are hanging from trees,
- and 'Barrels out of Bond', because everyone is stuffed into barrels.



- However, this might be attempted if everyone reading the roles of the dwarves, and Bilbo, stepped into large exercise hoops and held them up horizontally while walking forward and making up and down movements to show the movement of the barrels on the river. The chapter includes some enjoyable moments of comedy, such as the drunken butler, and Bilbo sneezing loudly.
- The final battle in 'The Clouds Burst' might be attempted if time can be given to making 'armies' out of paper cut-outs, or Games Workshop figures, which could be moved around by 'Commanders' during the narration.

It is easy to walk through 'An Unexpected Party' but you will need a NARRATOR as well as enough people to read all the dwarves, as well as Gandalf and Bilbo.

- This chapter has 2 'songs' in it. They do not need to be sung but can be recited, and it will work well if each 'dwarf' reads one stanza.
- The person reading Gandalf will need to mime blowing smoke rings as well as scratching the door,
- and in a more elaborate walk-through someone could represent the door by kneeling with arms



linked into a hoop, or by using an exercise hoop..

- Separate small areas of space will need to be assigned for Bilbo's kitchen as well as the hall and the sitting room.
- If the organiser has read the chapter before the walk-through, it is not necessary for the people reading characters to read the chapter before the walk through, but it helps.
- The people reading should be encouraged to think about the emotions their character is experiencing. These are usually quite obvious.
- For example: in this chapter Bilbo is polite but does not really want to spend much time with Gandalf at the start.
- Gandalf is planning to involve him in the quest but is careful not to say so at first.
- The dwarves all have different ways of behaving. Balin is old, Bombur is overweight, Fili and Kili are younger and livelier, and Thorin is haughty, high-handed, and stands very much on his dignity.
- The dwarves tease Bilbo when they wash up for him and he is very upset.
- Most of the time Bilbo is astonished, amazed, and rather overworked cooking and providing drink for his visitors.

If there is time, the organiser or group should talk about the shape of Bilbo's home, because it is not an ordinary house. This will be useful for working out where the door, the hall, and the various rooms would be. It may not be possible to repeat this layout during the walk-through, so the necessary changes should be talked about.

The group might discuss how they would feel if they suddenly found themselves unwillingly caught up in a plan to go in search of a dragon and its treasure hoard.

The same basic techniques can be used for most of the chapters. 'Roast Mutton' requires people to read the trolls, and their purse, as well as dwarves and Bilbo and Gandalf.

- The language of the trolls is old-fashioned and would have been understood as characteristic of low class or uneducated language when Tolkien was writing. It is interesting to discuss what is different about it.
- You will need to think about how the 'dwarves' will mime being stuffed into bags by the 'trolls' so that no one gets hurt
- and how 'Bilbo' and the 'purse' will stand together.
- Maybe the 'purse' can hold its arms in a hoop shape and Bilbo can stand within them.
- The trolls will have to stand completely still once the sun has come up,
- Maybe someone could represent the sun and slowly stand up while the trolls become immobile.

The following plan for 'Fire and Water' is useful for a large group with time to talk about what they will be, or have been, walking through.

Read the chapter 'Fire and Water'. If you are working in a large group you will need to choose people to be Bard, the Master, the folk of Esgaroth, the dragon, the thrush, and some to watch and comment. A narrator also can be chosen.

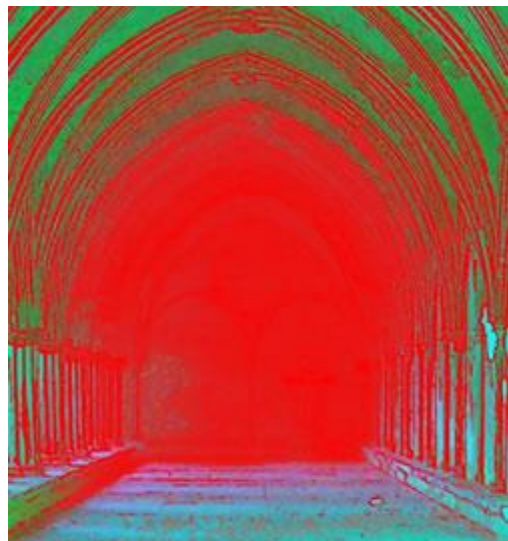
- When you have worked out which parts you are reading, you will need to read your own part carefully. It will be helpful if everyone has time to:
- Talk about what their character is like, how their character feels, and what he/she/it does
- Talk about the places in which the characters appear. Are they all in the same place at the same time?

