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“The Argument”

Blackthorn Winter by Douglas Wilson

“The captain hoped that Thomas would remember what he had told him the night before about leaving Isaac a way of escape. But Thomas, while he knew the wisdom of this, did not yet have the patience that comes with years that would enable him to understand when he should apply that wisdom. Thomas was angry enough not to be able to see how angry and irrational Carter was.

“Whines and complaints make for a poor pudding, as my mother used to say,” Thomas said.

“Your mother...! Carter shouted.

“I can tell chalk from cheese,” said Thomas, “and I can tell a rascal from an unfortunate sailor. And I can tell gallows bait from a quartermaster.”

And with that, Carter decided to end the argument the only way he knew how. He pulled a pistol from his belt, and, before anyone had a chance to move or say anything, he leveled it squarely at Thomas’ head, and pulled the trigger.”

“Attean’s Dog”

A Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare

“Sometimes Attean brought an old dog with him. It was about the sorriest-looking hound Matt had ever seen, with a coat of coarse brown hair, a mangy tail, and whitish patches on its face that gave it a clownish look. Its long pointed nose was misshapen with bumps and bristles. By the look of its ears, it had survived many battles. The instant it spied Matt, a ridge of hair went straight up on its back and it let out a mean growl. Attean cuffed it sharply, and after that it was quiet, but it watched the white stranger with wary eyes and kept its distance. Matt tried not to show his own distrust. “What’s his name?” he asked politely.

Attean shrugged. “No name. Aremus-- dog.”

“If he doesn’t have a name, how can he come when you call?”

“Him my dog. Him come.”

As though he knew what Attean had said, the scruffy tail began to weave back and forth.

“Piz wat,” Attean said. “Good for nothing. No good for hunt. No sense. Him fight anything--bear, moose.” There was no mistaking the pride in Attean’s voice.”

“Barracks 8”*The Hiding Place by Corrie ten Boom*

"Barracks 8 was in the quarantine compound. Next to us--perhaps as a deliberate warning to newcomers--were located the punishment barracks. From there, all day long and often into the night, came the sounds of hell itself. They were not the sounds of anger, or of any human emotion, but of a cruelty altogether detached: blows landing in regular rhythm, screams keeping pace. We would stand in our ten-deep ranks with our hands trembling at our sides, longing to jam them against our ears, to make the sounds stop.

It grew harder and harder. Even within these four walls there was too much misery, too much seemingly pointless suffering. Every day something else failed to make sense, something else grew too heavy.

But as the rest of the world grew stranger, one thing became increasingly clear. And that was the reason the two of us were here. Why others should suffer we were not shown. As for us, from morning until lights-out, whenever we were not in ranks for roll call, our Bible was the center of an ever-widening circle of health and hope.

Like waifs clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about it, holding out our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the Word of God.

'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?...Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.'

I would look about us as Betsie read, watching the light leap from face to face. More than conquerors...It was not a wish. It was a fact."

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 5 6th: 5

“The Black Thing”

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

“ Watch, Mrs. Whatsit commanded.

It was a shadow, nothing but a shadow. It was not even as tangible as a cloud. Was it cast by something? Or was it a Thing in itself.

The sky darkened. The gold left the light and they were surrounded by blue, blue deepening until where there had been nothing but the evening sky there was now a faint pulse of a star, and then another and another and another. There were more stars than Meg had ever seen before.

The atmosphere is so thin here, “ Mrs. Whatsit said as though in answer to her unasked question, “that it does not obscure your vision as it would at home. Now look. Look straight ahead.

Meg looked. The dark shadow was still there. It had not lessened or dispersed with the coming of night. And where the shadow was the stars were not visible.

What could there be about a shadow that was so terrible that she knew that there had never been before or ever would be again, anything that would chill her with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort?”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 2

“Camazotz”

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

“Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers there would be exactly the same number for each house. In front of all the houses children were playing. Some were skipping rope, some were bouncing balls. Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play. It seemed exactly like children playing around any housing development at home, and yet there was something different about it. She looked at Calvin, and saw that he, too, was puzzled.

“Look!” Charles Wallace said suddenly. “They’re skipping and bouncing in rhythm! Everyone’s doing it at exactly the same moment.”

