

Decision Education Foundation English Curriculum

The Hobbit

by J. R. R. Tolkein

Unit Snapshot

<i>Designed For</i>	Middle School Students
<i>Essential Questions</i>	How do our decisions define us? What makes characters in a novel interesting?
<i>Content and Skill Focus</i>	<p>Decision Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• six elements of a good decision• declaring a decision is the first step <p>English Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• understanding characters through their actions• qualities of powerful expository writing• reading for detail
<i>Expected Outcomes</i>	<p>Students will be able to</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• define the six elements of a good decision• practice declaring a decision• write clearly and confidently about characters in <i>The Hobbit</i>• produce a three to five paragraph expository essay
<i>Kinds of Assessment</i>	Character Writing Assignment Thirteen in-class decision skill exercises
<i>Time Required</i>	Seven mini-classes over the course of a seven to eight week unit.
<i>Comments</i>	Based on J. R. R. Tolkein's adventure story, <i>The Hobbit</i> , the following lesson plans provide students in grades six through eight with a new way to understand characters in the novel—through their decisions.

(Version 7)

Overview



Description: Designed to supplement a longer unit on J. R. R. Tolkien's novel, *The Hobbit*, these lesson plans provide students in grades six through eight with a method to analyze characters in the story.

Seven mini-lessons, each about 20-30 minutes long, introduce *declaring a decision* and the *six elements of good decision making*. Students choose, or are assigned, a character from *The Hobbit* and they are expected to become the 'expert' on that character. The seven decision-making mini-lessons enable students to think critically about their characters as they examine their decisions. The culminating project for the character analysis unit is a formal, three to five paragraph essay in which students comment on the decision-making abilities of their characters, using the language of the six elements.

Duration and Procedure: The entire unit on *The Hobbit* lasts for seven or eight weeks, and the mini-lessons are incorporated (about one mini-lesson per week) during the course of the larger unit. However, these lessons could be done one per day in about seven class periods.

These lessons are appropriate for individuals, pairs, or small groups depending on the preference of the teacher. Instruction is designed to be done in-class, and teachers can assign handouts as either homework or in-class exercises. While the culminating product is a three-five paragraph essay, each of the seven mini-lessons include a specific objective and assessment, and, therefore, teachers can also use them as discreet exercises.

The Hobbit Unit Contents

1. Learning Plan

- **First Class: Declaring a Decision (page 3)**
 - Handout # 1: Declaring a Decision (page 4)
 - Handout # 2: Declared / Undeclared Decisions (page 5)
- **Second Class: Helpful Frame (page 6)**
 - Handout # 3: What do the Cartoons Have in Common? (Frame) (page 7)
 - Handout # 4: Stealing from the Trolls (page 12)
- **Third Class: Creative Alternatives (page 13)**
 - Handout # 5: Connect the Dots (Alternatives) (page 14)
 - Handout # 6: Alternatives to Stealing from the Trolls (page 16)
- **Fourth Class: Clear Values (page 17)**
 - Handout # 7: What do we mean by VALUES? (page 18)
 - Handout # 8: Linking Decisions and Values (page 22)
- **Fifth Class Useful Information (page 23)**
 - Handout # 9: The Fight: What Might Happen? (Information) (page 24)
 - Handout # 10: New Information (page 26)
- **Sixth Class: Sound Reasoning (page 28)**
 - Handout # 11: What is a Decision Tree? (page 29)
- **Seventh Class: Commitment to Follow Through (page 30)**
 - Handout # 12: A Significant Decision Discussion (Follow Through) (page 31)
 - Handout # 13: Follow Through in *The Hobbit* (page 33)

2. Assessment Evidence (page 34)

3. Resources on the Web (page 36)

1. Learning Plan

First Class: Declaring a Decision



Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of declaring a decision and will reinforce their understanding by examining the decision declarations of characters in The Hobbit.

Materials:

3-5 balloons (blown up), thumbtack
“Stop, think, and decide” DEF poster
“Declaring a Decision” Handout #1
“Declared/Undeclared Decisions” Handout #2

Procedures:

1. Blow up 3-5 balloons and put them on a table. Ask for volunteers who have no objection to popping balloons. Have one volunteer come up, and give the volunteer the thumbtack. Ask the members of the class to imagine they were the volunteer with the balloon and ask them to consider what they would be doing if they had the pin. Say to the volunteer, “Your choice” and see what happens.
2. Ask why the volunteer did what he/she did. Point out that you gave no instructions other than “Your choice.”
3. Ask the group whether the volunteer made a decision. Discuss the alternatives (list them on the board) and point out that because there was more than one course of action under the volunteer’s control, he/she did in fact make a decision, whether consciously or unconsciously. Ask who recognized at the time that a decision was being made.
4. Extrapolate to real-life situations where we make decisions unconsciously – sometimes this is good and sometimes this is bad.
5. Discuss Handout #1 and draw students’ attention to the “Stop, think, and decide” DEF poster. Discuss situations in which declaring a decision (making a conscious decision) is a good thing.

Closure:

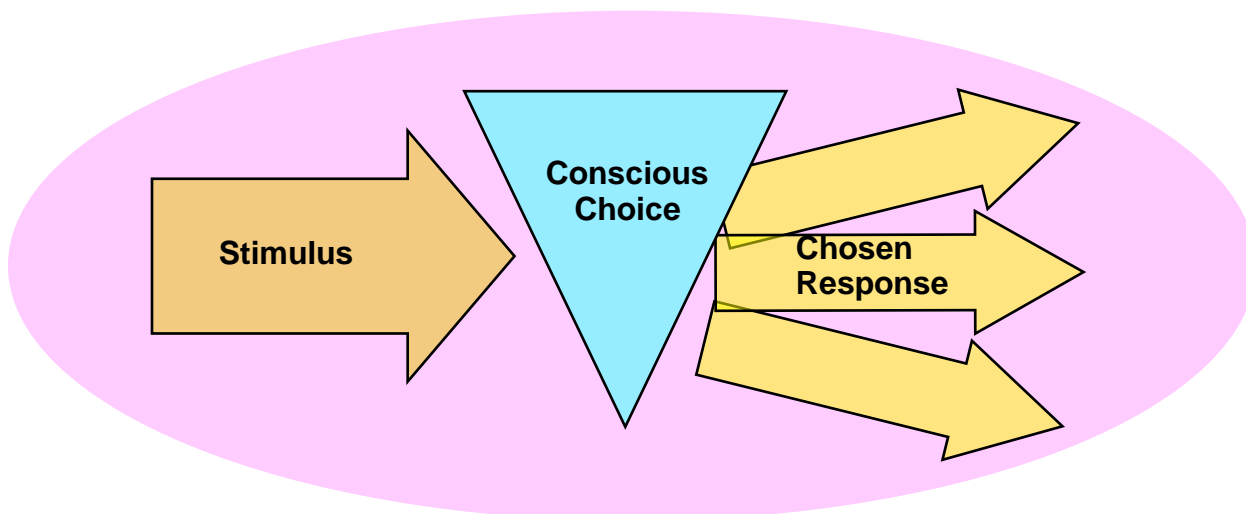
Use the “Declared/Undeclared Decisions” Handout #2 to wrap up the lesson, and to examine The Hobbit. Discuss the characters and their decisions. Which character is most likely to declare a decision? Which character is least likely to declare a decision? Why?

Evaluation:

Collect Handout #2. This sheet can be graded or simply reviewed to check students’ understanding of declaring decisions.

Handout #1:

Declaring a Decision: *An essential decision-making skill is recognizing when we have a decision to make.*



The opposite of *declaring a decision* is *going with the flow* or letting circumstances control us. Often we find ourselves in the middle of a situation before we even recognize we are making a decision. And sometimes we make a decision without realizing we have done so.

For example: *Fred is new to the school and delighted to be included in a touch football game during recess after lunch. The group stops to rest, and Mike, who lives across the street, says, "Hey guys, let's go to my house and get a snack—we can get back in time for class." Fred "goes with the flow" and sneaks across the street with the others. While they are drinking sodas, Mike turns on the TV, and before they realize it, twenty minutes passes. Mike notices the clock, and shouts, "Guys, we're ten minutes late for class. At that moment Fred remembers it is against the rules to leave campus during the day and he is late for an important math test.*

***DECLARING* helps us to create space for a good decision.
We **STOP** and **THINK** before we **ACT**.**

Making a conscious effort to recognize decision situations is the first step in making the best choices.

Declaring a decision can also be challenging and can make us unpopular. What might have happened if Fred said he could not go to Mike's house?

Other examples from your experience?

Handout #2:

Declared / Undeclared Decisions

Directions: Think about the decisions made by the following characters in *The Hobbit*. Create a list of the decisions they declare in the “Declared Decisions” column and the decisions they make but do not declare in the “Undeclared Decisions” column.

Character	Declared Decisions	Undeclared Decisions
Gandalf		
Bilbo		
Elrond		
Thorin		
Any of the Other Dwarves		
The Great Goblin		
The Trolls (Bert, Tom, William)		
Beorn		
Gollum		
The Elvenking		
Smaug		
Bard		
Lord of the Eagles		



Second Class: Helpful Frame

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of framing and will apply this concept to the decisions made by characters in The Hobbit.

Materials:

“The need for a larger frame” Handout #2

“Looking at the wrong frame...” Handout #3

“Stealing From the Trolls” Handout #4

Procedures:

1. Introduce the idea of frame and perspective, using the cartoons on Handout #3. Let students discuss the cartoons before handing out the second page.
2. Explore the decision frame further with the riddles and ‘boat on a river’ example on the third page. Hand out the fourth page once students have had a chance to discuss the first boat frame.
3. Distribute the fifth page of Handout # 3 and explain the idea that a frame answers the question **‘What am I deciding?’** and that it includes the PURPOSE, PERSPECTIVE, and SCOPE of the situation. Focus primarily on the issues and decisions faced by the person in the boat.
4. Distribute Handout #4 and have students examine the adventurers’ decision to steal from the trolls in *The Hobbit*.

Closure:

Have students turn to page five of Handout #3 and examine the three elements of a decision frame for the ‘boat on a river’ example. Emphasize purpose, perspective and scope.

Evaluation:

Collect Handout #4 and evaluate students’ understanding of the three elements of a decision frame for the adventurers’ decision to steal from the trolls in The Hobbit.