- Talk about how the characters will feel when they see the light on the mountain. Look carefully at the text.
- Is Bard behaving like everyone else?
- Look at the language Tolkien uses when he describes Bard.
- How does everyone else behave when they know the dragon is coming?
- What do they do to save the town?
- The person who is reading the dragon should talk about how the dragon feels. Is it looking for food? Is it seeking revenge? Is it angry or enjoying itself? Read the text carefully.
- Talk about how you would feel if your home was under attack from a dragon. What would you do?
- Talk about the thrush and what it does.
- When you have talked about the parts you are going to read, you can walk-through this chapter.
- Make sure when you read your parts that you listen to everyone else who is reading and show by the way you read how your character is feeling.
- Anyone in the group who is not reading a character should watch the walk-through and be ready to talk about it.
- At the end everyone should talk about the walk-through. This may be as simple as saying whether they enjoyed it or not, or may be much more detailed:
 - with discussions of how characters and their relationships with one another develop,
 - how difficult it is to work in the space provided,
 - how effective the language is on its own and how much the readers need to move and depict emotions to create a sense of excitement, tension, and fear.
 - Whether the readers felt any emotions and whether those watching (if any) felt the emotions were communicated.
 - How effective the walk-through was with or without the use of any props.
 - Whether it is possible to create the threat of the dragon with little or no costuming.
 - What would have improved the walk-through - this may be practical or idealistic - considering the use of elaborate props, scenery, CGI, back-projection, motion-capture.

It is likely that many other topics will arise depending on the age group of the participants.

For a very small group, Bilbo's encounter with Smaug only needs 3 readers - Bilbo, Smaug, and a narrator. This episode is just part of Chapter 12 'Inside Information'. If more readers can be found, the whole chapter includes the dwarves but only Thorin speaks. The other 'dwarves' only need to mime actions. The walk-through space does not need to be very large, no props are needed, but a cup shape would be good, and perhaps someone to mime the thrush.

- As with the chapters suggested above, it will be helpful for the readers to talk about what the characters are feeling and doing.



- They should look closely at Tolkien's descriptions of how Bilbo behaves, how Thorin behaves, and how Smaug behaves.
- They should talk about the places mentioned in the chapter - where Bilbo and the dwarves are at the start, what special advantage Bilbo has when he enters the mountain, what they would feel if they had to confront a dragon.
- Bilbo's actions should be discussed because he has to descend a slope to find Smaug and then run away with dragon fire following him. This cannot be easily mimed so the narration will be important here to set the scene. The reader will need to emphasise Bilbo's feelings, and the descriptions of conditions in the tunnel.
- Everyone should discuss the moment when Bilbo throws the stone at the thrush, asking why he does so, and then note that Thorin rebukes him. It might be noted that Bilbo has just had a bad experience - is his irritation understandable, though mean? What does Bilbo fear?
- The language used to describe the scenes and actions may be discussed, including the balance between narration and direct speech. What is the effect of this? Does it make the walk-through more like a tableau?
- The difficulties or recreating the scene may be discussed - does it rely too much on imagination?

These suggested approaches may be applied to any of the chapters. They may be summarised:

- In all cases, it will be helpful for the readers to talk about/understand what their characters are feeling and doing.
- Actions should be discussed, and whether these can be mimed, or recreated.
- The places mentioned in the chapter chosen should be discussed, and their connection to the characters in them.
- Attention should be given to Tolkien's descriptions of how characters behave.
- And how characters and their relationships with one another develop - if at all.
- The language used to describe the scenes and actions may be discussed, including the balance between narration and direct speech and the effect of this.
- The difficulties or recreating the scene may be discussed - does it rely too much on imagination? What modest props/scenery would be relevant?
- Finally, it would be interesting if the walk-through could be filmed on a camcorder (following relevant parental consent in the case of schools) as this would allow participants to see themselves. It would also permit the introduction of special effects, and tie in with media studies and film studies, as well as literature.

The suggestions in this Study Pack do not infringe any copyright as the texts are merely being read in an educational context. Walk-throughs are not intended for public performance but for exploration of the text in a dynamic form.