This was so. As the skipping rope hit the pavement, so did the ball. As the rope curved over the head of the jumping child, the child with the ball caught the ball. Down came the ropes. Down came the balls. Over and over again. Up. Down. All in rhythm. All identical. Like the houses. Like the paths. Like the flowers. Then the doors of all the houses opened simultaneously, and out came women like a row of paper dolls. The print of their dresses was different, but they all gave the appearance of being the same. Each woman stood on the steps of her house. Each clapped. Each child with the ball caught the ball. Each child with the skipping rope folded the rope. Each child turned and walked into the house. The doors clicked shut behind them.

“How can they do it? Meg asked wonderingly. “We couldn’t do it that way if we tried. What does it mean?”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

The Charges Against Katherine Tyler

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare

“Katherine Tyler, thou art here accused that not having the fear of God before thine eyes thou hast in a preternatural way afflicted and done harm to the bodies and estates of sundry of His Majesty’s subjects, in the third year of His Majesty’s reign, for which by the law of God and the law of the Colony thou deservest to die.

There was a murmuring along the benches. Kit’s hands felt icy, but she kept her eyes steadily on the magistrate.

“Mistress Tyler, you are accused by Adam Cruff with the following actions. Firstly that you were the familiar friend and companion of the Widow Hannah Tupper of Blackbird Pond, an alleged witch who has within the past week disappeared in a suspicious manner. Such friendship is a lawful test of guilt, inasmuch as it is well known that witchcraft is an art that may be learned and conveyed from one person to another, and that it has often fallen out that a witch, upon dying, leaveth some heir to her witchcraft.

Secondly, that you are guilty of actions and works which infer a court with the devil, which have caused illness and death to fall upon many innocent children in this town.”

“Defeating IT”

A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle

“Nonsense,” Charles Wallace said. “You have nothing that IT doesn’t have.”

“You’re lying,” she replied, and she felt only anger toward this boy who was not Charles Wallace at all. No, it was not anger, it was loathing; it was hatred, sheer and unadulterated, and as she became lost in hatred she also began to be lost in IT. The red miasma swam before her eyes; her stomach churned in ITs rhythm. Her body trembled with the strength of her hatred and the strength of IT.

With the last vestige of consciousness she jerked her mind and body. Hate was nothing that IT didn’t have. IT knew all about hate.

“You’re lying about that, and you were lying about Mrs. Whatsit! She screamed.

And that was where IT made its fatal mistake, for as Meg said, automatically, “Mrs. Whatsit loves me; that’s what she told me, that she loves me,” suddenly she knew.

She knew!

Love.

That was what she had that IT did not have.

She had Mrs. Whatsit’s love, and her father’s, and her mother’s, and the real Charles Wallace’s love, and the twins’, and Aunt Beast’s.

And she had her love for them.”

“Descriptive Scrooge”

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

“External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. No warmth could warm, nor wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty. Foul weather didn’t know where to have him. The heaviest rain, and snow, and hail, and sleet could boast of the advantage over him in only one respect. They often ‘came down’ handsomely, and Scrooge never did. What else can I be’, returned Scrooge, ‘when I live in such a world of fools as this? Merry Christmas! Out upon merry Christmas! What’s Christmas time to you but a time for paying bills without money; a time for finding yourself a year old, and not an hour richer; a time for balancing your books and having every item in ’em through a round dozen of months presented dead against you? If I could work my will’, Scrooge said, ‘ every idiot who goes about with Merry Christmas’ on his lips, should be boiled with his own pudding, and buried with a stake of holly through his heart. He should!”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 2

“The Dwarf Song” (It was sung by the dwarves, but as this is an oration competition please recite as a speech.)

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

“For over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away ere break of day
To seek the pale enchanted gold.

The dwarves of yore made might spells,
While hammers fell like ringing bells
In places deep, where dark things sleep,
In hollow halls beneath the fells.

For ancient king and elvish lord
There many a gleaming golden hoard
They shaped and wrought, and light they caught
To hide in gems on hilt of sword.

On silver necklaces they strung
The flowering stars, on crowns they hung
The dragon-fire, in twisted wire
They meshed the light of moon and sun.

Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away, ere break of day,
To claim our long-forgotten gold.

The Dwarf Song (Continued)

Goblets they carved there for themselves
And harps of gold; where no man delves
There lay they long, and many a song
Was sung unheard by men or elves.

The pines were roaring on the height,
The winds were moaning in the night.
The fire was red, it flaming spread;
The trees like torches blazed with light.

The bells were ringing in the dale
And men looked up with faces pale;
The dragon's ire more fierce than fire
Laid low their towers and house frail.

The mountain smoked beneath the moon;
The dwarves, they heard the tramp of doom.
They fled their hall to dying fall
Beneath his feet, beneath the moon.

