

The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

by C. S. Lewis

Overview

Plot

During a wartime visit to an old country house, four English children stumble through the back of a magical wardrobe into another world. There they join the great talking lion Aslan in a struggle to free the land of Narnia from an evil enchantment.

Conflict

Can Aslan and his friends free Narnia from the clutches of the White Witch? (Man vs. Man, Man vs. Society, Man vs. God) Will Edmund be saved from the consequences of his treachery? (Man vs. Self, Man vs. God)

Setting

England during WWII; the mythical land of Narnia

Characters

The talking lion Aslan; English children Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie; the evil White Witch; various talking beasts of Narnia.

Theme

Sin and redemption; betrayal; forgiveness; sacrificial love

Questions About Structure: Setting

(1.d-i) Where does this story happen?

This story takes place in two separate settings. The first of these creates what literary analysts call a *story frame*—an initial narrative within which the main story takes place. Just as a picture frame surrounds a piece of artwork, providing contrast and positioning the work on the larger wall, so a story frame surrounds a story with external context and added significance.

In Lewis’s book, the initial story setting finds the protagonists, the four young Pevensie children, journeying to the English countryside and the home of old Professor Digory Kirke in order to avoid the air raids of World War II. In the Professor’s old mansion there are many long corridors and dusty rooms to explore. It is in one of these rooms that the children discover a doorway into another world. As the children enter this world one by one, the “frame” gives way to the interior portion of the story, which takes place in the magical land of Narnia.

Though at first the Pevensie children are enamored with the whimsical qualities of the new world in which they find themselves, they soon discover that strife grips Narnia. Due to the absence of Narnia’s true king, Aslan, a traitorous usurper — the White Witch — has cast a spell on Narnia which makes it always winter there, but never Christmas. As the tyrant rules Narnia with a frigid fist, the beleaguered Narnians pray for Aslan to return and deliver them. This political turmoil in Narnia is subtly allegorical. The real, historical world of the external setting and the world of Narnia may both be considered to languish in the rule of a usurper; both await a Savior. Each of these worlds is equally rich in circumstantial conflict, given the political and spiritual struggles inherent in their settings. These complex settings and conflicts enrich Lewis’s plot.

(2) When does this story happen?

Due to incongruities between the passage of time in Narnia and in its correlative real world, this story takes place in a whole era or generation of Narnian time while only a moment of time passes in the England of the story’s external frame. While visiting Narnia, the children experience adventure after adventure, maturing into kings and queens who share the life-content of true adults. Yet

Questions About Structure: Characters

(3) Who is this story about? (Protagonist)

This story chronicles the adventures of the four young Pevensie siblings: Peter, Susan, Edmund, and Lucy. Choosing a protagonist for this story can produce a fruitful discussion. As a result of the third person, omniscient narration, it is difficult to pinpoint a single protagonist. While Lucy may be the protagonist for a good portion of the story, Edmund soon takes her place when the narrator follows him to the White Witch's castle, where he traitorously betrays his family. In addition, Aslan's crucial, heroic role in the climax and the resolution of the story leads many readers to assign the protagonist badge to Him.

In fact, the choice of the protagonist depends largely on what perspective the reader intends to chart: the human or the heavenly. After all, the *Chronicles of Narnia* are, in part, an allegory of the Christian life. While Edmund and Lucy represent human, fallen sinners, Aslan is the Christ-figure who lays down His life for them. Since the content of the greater portion of the story follows the struggles and actions of the children (the sinners – Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve), it seems appropriate to consider them the protagonists. It is their story, the sinners' story, that we will chart in this guide.

Even after this decision is made, we readers face a final choice: do we chart Lucy's story or Edmund's? Lucy represents the ideal, obedient Christian, never straying from her Lord's set path, faithfully believing Him until the end. In Lucy's story, Edmund is a sort of antagonist as he casts his lot with the White Witch for a time. However, Edmund remains a Pevensie child, and it is the Pevensies whom we have identified to be the protagonists of the story. It seems likely that his turncoat behavior exists to illustrate the traitorous nature of man. That is, whereas Lucy represents innocent humanity searching for God, Edmund plays the Prodigal Son. Both of these stories and responses are equally valid, but they emphasize different conflicts and, therefore, will produce different story charts. The choice remains for the reader to make. Remember that getting the right answer is not the object of the discussion here. What we are after is thoughtful discussion that forces the kids to read closely and support their own understandings of the story with evidence from the text.

For the purposes of this Teacher Guide, we will chart Edmund's story, since it is fraught with both internal and external conflict. As the receiver of Aslan's love and sacrifice, this story is uniquely his. In addition, Edmund's character is perhaps the most sympathetic. While Lucy represents an ideal Christian and an "example to follow," the average struggling, suffering sinner may not identify with her. Edmund, however, stands as a remarkably sympathetic character. Helpless in his sin and treachery, he needs a Savior desperately. All readers identify with this fundamental need.