Handout # 3

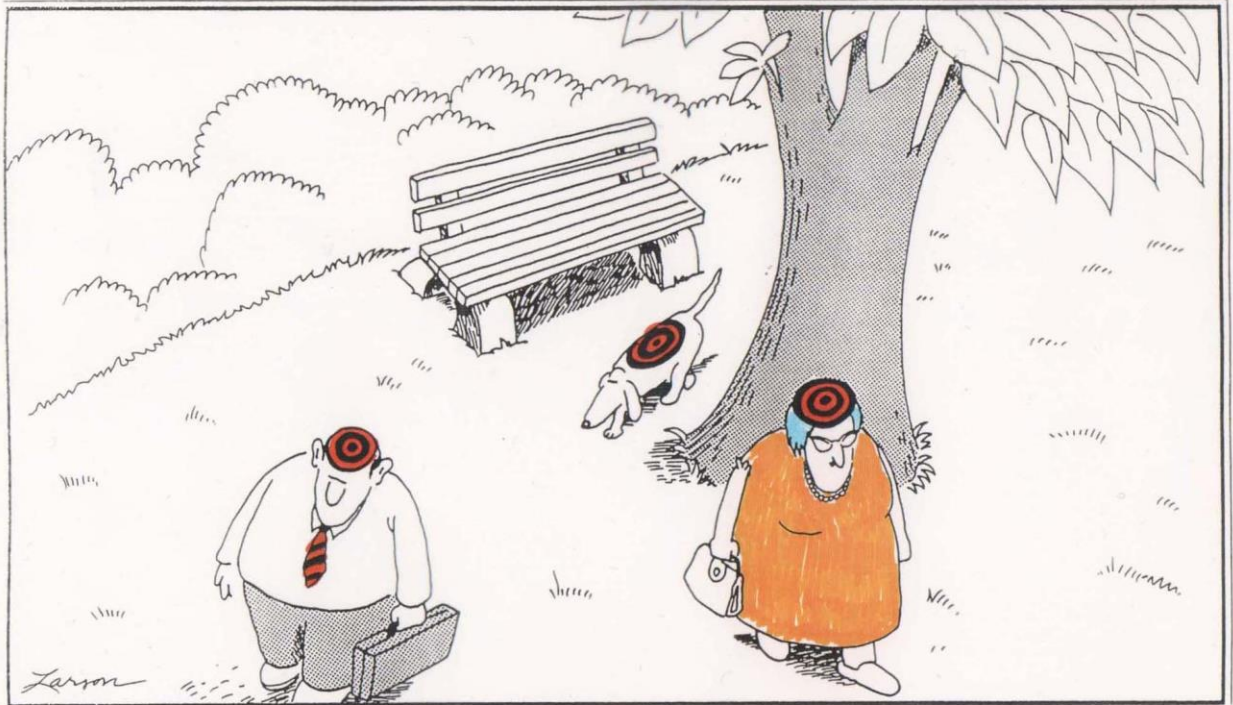
What do the three following cartoons have in common?



**“Hello, Emily. This is Gladys Murphy up the street.
Fine, thanks...Say, could you go to your window and
describe what’s in my front yard?”**

(Source: Gary Larson, The Farside Gallery Chronicle Publishing Co., 1980)

(Handout # 3, page 2)



How birds see the world



RELAX, DAD. IT'S JUST A BALL IN THE GUTTER. IT'S NOT AS IF I'VE BEEN EMBEZZLING MONEY OR KILLING PEOPLE, RIGHT? AREN'T YOU GLAD I'M NOT STEALING AND MURDERING?



I ALWAYS HAVE TO HELP DAD ESTABLISH THE PROPER CONTEXT.



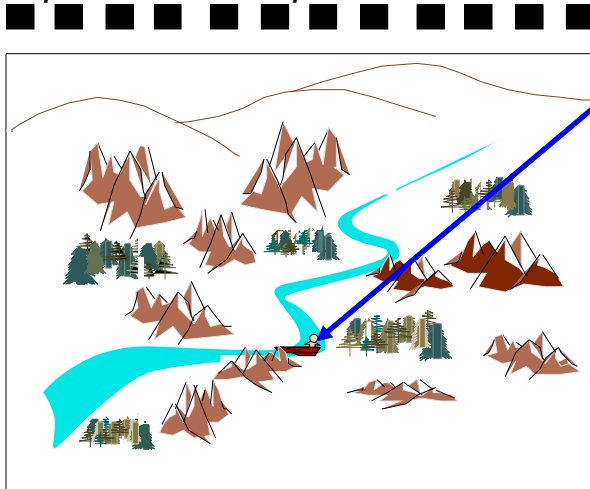
(Handout # 3, page 3)

Notice that the humor in each cartoon has to do with differences in perspective. Explain.

Perspective—our viewpoint and the views of others—is important to think about when making decisions. Perspective is a part of the FRAME of the decision.

More fun with FRAMES...

- *Why are 1988 pennies worth more than 1987 pennies?*
- *Which animals can jump higher than a house?*
- *You see a person in a boat on a river. What decisions might be important for this person to consider?*


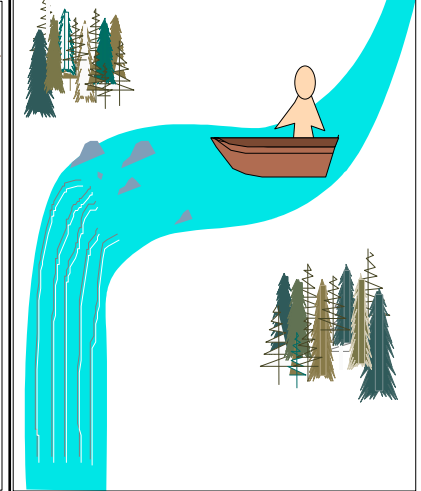
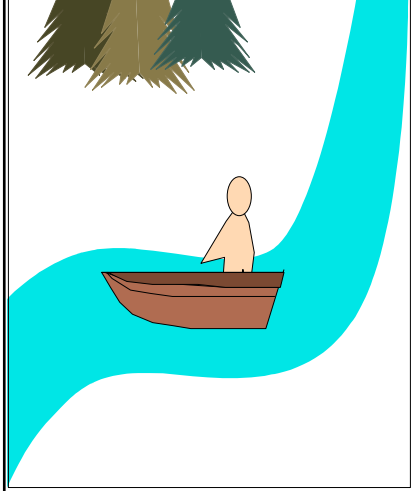


Possible Issues:

Possible Decisions to Make:

Look at the FRAMES on the next page and consider the question again...