For over the misty mountains grim
To dungeons deep and caverns dim
We must away, ere break of day,
To win our harps and gold from him!

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 5 6th: 4

“The Elves Song” (It was sung by the elves, but as this is an oration competition please recite as a speech.)

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

“Down the swift dark stream you go
Back to lands you once did know!
Leave the halls and caverns deep,
Leave the northern mountain steep,

Where forest wide and dim
Stoops in shadow grey and grim!
Float beyond the world of trees
Out into the whispering breeze,

Past the rushes, past the reeds,
Past the marsh’s waving weeds,
Through the mist that riseth white
Up from mere and pool and night!

Follow, follow stars that leap
Up the heavens cold and steep;
Turn when dawn comes over land,
Over rapid, over sand,

South away! And South away!
Seek the sunlight and the day,
Back to pasture, back to mead,
Where the berry swells and fills
Under sunlight, under day!
South away! And South away!
Down the swift dark stream you go
Back to lands you once did know!

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

“Entering the Wardrobe”

The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis

A few mornings later Peter and Edmund were looking at the suit of armour and wondering if they could take it to bits when the two girls rushed into the room and said, “Look out! Here comes the Macready and a whole gang with her.”

“Sharp’s the word,” said Peter, and all four made off through the door at the far end of the room. But when they had got out into the Green Room and beyond it, into the Library, they suddenly heard voices ahead of them, and realized that Mrs Macread must be bringing her party of sightseers up the back stairs – instead of up the front stairs as they had expected. And after that – whether it was that they lost their heads, or that Mrs Macready was trying to catch them, or that some magic in the house had come to life and was chasing them into Narnia they seemed to find themselves being followed everywhere, until at last Susan said, “Oh bother those trippers! Here – let’s get into the Wardrobe Room till they’ve passed. No one will follow us in there.” But the moment they were inside they heard the voices in the passage – and then someone fumbling at the door – and then they saw the handle turning.

“Quick!” said Peter, “there’s nowhere else,” and flung open the wardrobe. All four of them bundled inside it and sat there, panting, in the dark. Peter held the door closed but did not shut it; for, of course, he remembered, as every sensible person does, that you should never never shut yourself up in a wardrobe.

“The Explanation of Amos”

Ben and Me by Robert Lawson

“Since the recent death of my lamented friend and patron Ben Franklin, many so-called historians have attempted to write accounts of his life and his achievements. Most of these are wrong in so many respects that I feel the time has now come for me to take pen in paw and set things right.

All of these ill-informed scribblers seem astonished at Ben’s great fund of information, at his brilliant decisions, at his seeming knowledge of all that went on about him.

Had they asked me, I could have told them. It was ME.

For many years I was his closest friend and adviser and, if I do say it, was in great part responsible for his success and fame.

Not that I wish to claim too much: I simply hope to see justice done, credit given where credit is due, and that’s to me--mostly.

Ben was undoubtedly a splendid fellow, a great man, a patriot and all that; but he was undeniably stupid at times, and had it not been for me--well, here’s the true story, and you can judge for yourself.”

“The Fight”

Susan Creek by Douglas Wilson

“When John ran at Curtis, he had no other thought in his mind other than his anger and his desire to do something. He was completely shocked when Curtis, who had been plotting the fight beforehand, threw a right fist into his face, which knocked him onto his back. John lay on the deck, stunned for a moment. In the background, he could hear the helmsman trying to restrain his friend. “That’s enough now, Jack...”

But when John’s scattered senses came back to him, the hot anger was completely gone. In its place was a cold wrath, and a deep sense that he was involved with a kind of situation he had never been in before. He stood slowly to his feet, and approached Curtis warily this time, his fists up in front of him.

Jack Curtis was about ten years older than John, and he was about twenty pounds heavier. John thought coldly to himself that Curtis was probably going to thrash him, and that his only goal should simply be to acquit himself well. But even with his anger gone, John was vaguely aware that his motives were mixed, and that in part he was fighting because he had fallen into the water, or perhaps because Jenny’s mother had not received his apology, or perhaps because he had completely misunderstood Mr. Whitefield’s sermon, thinking that he was a nice person because he knew that being a nice person was not enough. There was more than enough in Curtis’s taunts to fight over--he had no right to speak about Jenny’s mother that way.