(4) Who else is the story about? (Antagonist)

The White Witch remains the story's main antagonist. A traitorous usurper, she opposes the children at every turn. She hates the Pevensies from the start because ancient Narnian prophecy has foretold that the arrival of these four siblings, destined to become the monarchs of Narnia, will herald her downfall. The White Witch opposes the children's attempts to survive, to meet Aslan, and to reach Cair Paravel, all for the purpose of preventing her prophesied demise. Despite her reprehensible nature and purpose, the White Witch commands a peculiar fascination and attraction. As Edmund discovers soon after his entrance into Narnia, the White Witch is as deceptively attractive as Queen Jadis in *The Magician's Nephew* (see chapter 6 below). Using her striking beauty and frigid charm to their best advantage, she seduces Edmund into her service, but her charms soon fade. Having once obtained her goal, the White Witch reveals a heart as cold as the icy winter she imposes upon Narnia.

Interestingly enough, Edmund too plays the part of an antagonist in the initial portion of the story. Controlled entirely by his lust for Turkish Delight and all that it signifies, Edmund is driven to act in a way that is ultimately incompatible with his own goals of survival and happiness. This Turkish Delight which Edmund lusts after boasts intense allegorical significance. As tantalizing as the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden, the Witch's candy revolutionizes Edmund's perspective on his own life and situation. Much as the forbidden fruit incited dissatisfaction and ambition in Adam and Eve, Turkish Delight opens Edmund's eyes to the insufficiency of his current state and rouses evil ambitions in his mind and heart.

Questions About Structure: Plot

(8) What happens in the story?

When Edmund's younger sister, Lucy, professes to have discovered a secret world within the old wardrobe in Professor Kirke's attic, Edmund and his siblings honestly assume that she is either lying or delusional. Yet during a game of hide and seek one night, Edmund too discovers the wardrobe world. On her initial foray into Narnia, Lucy had befriended an old faun named Tumnus, joining him and the beleaguered inhabitants of Narnia in hating the tyrannical White Witch. Edmund, on the other hand, begins his first visit to Narnia by befriending the wicked, usurping queen. Tempted by the treats of power, position, and gratification that the Witch offers him, Edmund accepts Turkish Delight. In so doing, he pledges fealty to the queen and betrays his siblings.

Yet Edmund's choice soon turns on him. On his second visit to Narnia, Edmund hastens to her castle; there, he finds the queen's demeanor toward him much changed. No longer simpering and charming, she reveals her true nature as a cruel, heartless tyrant and a merciless master. He sees his true situation with new eyes, as he is made a captive and a bondservant to the wicked liege-lady. Filled with regret and growing terror, Edmund longs for deliverance.

Meanwhile, Lucy, Peter and Susan travel with their new friends, the beavers, to Aslan's camp at the Stone Table. There, the children tell Aslan of their brother's predicament, and He arranges a rescue party to extricate Edmund. Little do the children know, however, that Narnian law requires that a life be given as payment for betrayal. No matter the circumstance, this law cannot be broken...even by the king. So, King Aslan barter with the White Witch and redeems Edmund's life by brokering a deal: his own life in exchange for Edmund's.

(9) How is the main problem solved?

While Narnians sleep, Aslan walks willingly to his death. He delivers himself into the hands of his enemies and endures mockery, abuse, and derision all without a murmur of reproach. He sacrifices his life willingly in order to free Edmund from his bitter bargain. This selfless act marks the climax of the story. Aslan takes Edmund's place as the fulfillment of the deep magic and, in so doing, demonstrates that He is the savior for whom Edmund

prayed.

The White Witch and her bevy of demons, having slain Aslan, sweep off to fight the small army of free Narnians who oppose her rule, and to subject Narnia to an endless winter. Yet the Stone Table on which Aslan was murdered bears an engraving of the Narnian laws which are bound by a deeper magic from before the dawn of time. At Aslan's death, the table splits in two and the deeper magic begins to work backwards. Once requiring death, now it forces even death to set its captives free. In this way, Aslan himself is resurrected by the deeper magic, and he sets off to battle the White Witch for lordship of Narnia. Meanwhile, a free Edmund joins his siblings and the rest of the Narnians in hand-to-hand combat against the White Witch and her minions.

(10) How does the story end?

Newly resurrected, Aslan's first object is to wake the Narnians whom the witch has encased in stone and lead them to the battle. Meanwhile, in the battle fray, Edmund shatters the White Witch's wand; without its protection, she is helpless. When Aslan's reinforcements arrive, she is devoured by Aslan. All well, the battle won, the Narnians convene at Cair Paravel where the children are crowned kings and queens of Narnia. They rule for many long years, but one day, while hunting a stag in the forest of "Spare Oom," they stumble back into their old wardrobe. Suddenly, they find themselves children once again in the England of the "real" world. They tumble out into the Professor's mansion just seconds after they had entered the wardrobe and begun their timeless journey.

NOTES:

Questions About Structure: Theme

(11) What does the protagonist learn?

Edmund discovers his own depravity in the interim between his betrayal and his deliverance. Matured by the revelation of the depth of his sinfulness, he realizes his desperate desire to wean himself from Turkish Delight in all of its forms. Taking a lesson from the events of this story, however, he internalizes the truth that he is utterly incapable of such self-control. He embraces his need for a savior.