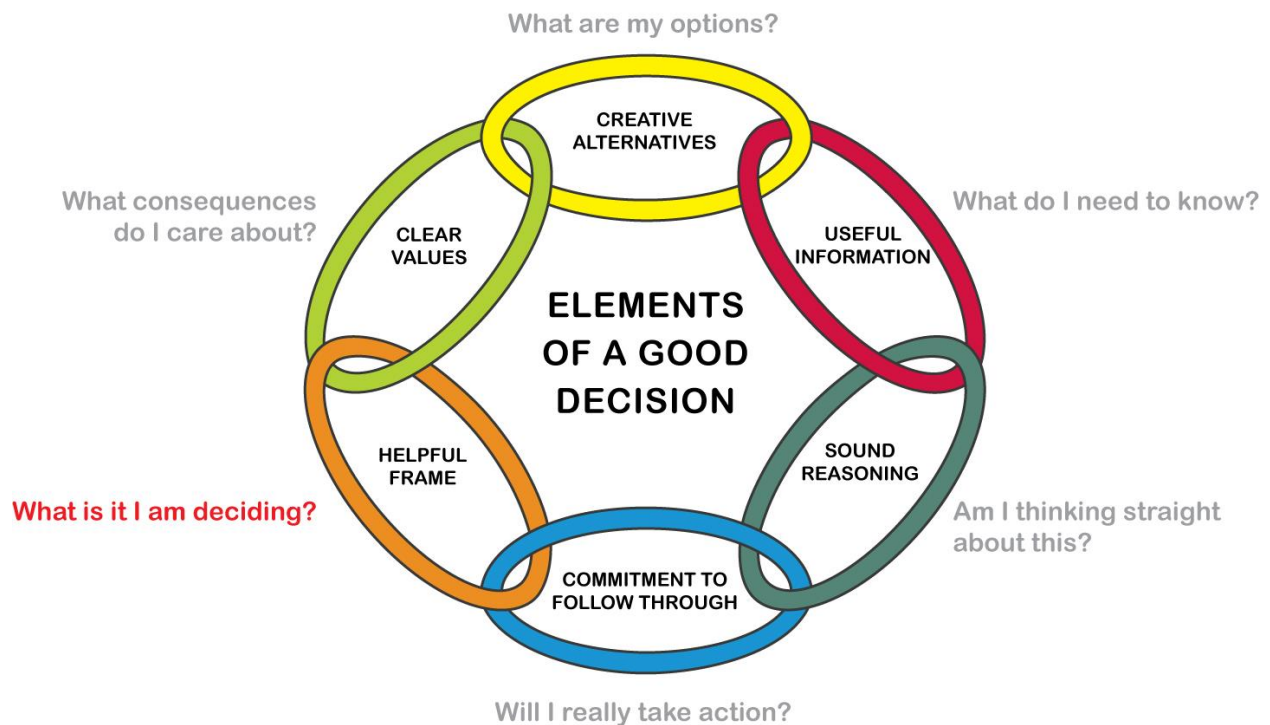
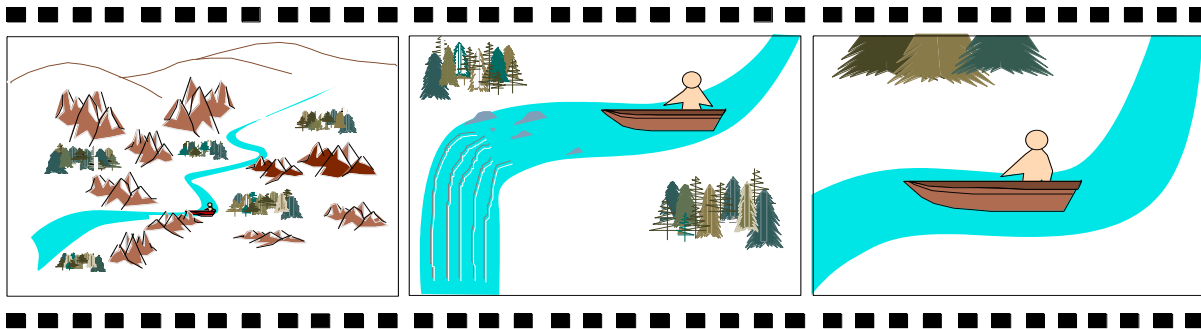
Looking at the wrong frame can lead to bad decisions.

		
<p>Issues:</p> <p>Decisions:</p>	<p>Issues:</p> <p>Decisions:</p>	<p>Issues:</p> <p>Decisions:</p>

(Handout # 3, page 5)

A useful decision FRAME includes...

- **Purpose**—what we intend to achieve in this situation
- **Perspective**—the context for a decision (e.g., how to view the problem, who to involve, what issues to explore)
- **Scope**—what decisions are included and excluded in considering the situation



Handout # 4: *Stealing From the Trolls*

Directions: In chapter 2 (“Roast Mutton”) of The Hobbit, the adventurers make the hasty decision to try to steal from the Trolls. Answer the following questions about the framing of this decision.

1. What do the adventurers intend to achieve in this situation?

Bilbo’s intentions:

Dwarves’ intentions:

2. What issues are included when the adventurers consider this situation?

Bilbo’s issues:

Dwarves’ issues:

3. What decisions are included when the adventurers consider this situation?

Bilbo’s decisions:

Dwarves’ decisions:



Third Class: Creative Alternatives

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of alternatives in decision-making and apply the concept to the decisions of characters in *The Hobbit*.

Materials:

Box of paper clips

“Nine Dots” Handout #5

“Alternatives to Stealing from the Trolls” Handout #6

Procedures:

1. Assemble students in small groups, and give each small group of students a paper clip. The recorder in the group should write down all of the alternative uses for a paper clip the group can come up with in 4 minutes. Groups share lists to come up with one master list of alternative uses for a paper clip.
2. Distribute “Nine Dots” Handout #5. Students should work individually to come up with the answer. Be sure to emphasize the directions on the handout. Have students come up to the board to draw the correct answers for the fewest number of lines (start from 5 lines and work down to 3 lines, or even 1 line). For solutions see page two of Handout # 5. Emphasize perspective and alternatives during this lesson.

Closure:

Distribute “Alternatives to Stealing from the Trolls” Handout #6. Have students brainstorm alternative for the adventurers.