But John circled around the older sailor, fists in front of him, and he knew that he was not going to be able to fight with that abandon that comes with a clean conscience. He was going to fight, and he was going to do the best he could, but his thoughts were all a jumble. And he was still very angry. His father had once told him that there was always a deeper right than being right. But now he was only in the right one way. And he had to fight anyway.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 4 6th: 3

“The Fox”

A Sign of the Beaver by Elizabeth George Speare

“The fox watched them, its teeth bared. The angry eyes made Matt uncomfortable.

“We’re in luck to find it first,” he said to cover his uneasiness.

Attean shook his head. “Not beaver hunting ground,” he said. “Turtle clan hunt here.” he pointed to a nearby tree. On the bark Matt could just make out a crude scar that had a shape somewhat like a turtle. He was indignant.

“We found it,” he said. “You mean you’re just going to leave it here because of a mark on a tree?”

“Beaver people not take animal on turtle land,” Attean repeated.

“We can’t just let it suffer,” Matt protested. “Suppose no one comes here for days?”

“Then fox get away.”

“How can he get away?”

“Bite off foot.”

Indeed, Matt could see now that the creature had already gnawed its own flesh down to the bone.

“Leg mend soon,” Attean added, noting Matt’s troubled face. “Fox have three leg beside.”

“I don’t like it,” Matt insisted. He wondered why he minded so much. He had long ago got used to clubbing the small animals caught in his own snares. There was something about this fox that was different.

Those defiant eyes showed no trace of fear. He was struck by the bravery that could inflict such pain on itself to gain freedom.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 4 6th: 3

“Goblins”

The Hobbit by J.R.R Tolkien

“There in the shadows on a large flat stone sat a tremendous goblin with a huge head, and armed goblins were standing round him carrying the axes and the bent swords that they use. Now goblins are cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted. They make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones. They can tunnel and mine as well as any but the most skilled dwarves, when they take the trouble, though they are usually untidy and dirty. Hammers, axes, swords,, daggers, pickaxes, tongs, and also instruments of torture, they make very well, or get other people to make to their design, prisoners and slaves that have to work till they die for want of air and light. It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them, and also not working with their hands more than they could help; but in those days and those wild parts they had not advanced (as it is called) so far. They did not hate dwarves especially, no more than they hated everybody and everything , and particularly the orderly and prosperous; in some parts wicked dwarves had even made alliances with them.

But they had a special grudge against Thorin’s people, because of the war which you have heard mentioned, but which does not come into this tale; and anyway goblins don’t care who they catch, as long as it is done smart and secret, and the prisoners are not able to defend themselves.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

“God’s Grace”

Susan Creek by Douglas Wilson

“John was not looking at her directly and seemed to be taking great interest in his shoes. After a moment, he finally raised his head and said, “Look here. Let me explain something that I noticed in church today. The minister preaches the same gospel as Mr. Whitefield does. He preaches it with the same fire. He is a different man, so the fire burns differently, but the fire is the same.”

Jenny nodded. “Yes, that’s very true.”

“The first time I ever heard anyone preach that way was Mr. Whitefield himself when we were out at sea. I was thinking about that today while looking at Mr. Wyatt. Just as we looked at Mr. Whitefield preaching across the water, and heard his words as they echoed off the water, in the same way, I thought about hearing Mr. Wyatt with his words echoing off my baptism.”

Jenny stared at John, amazed. “That is a wonderful way to think about it.”

“And do you remember what I confessed to you after Curtis thrashed me so badly? That I had understood Mr. Whitefield saying that we could not be proud of grace, and I was proud of how I understood that?”

Jenny nodded. “I remember that, too.”

“When Mr. Wyatt was preaching, I finally understood that God is God whether we understand it or not, and grace is grace whether we understand it or not, and I understood finally in a way that built me up--instead of puffing me up.”

“Gollum in the Goblin Tunnels”

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

“Deep down here by the dark water lived old Gollum, a small slimy creature. I don’t know where he came from, nor who or what he was. He was Gollum--as dark as darkness, except for two big round pale eyes in his thin face. He had a little boat, and he rowed about quite quietly on the lake; for lake it was, wide and deep and deadly cold. He paddled it with large feet dangling over the side, but never a ripple he make. Not he. He was looking out of this pale lamp-like eyes for blind fish, which he grabbed with his long fingers as quick as thinking. He liked meat too. Goblin he thought good, when he could get it; but he took care they never found him out. He just throttled them from behind, if they ever came down alone anywhere near the edge of the water, while he was prowling about. They very seldom did, for they had a feeling that something unpleasant was lurking down there, down at the very roots of the mountain. They had come on the lake, when they were tunneling down long ago, and they found they could go no further; so there their road ended in that direction, and there was no reason to go that way--unless the Great Goblin sent them. Sometimes he took a fancy for fish from the lake, and sometimes neither goblin nor fish came back.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 2

