



# Essay Ideas

For Pre-university Students

**Clothing and its significance in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings***

**The importance of food in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Ring***

**'Home is behind': the significance of homes, dwellings, and homelessness in Tolkien's works**

**'Home is behind': the process of leaving safe places in *The Hobbit*, *Roverandom* and *The Lord of the Rings***

**The naming and inheritance of weapons in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* - a matter of scale?**

**Gentle men, scholars and heroes in the works of JRR Tolkien** (look for warrior-poets, linguists, lore-masters, pupils, and unlikely candidates. What does this suggest about the world Tolkien is creating?)

**Strong females in the works of JRR Tolkien** (don't ignore Lobelia and Shelob, don't forget *The Silmarillion*)

**The roles of women in The Shire and beyond** (A chance to look at all the women who appear or are just mentioned. What roles do all these women play? Don't forget all the absent mothers, what does their absence suggest, imply or contribute to the story?)

**Melian and Galadriel: the defensive females of Middle-earth** (could be adapted to include Lobelia and Shelob)

**Social structures in Middle-earth** (it would be helpful, but not essential to know something about medieval English and northern European history for this.)

**The Flora of Middle-earth and its functions**

**The fauna of Middle-earth and its impact there** (*The Hobbit* and/or *Roverandom* could usefully be included in a comparative essay)

**Memory and its significance in Middle-earth** (including poems, backstories, and Rhymes of Lore)

**The power of the supernatural - Valar, wraiths, wights - and others in Middle-earth**

**The next generation: the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and the works of J.K. Rowling - comparisons and contrasts**

**Morality and monstrosity in the works of JRR Tolkien** (medieval and renaissance Europe linked physical monstrosity with evil and moral corruption. To what extent does Tolkien continue this archaic convention?)

## **Monsters and their meaning in *The Lord of the Rings***

**Spirituality in Middle-earth** (the influence of Christianity has often been noted but there are other indications of the spiritual life of Middle-earth, and connections with Islam have been noted)

**Prejudice in Middle-earth** (how many kinds of prejudice are there among Elves and Men and others, what forms do they take, and how do they arise? Is Tolkien making a wider observation?)

**The forms and function of choice in the works of JRR Tolkien** (might include reference to free will)

## ***The Lord of the Rings: Verse forms, their diversity and significance***

**The function of poetry in the works of JRR Tolkien** (there are many verse forms, for many different occasions, and many different speakers in his stories. Why does Tolkien use so much poetry and what does it contribute? Consider also his collection of poems *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*)

**Forms and varieties of language and their function in *The Lord of the Rings*** (besides two forms of Elvish, a few words of Anglo-Saxon, and Dwarvish, there are other forms of language. How do they function in the story individually and how does the creation of so many languages affect the reader's perception of Middle-earth?)

## **Seeing stones, scrying, and 'information technology' in Middle-earth**

**Transport and its problems in Middle-earth** (could be extended to cover all Tolkien's works including *Roverandom*, *The Silmarillion*, *Leaf by Niggle*)

## **The Road goes ever on: the significance of fords, bridges and causeways in Tolkien's works**

## **The place of music in Tolkien's works**

## **'Unnumbered tears': grief and pathos in *The Silmarillion***

## **Creation myths and *The Silmarillion***

**Being overlooked: the roles of servants, squires, heralds and pages in Tolkien's works.**  
(don't forget the ostlers in Bree and Beorn's 'servants' in *The Hobbit*!)

## **Horror in Middle-earth**

## **Historical social structures - moots, shirrifs, hue and cry etc. in the works of JRR Tolkien**

**Allegory and its discontents - a comparative study of Tolkien's short stories** (Tolkien wrote at least one allegorical short story)

## **Faerie and its forerunners: the Victorians and Romantics**

**Old warriors and last battles: Theoden, Byrhtnoth, Hrothgar and Beowulf** (you will also need to read carefully a good translation in modern English of the Old English poem *Beowulf* in order to tackle this essay. Don't rely on film versions)

**Beneficial fantasy in *The Lord of the Rings*** (a chance to think about all that is good in the story, and why fantasy goodness may be beneficial)

**Stereotyping and creativity in the works of JRR Tolkien** (Tolkien uses character types in his works, so can you find out where they come from? How are they used, and why? Does he alter them? What is the effect?)

**Emblems and symbolism in the works of JRR Tolkien** (what is the point of Elfstones, eagles, anvils and hammers, white trees, and all the other emblems? How many others can you discover and what do they contribute to the story?)

**Fantasy horror, archetypes, and bad dreams**