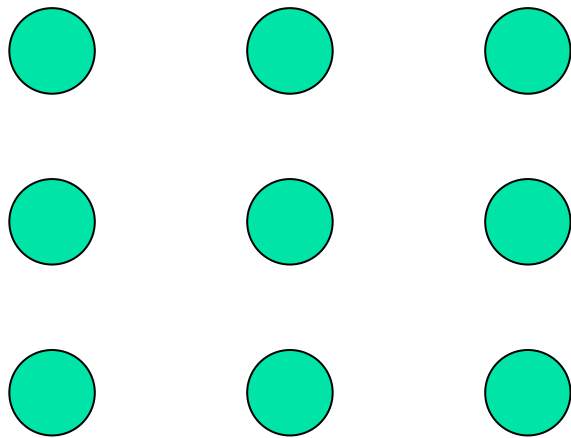
Evaluation:

Collect and evaluate Handout #6 to check for student understanding of alternatives.

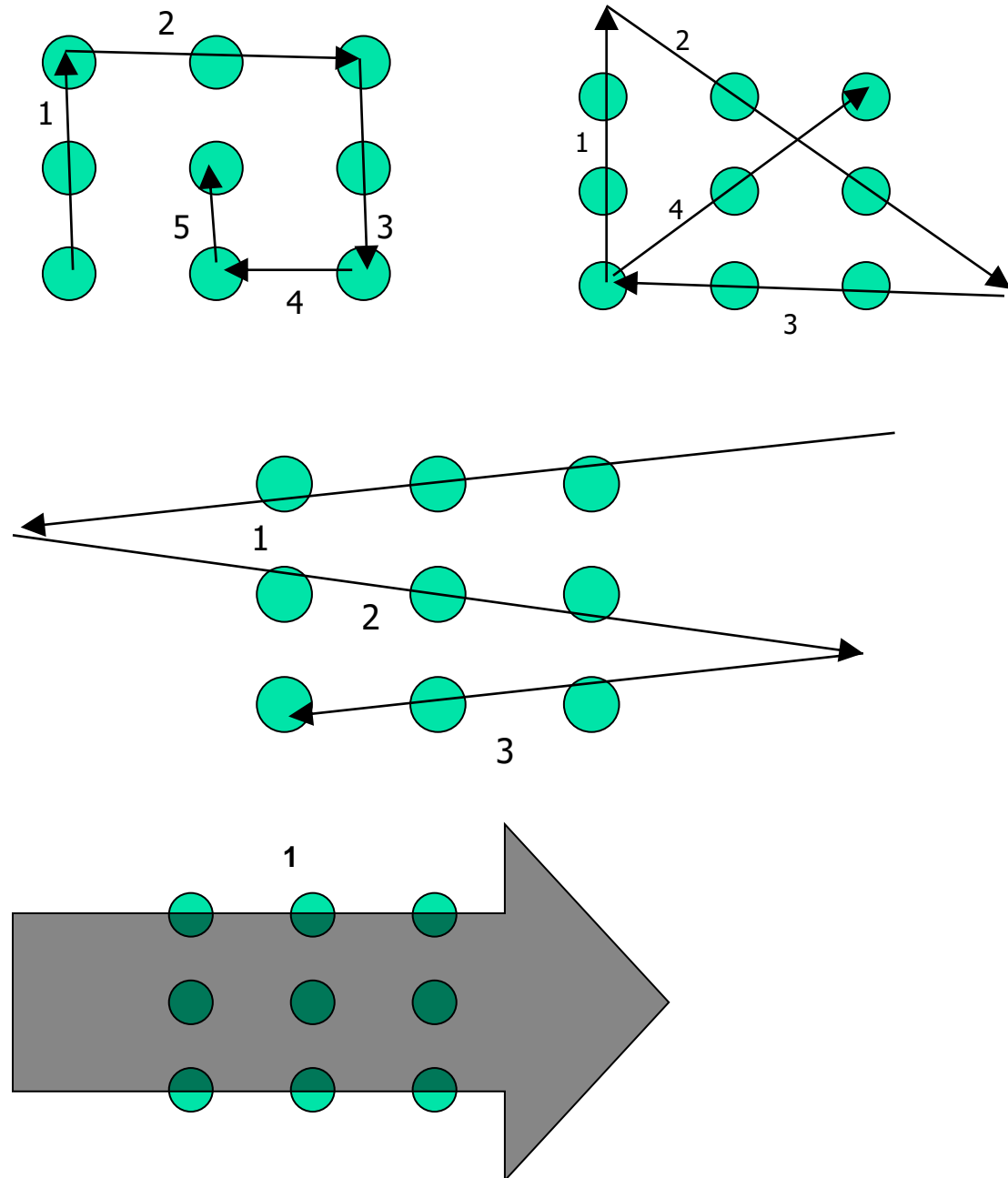


Handout # 5

Connect these nine dots with as few straight lines as possible.



Possible Solutions



Handout # 6

Alternatives to Stealing From the Trolls

Directions: Stealing from the Trolls is an extremely dangerous undertaking for the adventurers. Brainstorm and list some alternatives that Bilbo and the Dwarves could have considered before rushing into that decision.

Bilbo's Alternatives	Dwarves' Alternatives

Fourth Class: Clear Values

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of direct and indirect values and will apply the concept to the decisions of characters in *The Hobbit*.

Materials:

“What do we mean by values?” Handout #7 (four pages)

“Linking Decisions and Values” Handout #8

Procedures:

1. Distribute page one of Handout #7, and have students brainstorm answers to the question on the first page, “What do we mean by ‘values?’”
2. Distribute pages two and three. Explain the difference between direct and indirect values using page three of Handout #7. Use page two to emphasize the question we ask to determine values.
3. Have students fill in the chart “Linking My Decisions and Values” on page 3 of Handout #7. This can be done individually and then shared with the whole group. Discuss decision-making as a reflection of values, emphasizing that values are ‘what we care about.’ Check to see if students can distinguish between direct and indirect values as they share their responses.