“Gratitude of a Stranger”*Where the Red Fern Grows by Wilson Rawls*

It's strange indeed how memories can lie dormant in a man's mind for so many years. Yet those memories can be awakened and brought forth fresh and new, just by something you've seen, or something you've heard, or the sight of an old familiar face. What I saw in the warm gray eyes of the friendly old hound brought back wonderful memories. To show my gratitude, I took hold of his collar and said, "Come on, boy, let's go home and get something to eat." He seemed to understand that he had found a friend. He came willingly. I gave him a bath and rubbed all the soreness from his muscles. He drank quarts of warm milk and ate all the meat I had in the house. I hurried down to the store and bought more. He ate until he was satisfied. He slept all that night and most of the next day. Late in the afternoon he grew restless. I told him I understood, and as soon as it was dark, he could be on his way. I figured he had a much better chance if he left town at night. That evening, a little after sundown, I opened the back gate. He walked out, stopped, turned around, and looked at me. He thanked me by wagging his tail. With tears in my eyes, I said, "You're more than welcome, old fellow. In fact, you could've stayed here as long as you wanted to."

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

“The Hobbit Hole”

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

“In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit. Not a nasty, dirty, wet hold, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hold with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat; it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.

It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke, with paneled walls, and floors tiled and carpeted, provided with polished chairs, and lots and lots of pegs for hats and coats--the hobbit was fond of visitors. The tunnel wound on and on, going fairly, but not quite straight into the side of a hill--The Hill, as all the people for many miles round called it--and many little round doors opened out of it, first on one side and then on another. No going upstairs for the hobbit; bedrooms, bathrooms, cellars, pantries (lots of these), wardrobes (he had whole rooms devoted to clothes), kitchens, dining-rooms, all were on the same floor, and indeed on the same passage. The best rooms were all on the left-hand side (going in), for these were the only ones to have windows, deep-set round windows looking over his garden, and meadows beyond, sloping down to the river.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

“The Kidnapping of Winnie”

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

“Mae Tuck’s round face wrinkled in dismay. “Dear Lord, don’t cry! Please don’t cry, child!” she implored. “We’re not bad people, truly we’re not. We had to bring you away--you’ll see why in a minute--and we’ll take you back just as soon as we can. Tomorrow. I promise.”

When Mae said, “Tomorrow,” Winnie’s sobs turned to wails. Tomorrow! It was like being told she would be kept away forever. She wanted to go home now, at once, rush back to the safety of the fence and her mother’s voice from the window. Mae reached out to her, but she twisted away, her hands over her face, and gave herself up to weeping.

“This is awful!” said Jessie. “Can’t you do something, Ma? The poor little tad.”

“We ought to’ve had some better plan than this,” said Miles.

“That’s the truth,” said Mae helplessly. “The dear Lord knows there’s been time enough to think of one, and it had to happen sooner or later. We been plain bone lucky it hasn’t before now. But I never expected it’d be a child!”

“Kit Saves the Day”

The Witch of Blackbird Pond by Elizabeth George Speare

“Upstairs, in her own room, she stood leaning against the door, trying to collect her wits. She would have to get to Hannah. No matter what happened, she could not stay here and leave Hannah to face that mob alone. If she could get there in time to warn her--that was as far as she could see just now.

She snatched her cloak from the peg and, carrying her leather boots in her hand, crept down the stairs. She dared not try to unbolt the great front door but instead tiptoed cautiously through the cold company room into the back chamber and let herself out the shed door into the garden. She could hear shouts in the distance, and slipping hurriedly into her boots she fled along the roadway.

In Meeting House Square she leaned against a tree for an instant to get her bearing. The crowd was gathering, a good twenty men and boys and a few women, carrying flaring pine torches. In the hoarse shouting and the heedless screaming of the women there was a mounting violence, and a terror she had never known before closed over Kit’s mind like fog. For a moment her knees sagged and she caught at the tree for support. Then her mind cleared again, and skirting the square, darting from tree to tree like a savage, she made her way down Broad Street and out onto South Road.