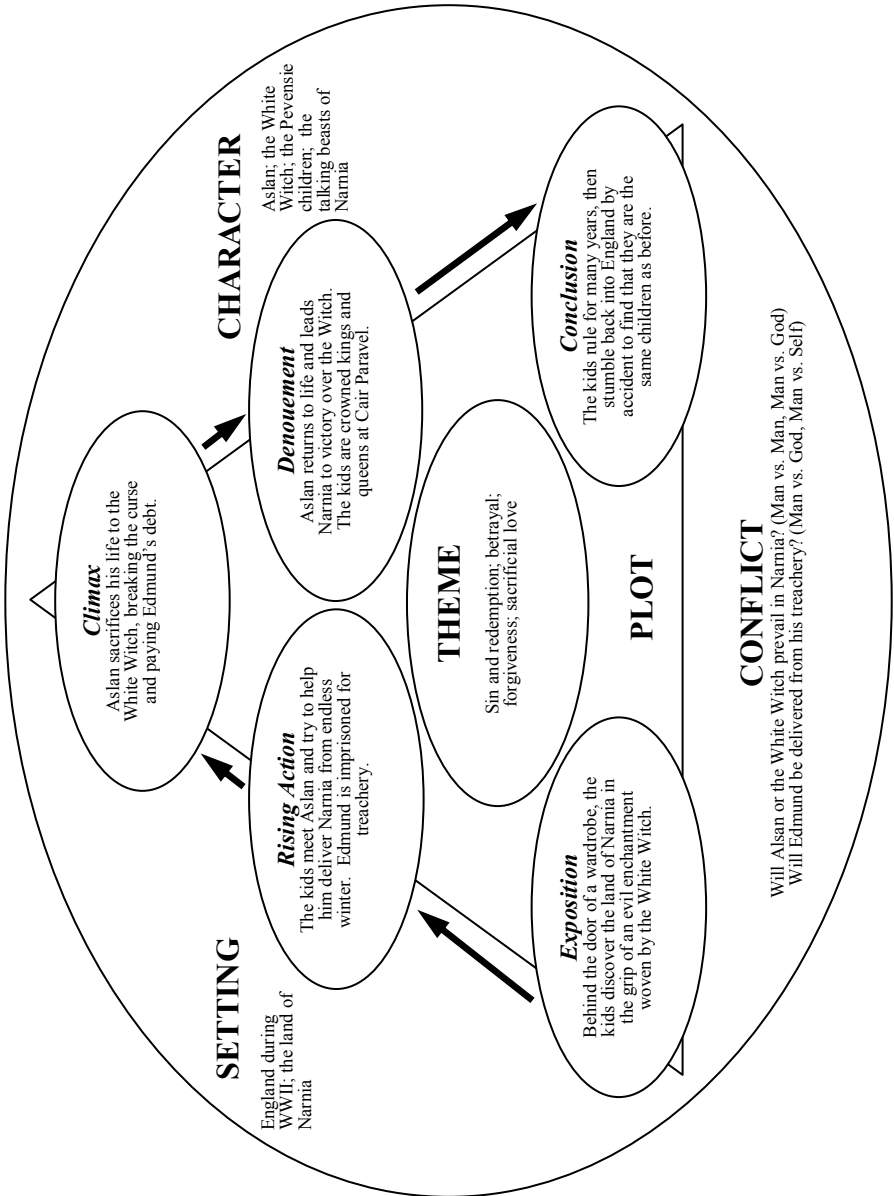
Through the events of the story, Edmund meets the leaders of two sides warring for his soul: the White Witch on one side and Aslan on the other. He is overcome with gratitude that he is on Aslan's side despite his perfidy. In spite of his bad decisions, Edmund is saved, redeemed, and set free. In the course of these saving acts, Edmund comes to realize the love, mercy, and unquenchable grace of the lion who so steadily works to win his heart. Aslan's saving and redeeming love leaves a lasting impression on Edmund's heart, the nature of which change is evident in Edmund's character in the *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (see chapter 3 below).

(13) What is the main idea of the story?

This story opens the door for fantastic discussions about universal themes such as: sacrificial love, humility, the battle between good and evil, man's sin nature, redemption, God's providence, betrayal, and forgiveness. Without assuming a didactic tone, Lewis emphasizes the value of humility and repentance through his presentation of Edmund's betrayal and redemption. He lauds the power of sacrificial love and the triumph of Good over Evil in his presentation of Aslan's victorious sacrifice.

In each of these themes, Lewis subtly infers allegory. Aslan's sacrifice mirrors Christ's sacrifice on the cross at Calvary. There, just as Aslan paid the blood price for Edmund's freedom, Christ bought the freedom of all Christians. Through this sacrifice, Christ conquered Death, forcing even that heinous opponent to set his captives free. Even as Aslan rose again after his victorious sacrifice, Christ was resurrected by his Father on the third day. Lewis emphasized these similarities to draw parallels between these two stories and characters. He crafted these themes very intentionally

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Story Chart



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