Closure:

Distribute “Linking Decisions and Values” Handout #8 and have students complete the chart for an assigned character from *The Hobbit*.

Evaluation:

Collect Handout #8 and evaluate for comprehension of the lesson on values.

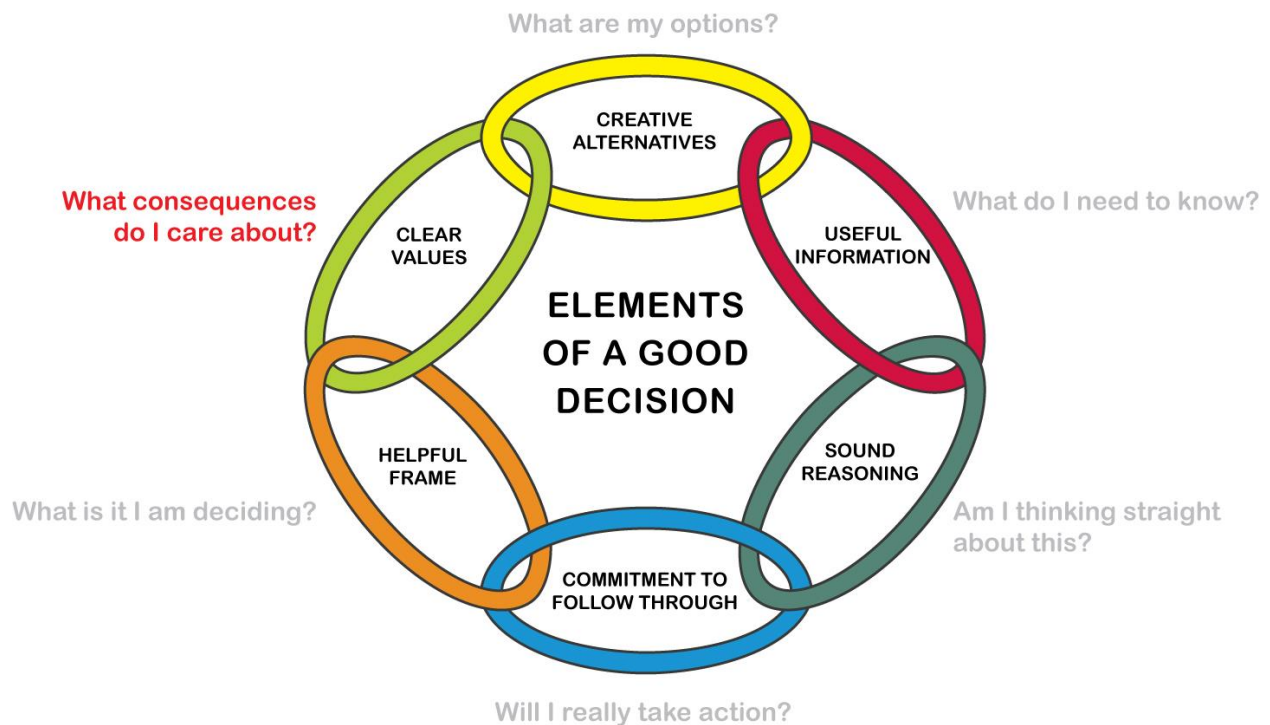
Handout # 7

What do we mean by VALUES?

- .
-
-
-
-
-



***VALUES are what we care about.
They are what we really want.***



**We make a distinction between
DIRECT and INDIRECT values.**

- **Direct values** are the things that we fundamentally care about.
 - For example, I really care about listening to music.
- **Indirect values** are things we care about because we think they lead us to direct values.
 - For example, I care about owning a good audio system – but only because it allows me to enjoy listening to music.
- If there is an answer to the question “Why do I value this?”, it is an indirect value. If not, it is a direct value.

Linking My Decisions and Values

- *What are 3 important decisions you faced recently? What did you do?*

Decision I faced recently	What I did	How well did my decision reflect my values?

- *What choices can you make today and in the future that reflect your values?*
- *Will you make these choices?*

Handout # 8



Linking _____'s Decisions and Values

Directions: Fill in your assigned character's name in the blank (____) spaces. Think about THREE of the decisions your character has faced so far in The Hobbit. In the chart below, briefly summarize the decision the character faces, his response to the decision, how well the decision reflects his values (1 = very well, 2 = fairly well, 3 = not well), and whether the decision reflects direct (D) or indirect (I) values for your character.

Decision _____ faces.	_____’s response.	How well does the decision reflect _____’s values? (1, 2, or 3)	Decision reflects direct (D) or indirect (I) values.

Fifth Class: Useful Information

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of useful information and will apply the concept to characters from *The Hobbit*.

Materials:

“The Fight” Handout #9

Deck of cards

“New Information” Handout #10

Procedures:

1. Distribute “The Fight” Handout #9. Have students consider the situation on page one only. Students should brainstorm answers to the question.
2. Distribute page two of the handout—new information. Now, have the students brainstorm answers to the questions, based on the new information. Be sure to conclude by asking, “How does the new information change your response to the situation?”
3. Now, use the deck of cards to introduce the idea of a probability tree. The situation for the students to consider: You have four playing cards – two aces and two kings. The cards are shuffled and placed face down on a table. You select two of the cards. What is the probability that you have drawn two aces? See if students can brainstorm the correct answer to the problem (1/6 or 16%).
4. Draw the probability tree to make clear the solution to the problem (this is a good introduction to decision trees!). See Handout #9, page 3.