She had never before seen the Meadows by moonlight. They lay serene and still, wrapped in thin veils of drifting mist. She found the path easily, passed the dark clump of willows, and saw ahead the deep shining pool that was Blackbird Pond and a faint reddish glow that must be Hannah’s window.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 4 6th: 3

“The Law of the Jungle”*The Jungle Book by Rudyard Kipling*

Bagheera would lie out on a branch and call, “Come along, Little Brother,” and at first Mowgli would cling like the sloth, but afterward he would fling himself through the branches almost as boldly as the gray ape. He took his place at the Council Rock, too, when the Pack met, and there he discovered that if he stared hard at any wolf, the wolf would be forced to drop his eyes, and so he used to stare for fun. At other times he would pick the long thorns out of the pads of his friends, for wolves suffer terribly from thorns and burs in their coats. He would go down the hillside into the cultivated lands by night, and look very curiously at the villagers in their huts, but he had a mistrust of men because Bagheera showed him a square box with a drop gate so cunningly hidden in the jungle that he nearly walked into it, and told him that it was a trap. He loved better than anything else to go with Bagheera into the dark warm heart of the forest, to sleep all through the drowsy day, and at night see how Bagheera did his killing. Bagheera killed right and left as he felt hungry, and so did Mowgli—with one exception.

As soon as he was old enough to understand things, Bagheera told him that he must never touch cattle because he had been bought into the Pack at the price of a bull’s life. “All the jungle is thine,” said Bagheera, “and thou canst kill everything that thou art strong enough to kill; but for the sake of the bull that bought thee thou must never kill or eat any cattle young or old. That is the Law of the Jungle.” Mowgli obeyed faithfully.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 4 6th: 3

“Liberty Tree”

Liberty Tree by Thomas Paine

In a chariot of light from the regions of day,

The Goddess of Liberty came;

Ten thousand celestials directed the way

And hither conducted the dame.

A fair budding branch from the gardens above,

Where millions with millions agree,

She brought in her hand as a pledge of her love,

And the plant she named Liberty Tree.

The celestial exotic struck deep in the ground,

Like a native it flourished and bore;

The fame of its fruit drew the nations around,

To seek out this peaceable shore.

Unmindful of names or distinction they came,

For freemen like brothers agree;

With one spirit endued, they one friendship pursued,

And their temple was Liberty Tree.

Beneath this fair tree, like the patriarchs of old,

Their bread in contentment they ate,

Liberty Tree (Continued)

Unvexed with the troubles of silver and gold,
The cares of the grand and the great.
With timber and tar they Old England supplied,
And supported her power on the sea;
Her battles they fought, without getting a groat,
For the honor of Liberty Tree.
But hear, O ye swains, 'tis a tale most profane,
How all the tyrannical powers,
Kings, Commons, and Lords, are uniting amain
To cut down this guardian of ours;
From the east to the west blow the trumpet to arms
Through the land let the sound of it flee,
Let the far and the near, all unite with a cheer,
In defense of our Liberty Tree.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 3

“The Man in the Yellow Suit”*Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt

“The man in the yellow suit smiled a ghastly smile. “I can’t think why you’re so upset. Did you really believe you could keep that water for yourselves? Your selfishness is really quite extraordinary, and worse than that, you’re stupid. You could have done what I’m about to do, long ago. Now it’s too late. Once Winifred drinks some of the water, she’ll do just as well for my demonstrations. Even better. Children are much more appealing, anyway. So you may as well relax. There’s nothing you can do to stop me.”

But he was wrong. Mae lifted the shotgun. Behind her, Miles gasped, “Ma, no!”

But Mae’s face was dark red. “Not Winnie!” she said between clenched teeth. “You ain’t going to do a thing like that to Winnie. And you ain’t going to give out the secret.” Her strong arms swung the shotgun round her head, like a wheel. The man in the yellow suit jerked away, but it was too late. With a dull cracking sound, the stock of the shotgun smashed into the back of his skull. He dropped like a tree, his face surprised, his eyes wide open. And at that very moment, riding through the pine trees just in time to see it all, came the Tregap constable.”

“Martin the Warrior”*Mossflower by Brian Jacques*

Mossflower lay deep in the grip of midwinter beneath a sky of leaden gray that showed tinges of scarlet and orange on the horizon. A cold mantle of snow draped the landscape, covering the flatlands to the west. Snow was everywhere, filling ditches, drifting high against hedgerows, making paths invisible, smoothing contours of earth in its white embrace. The gaunt, leafless ceiling of Mossflower Wood was penetrated by constant snowfall, which carpeted the sprawling woodland floor, building canopies on evergreen shrubs and bushes. Winter had muted the earth; the muffled stillness was broken only by the traveler’s paws.