First Card	Second Card	Probability
Ace (50%, $\frac{1}{2}$)	Ace (33%, $\frac{1}{3}$)	$\frac{1}{2} * \frac{1}{3} = \frac{1}{6}$ (16%)
	King (66%, $\frac{2}{3}$)	$\frac{1}{2} * \frac{2}{3} = \frac{1}{3}$ (33%)
King (50%, $\frac{1}{2}$)	Ace (66%, $\frac{2}{3}$)	$\frac{1}{2} * \frac{2}{3} = \frac{1}{3}$ (33%)
	King (33%, $\frac{1}{3}$)	$\frac{1}{2} * \frac{1}{3} = \frac{1}{6}$ (16%)

Closure:

Distribute “New Information” Handout #10 and have the students consider the usefulness of the information the adventurers receive in chapter 7 of *The Hobbit*.

Evaluation:

Collect Handout #10 and evaluate for student comprehension of the lesson on useful information.



Handout # 9

The Fight: What might happen?

- There is a rumor flying around school that your friend Ted plans an after school fight with Jason, a guy who has been hassling his younger brother.
 - You tell Ted not to fight Jason, but he refuses to listen.

- What might happen if Ted fights Jason?
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -
 -

(Handout # 9, page 2)



The Fight – new information

1. Two teachers heard about the fight and plan to be there after school.

- Now, what might happen if Ted fights Jason?

—

—

—

- What would you do to help Ted?

2. You hear that Jason is carrying a knife.

- Now, what might happen if Ted fights Jason?

—

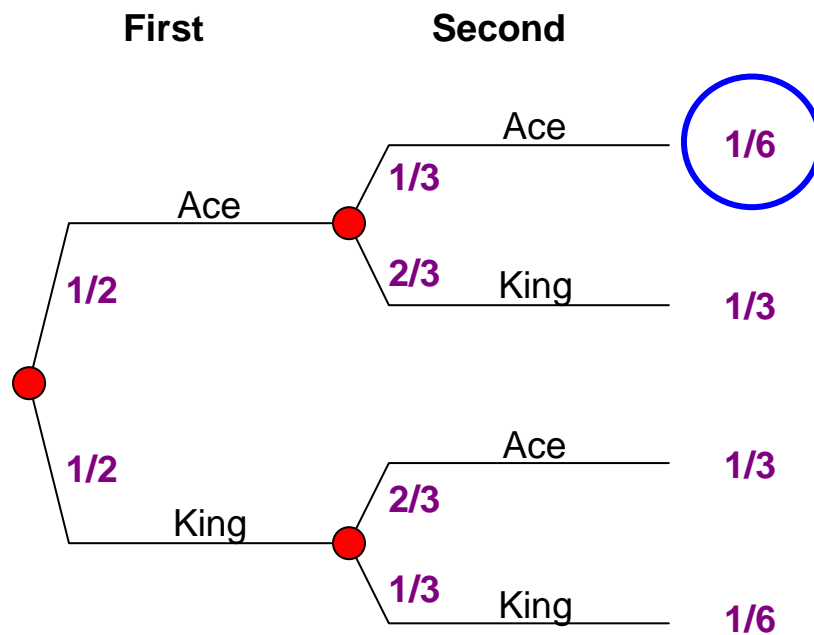
—

—

- What would you do to help Ted?

(Handout # 9, page 3)





Handout # 10



New Information

Directions: When the adventurers leave Beorn's house in chapter 7 of *The Hobbit*, they receive a good deal of new information regarding their journey. Answer the following questions about this information.

1. What information do they receive? Be as specific as possible.
2. Who is offering the information to the adventurers?
3. What are the qualifications, experience, and motivations of those offering the information?
4. Where did those offering the information get their facts and reasoning?
5. When did those offering the information get this news?
6. Why are they giving this information to the adventurers?
7. How common is their viewpoint? In other words, would the adventurers receive the same information from other allies in the region?
8. Is this good information for the adventurers? Why or why not? Explain.



Sixth Class: Sound Reasoning

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the concept of sound reasoning by using decision trees to examine their character's decisions in *The Hobbit*.

Materials:

"What is a Decision Tree?" Handout #11

Procedures:

1. Introduce the decision tree concept to the students, using Handout #11. This should be a very simple introduction, and should focus mainly on the idea that a decision tree shows a decision, the uncertainties, and the possible outcomes.
2. Illustrate by reviewing the 'party location' example with the students on Handout #11.

Closure:

Have students create a simple decision tree for one decision faced by their characters in *The Hobbit*. If students grasp the concept quickly and easily, they can also generate a 'real' decision tree for a personal decision they are facing (optional).

Evaluation:

Collect the decision trees for evaluation.

Handout # 11

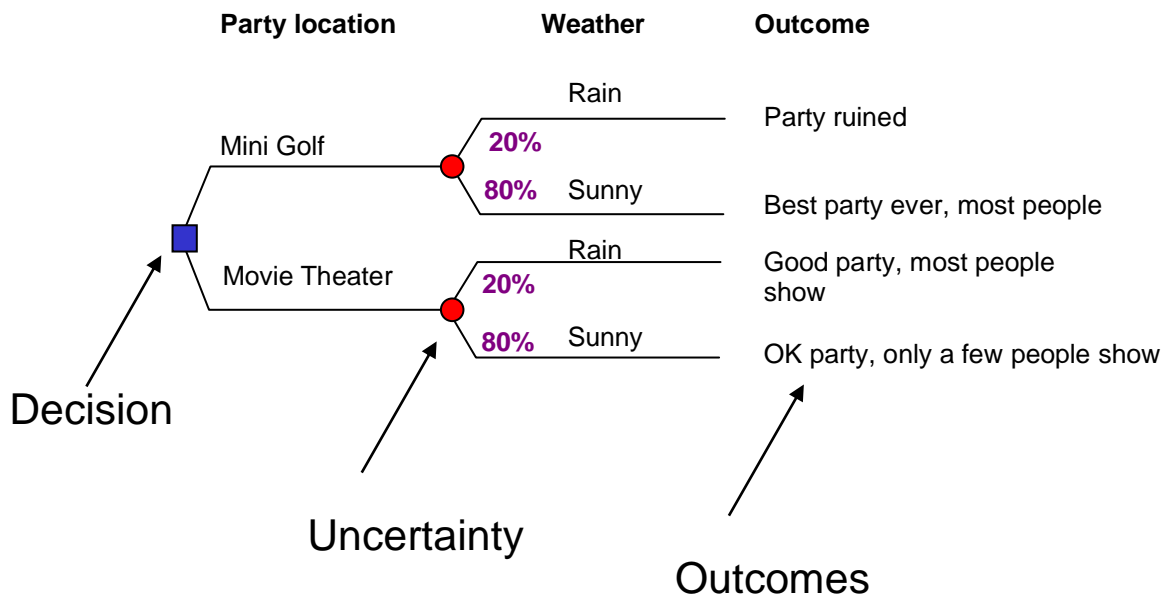
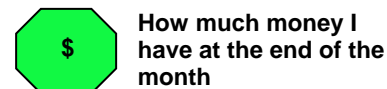
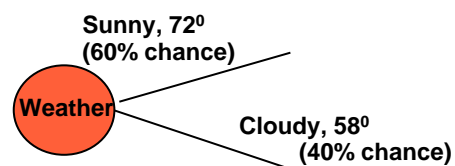
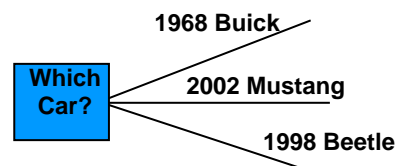
What is a Decision Tree?

- A decision tree is a graphical tool (map) that ties together decisions, uncertainties, and values.
- The tree both communicates how they are related and helps you determine the best choice.

A **decision** is a choice between alternatives that results directly in an action.

An **uncertainty** is an event whose outcome is unknown.

A **value** is something important to you; it determines how good an outcome is.



DECISION TREES organize **decisions**, **uncertainties**, and **outcomes**.



Seventh Class: Commitment to Follow Through

Objectives:

Students will be able to understand the importance of following through on a decision and will apply this lesson to their characters from *The Hobbit*.

Materials:

“What does it take to follow through on your decisions?” Handout #12

“Following Through” Handout #13

Procedures:

1. Distribute Handout #12, top half. Use the topic, “Think of a time when you intended to make a significant decision” to generate discussion about personal decisions and the things that prevent follow through.
2. Keep a master list of the things that stopped students from following through.
3. Use the “Following through” section of Handout #12 (bottom half) to discuss the challenges associated with following through.
4. Be sure to discuss the “two great challenges to following through”, and ask students to brainstorm some ideas to answer the question, “How can we build commitment to follow through on a decision?” (both on Handout #12, page 2)

Closure:

Distribute “Following Through in *The Hobbit*” Handout #13, and have students examine their characters’ willingness to follow through on decisions in the novel.

Evaluation:

Collect Handout #13 and evaluate for student understanding of the lesson on following through.

Handout # 12

Think of a time when you intended to make a significant decision.

- What was it?
- Was the decision difficult? If so, why?
- Did you actually carry it out? If not, what things got in the way?

Two rules for this conversation:

No one is forced to speak
No one has to reveal things that make them uncomfortable



Following Through

- What makes it easy to follow through?
 -
 -
 -
- What makes it hard to follow through?
 -
 -
 -
- Why is following through an essential part of making good decisions?

In the end, there are two great challenges to following through.

Inertia

I'll start tomorrow; there's no harm in waiting a bit
I need more time to get ready
I'm comfortable where I am
My heart's just not in it

Fear

What will others think?
What if I fail?

How can we build commitment to follow through on a decision?

Following Through in *The Hobbit*

Directions: Answer the following questions about a decision made by your assigned character from The Hobbit.

Character's Name:

Character's Decision:

1. Does the character follow through on the decision? If so, how? Explain. If not, why not? Explain.
2. If your character follows through on the decision, how does he do so? Explain and provide examples.
3. If your character does not follow through, why doesn't he? What stops him from following through on his decision? Explain and give examples.

2. Assessment Evidence



Character Writing Assignment

Directions:

- Write a three-paragraph essay about the following topic:

In The Hobbit, many characters make decisions that have serious implications for the rest of Middle Earth. Think about your character's decision(s). Do you agree or disagree with his/her decision(s)? In other words, does that character make the right decision(s)?

Remember:

- Use the outline on the next page to organize your thoughts about the essay topic.
- Use decision making language as you prove your point (**frame, perspective, alternatives, information, values, sound reasoning**).
- Your essay should include three distinct paragraphs, following the format of the outline.
- Write in the present tense.
- NO personal pronouns (I, me, my, you).
- To quote **dialogue**: Bilbo says, “What can I do for you, my dwarves?” (8).
- To quote **narration**: The narrator explains, “Hobbits have no beards” (2).

Final Draft Format:

- ~2 pages; double space; 12 point font; Times New Roman font; use the spell-check.

Outline for the Character Essay

INTRODUCTION



General Info:_____

Specific Info:_____

Thesis Statement:_____

MAIN BODY

Transition Sentence:_____

Reason #1:_____

Context:

Quote:

Explanation:

Reason #2:_____

Context:

Quote:

Explanation:

Reason #3:_____

Context:

Quote:

Explanation:

Transition Sentence:_____

CONCLUSION

Restate Thesis:_____

Review Proof:_____

Overall Conclusion:_____

3. Resources on the Web

The Hobbit: Background, Summaries, Analysis, and Other Resources



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hobbit

Wikipedia includes a clear synopsis and a wealth of resources on its production, history, author, and various formats of the story. There is a link to the “Middle Earth Portal” which leads to exhaustive details about Tolkein’s imaginary world.

<http://www.tolkiensociety.org/>

For students and teachers interested in learning more about the author.

http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/readers_guides/hobbit/#intro

Houghton-Mifflin’s teacher’s guide to the novel.

<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/tolkien.html>

Web English Teacher includes a number of links to lesson plans and activities for students.