A sturdily built mouse with quick eyes was moving confidently across the snowbound country. Looking back, he could see his tracks disappearing northward into the distance. Farther south, the flatlands rolled off endlessly, flanked to the west by the faint shape of distant hills, while to the east stood the long ragged fringe marking the marches of Mossflower. His nose twitched at the elusive smell of burning wood and turf from some hearthfire. Cold wind soughed* from the treetops, causing whorls of snow to dance in icy spirals. The traveler gathered his ragged cloak tighter, adjusted an old rusting sword that was slung across his back, and trudged steadily forward, away from the wilderness, to where other creatures lived.

It was a forbidding place made mean by poverty. Here and there he saw signs of habitation. The dwellings, ravaged and demolished, made pitiful shapes under the snowdrifts. Rearing high against the forest, a curious building dominated the ruined settlement. A fortress, crumbling, dark and brooding, it was a symbol of fear to the woodland creatures of Mossflower.

This was how Martin the Warrior first came to Kotir, the place of the wildcats.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 5 6th: 4

“Northland Wild”

White Fang by Jack London

Dark spruce forest frowned on either side of the frozen waterway. The trees had been stripped by a recent wind of their white covering of frost, and they seemed to lean toward each other, black and ominous, in the fading light. A vast silence reigned over the land. The land itself was a desolation, lifeless, without movement, so lone and cold that the spirit of it was not even that of sadness. There was a hint in it of laughter, but of a laughter more terrible than any sadness — a laughter that was mirthless as the smile of the Sphinx, a laughter cold as the frost and partaking of the grimness of infallibility. It was the masterful and incommunicable wisdom of eternity laughing at the futility of life and the effort of life. It was the Wild, the savage, frozen-hearted Northland Wild.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 1 6th: 1

“Saving a Life”

Robinson Crusoe by William Defoe

“The poor savage who fled, but had stopped, though he saw both his enemies had fallen...yet so frightened with the noise and fire of my piece, that he stood stockstill, and neither came forward nor went backward...I ballooed again to him, and made signs to him to come forward, which he easily understood, and came a little way, then stopped again...he stood trembling as if he had taken prisoner, and just been to be killed, as his two enemies were. I beckoned to him again to come to me, and gave him all signs of encouragement, that I could think of; and he came nearer and nearer, kneeling down every ten or twelve steps, in token of acknowledgement for saving his life. I smiled at him, and looked pleasantly, and beckoned to him to come still nearer. At length he came close to me, and then he kneeled down again, kissed the ground, and, taking my foot, set it upon his head. This, it seemed, was a token of swearing to be my slave forever...”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 1

“Scrooge’s Word”

A Christmas Carol by Charles Dickens

“Scrooge was better than his word. He did it all, and infinitely more; and to Tiny Tim, who did -NOT- die, he was a second father. He became as good a friend, as good a master, and as good a man, as the good old city knew, or any other good old city, town, or borough, in the good old world. Some people laughed to see the alteration in him, but he let them laugh, and little heeded them; for he was wise enough to know that nothing ever happened on this globe, for good, at which some people did not have their fill of laughter in the outset; and knowing that such as these would be blind anyway, he thought it quite as well that they should wrinkle up their eyes in grins, as have the malady in less attractive forms. His own heart laughed: and that was quite enough for him.”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 1 6th: 1

“The Stalagmite”

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer by Mark Twain

“A stalagmite had been slowly growing up from the ground for ages, built by the water-drip from a stalactite overhead. The captive had broken off the stalagmite, and upon the stump had placed a stone, wherein he had scooped a shallow hollow to catch the precious drop that fell once in every three minutes with the dreary regularity of a clock-tick — a dessert spoonful once in four and twenty hours. That drop was falling when the Pyramids were new; when Troy fell; when the foundations of Rome were laid when Christ was crucified; when the Conqueror created the British Empire; when Columbus sailed; when the massacre at Lexington was ‘news.’ It is falling now; it will still be falling when all these things shall have sunk down the afternoon of history, and the twilight of tradition, and been swallowed up in the thick night of oblivion. Has everything a purpose and a mission? Did this drop fall patiently during five thousand years to be ready for this flitting human insect’s need? And has it another important object to accomplish ten thousand years to come?” That, my friends, may be the most brilliant and elegant description of time in all of literature.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 3 6th: 2

“Treegap”

Tuck Everlasting by Natalie Babbitt

“The road that led to Treegap had been trod out long before by a herd of cows who were, to say the least, relaxed. It wandered along in curves and easy angles, swayed off and up in a pleasant tangent to the top of a small hill, ambled down again between fringes of bee-hung clover, and then cut sidewise across a meadow. Here its edges blurred. It widened and seemed to pause, suggesting tranquil bovine picnics: slow chewing and thoughtful contemplation of the infinite. And then it went on again and came at last to the wood. But on reaching the shadows of the first trees, it veered sharply, swung out in a wide arc as if, for the first time, it had reason to think where it was going and passed around.

On the other side of the wood, the sense of easiness dissolved. The road no longer belonged to the cows. It became, instead, and rather abruptly, the property of people. And all at once the sun was uncomfortably hot, the dust oppressive, and the meager grass along its edges somewhat ragged and forlorn. On the left stood the first house, a square and solid cottage with a touch-me-not appearance, surrounded by grass cut painfully to the quick and enclosed by a capable iron fence some four feet high which clearly said, “Move on--we don't want you here.”

So the road went humbly by and made its way, past cottages and more and more frequent but less and less forbidding, into the village. But the village doesn't matter, except for the jailhouse and the gallows. The first house is only important; the first house, the road, and the wood.”

“What Is a Hobbit?”

The Hobbit by J.R.R Tolkien

“What is a hobbit? I suppose hobbits need some description nowadays, since they have become rare and shy of the Big People, as they call us. They are (or were) a little people, about half our height, and smaller than the bearded Dwarves. Hobbits have no beards. There is little or no magic about them, except the ordinary everyday sort which helps them to disappear quietly and quickly when large stupid folk like you and me come blundering along, making a noise like elephants which they can hear a mile off. They are inclined to be fat in the stomach; they dress in bright colours (chiefly green and yellow); wear no shoes, because their feet grow naturally leathery soles and thick warm brown hair like the stuff on their heads (which is curly); have long clever brown fingers, good-natured faces, and laugh deep fruity laughs (especially after dinner, which they have twice a day when they can get it). “

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 2

“The Wheel of Life”*Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt

“Tuck’s voice was rough now, and Winnie, amazed, sat rigid. No one had ever talked to her of things like this before. “I want to grow again,” he said fiercely, “and change. And if that means I got to move on at the end of it, then I want that, too. Listen, Winnie, it’s something you don’t find out how you feel until afterwards. If people knew about the spring down there in Treegap, they’d all come running like pigs to slops. They’d trample each other, trying to get some of that water. That’d be bad enough, but afterwards--can you imagine? All the little ones little forever, all the old ones old forever. Can you picture what that means? Forever? The wheel would keep going round, the water rolling by to the ocean, but the people would’ve turned into nothing but rocks by the side of the road. ‘Cause they wouldn’t know till after, and then it’d be too late.” He peered at her, and Winnie saw that his face was pinched with the effort of explaining. “Do you see, now, child? Do you understand? Oh, Lord, I just got to make you understand!”

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 2 6th: 1

“Who Knows a Dragon?”

The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkien

“Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from men and elves and their dwarves, wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically forever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it. Indeed they hardly know a good bit of work from a bad, though they usually have a good notion of the current market value; and they can’t make a thing for themselves, not even mend a little loose scale of their armour. There were lots of dragons in the North in those days, and gold was probably getting scarce up there, with the dwarves flying south or getting killed, and all the general waste and destruction that dragons make going from bad to worse. There was a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm called Smaug. One day he flew up into the air and came south. The first we heard of it was a noise like a hurricane coming from the North, and the pine-trees on the Mountain creaking and cracking in the wind. Some of the dwarves who happened to be outside (I was one luckily--a fine adventurous lad in those days, always wandering about, and it saved my life that day)--well, from a good way off we saw the dragon settle on our mountain in a spout of flame. Then he came down the slopes and when he reached the woods they all went up in fires. By that time all the bells were ringing in Dale and the warriors were arming. The dwarves rushed out of the great gate; but there was the dragon waiting for them. None escaped that way. The river rushed up in steam and a fog fell on Dale, and in the fog the dragon came on them and destroyed most of the warriors--the usual unhappy story, it was only too common in those days. Then he went back and crept in through the Front Gate and routed out all the halls and lanes, and tunnels, alleys, cellars, mansions and passages. After that there were no dwarves left alive inside, and he took all their wealth for himself.

Degree of Difficulty: 5th: 4 6th: 3