Objectives

1. Engage students in the characters and story of J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic fantasy-adventure *The Hobbit*, preparing them to discuss and write critical, level-appropriate responses to the excerpt.

2. Practice and reinforce the following Grade 7 ELA Common Core Standards for reading literature, writing, and speaking and listening:
   - **READING: LITERATURE** – RL.7.1-4, 6-7, 9-10
   - **WRITING** – W.7.1-7, 9-10
   - **SPEAKING AND LISTENING** – SL.7.1-6

Time

130 minutes (with an additional 250 minutes of extension possibilities)

Materials

SyncTV Premium Lesson on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*

Overview

Welcome to Middle Earth, where Gandalf, Bilbo Baggins and a party of thirteen dwarves are preparing to set out on a thrilling adventure to take back their mountain home from the ferocious dragon Smaug. So begins *The Hobbit*, J.R.R. Tolkien’s classic fantasy saga that has been translated into over forty languages, never once going out of print since its initial publication in 1937. Tolkien would delve deeper into the many worlds and mythologies of Middle Earth with *The Lord of the Rings*, his sequel to *The Hobbit*. Both works have spawned hugely successful film franchises in recent years, sparking a even greater surge of interest in Tolkien’s fantasy universe—though the characters and quests in both *The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings*, truth be told, have never really fallen out of popularity. Here, students will read an excerpt from the first chapter of *The Hobbit*, an introduction to a strange and fantastical world with which many of them may already be acquainted. After reading, the class will engage in in-depth discussion and critical written analysis of the excerpt consistent with the ELA Common Core Standards for the seventh grade.
Background (10 minutes)

1. **Watch the Preview (SL.7.1-2).** As a group, watch the video preview of the premium lesson. After viewing, use the following questions to spur a discussion:
   
a. What do you make of this world described in the preview? Are you reminded of other books, movies, etc., when you listen to this description? What are the typical characteristics of the fantasy genre?

b. Do you think you are more like a hobbit—"preferring to stay home, eat and socialize"—or are you more of the adventurous, restless type? Would an adventure like this appeal to you? Why or why not?

c. Pretend you found a ring with the power to change you and the world, like the one described in the preview. What would you change? Would you want to have this power? What would you gain from this and what would you sacrifice? Discuss.

Extension (additional 70 minutes)

d. **Imagine (W.7.3-4 and SL.7.4 and ELL).** Have students pretend they are writing their own fantasy-adventure, asking each of them to create a fictional hero who will set out to battle a vicious dragon. They should make a list of attributes and qualities their character will have, in addition to their name, their age, and any other relevant details they’d like to share in their presentations. Then, on the back of the page, as students to draw their heroes. Be creative!

e. **Journal (W.7.3-4).** As a short pre-reading activity, ask students to write a journal entry about a time they were preparing to go on a trip or journey of some kind. How did they feel before it began? Were they nervous, excited, apprehensive, etc.? How did they feel once the journey started?

f. **Research (W.7.7 and SL.7.4-6).** J.R.R. Tolkien is best known as the author of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, but he achieved many other things during his life as well. As a homework assignment, ask students to find a notable accomplishment or other fact about Tolkien’s life. Encourage students to look for unusual or interesting facts that others do not choose. They should present their findings to the class, and once the presentations are finished, split them into groups and have them compile their facts and accomplishments into a visual timeline about the author’s life.

Engaging the Text (120 minutes)

2. **Read the Text (30 minutes)**
   
a. **Read and Annotate (RL.7.1-4, 6).** Have students read and annotate the introduction and excerpt. If students are completing as a homework assignment, ask them to write any questions they have into the annotation tool—these questions are visible to you after the students submit their writing assignments or beforehand if you use the “Mimic” function to access the students’ accounts.

b. **Discuss (SL.7.1, 3).** Have students get into small groups or pairs and briefly discuss the questions and inferences they had while reading.
Extension (additional 20 minutes)

c. **Listen and Discuss** (*SL.7.1-2*). As a class, listen to the audio reading of the text. Ask students to share how their understanding of the text changed after listening. What additional images came to mind? What words did the author use to develop the setting?

d. **Comprehend** (*RL.7.1-4, 6, 10*). Have students complete the multiple-choice questions. Collect papers or discuss answers as a class.

3. **Watch SyncTV (30 minutes)**

   a. **Watch** Either watch the SyncTV discussion as a class or ask students to watch it on their individual computers.

   b. **Focus** (*SL.7.1-3 and RL.7.1, 3, 6*). The SyncTV discussion is centered on a Venn diagram outlining the two competing “sides” of Bilbo Baggins. Watch first from 0:55-1:58 as the SyncTV students discuss the “Took” side of Bilbo, and his familial heritage of adventure and intrigue.

   c. **Focus** (*SL.7.1-3 and RL.7.1, 3, 6*). Then, from 2:46-3:43, the SyncTV discussion turns to focus on competing “Baggins” side. Watch this segment, paying attention to how the two sides stand in direct contrast.

   d. **Focus** (*SL.7.1-3 and RL.7.1, 3, 6*). Finally, have students watch the section from 4:16-5:12 and think about the topics of the SyncTV discussion, including why Bilbo may be right for this job, and why Tolkien may have chosen to make his central protagonist an anti-hero.

   e. **Discuss** (*SL.7.1-5 and RL.7.1-4, 6, 10*). After watching the model discussion, have a conversation with the class about the ideas discussed in the SyncTV episode. What new thoughts do they have after hearing the students' discussion? Next, divide students into small groups (3-4 students). Move around the room monitoring groups as students follow the SyncTV episode as a model to discuss some of the following questions:

      i. What are Bilbo Baggins’ two competing sides and how do they play out in this excerpt from *The Hobbit*? Cite examples of when he behaves more like a Took, and when, conversely, he behaves more like a Baggins.

      ii. Is Bilbo cowardly, or is he just prudent? Using the SyncTV discussion as a jumping-off point, have a discussion or debate about whether Bilbo’s caution and apprehension is a sign of cowardice or intelligence, citing examples from the text.

      iii. In many ways, Bilbo Baggins is not like the archetype of a classic hero. Talk about the different ways in which Bilbo is an anti-hero, then speculate why Tolkien may have envisioned Bilbo this way. Does Bilbo’s status as an anti-hero make this story more interesting, and if so, how?

      iv. Which “side” of Bilbo do you think will come out during the adventure: the Took side, the Baggins side, or both? Do you ever feel, like Bilbo, that you contain two competing impulses or “sides”? How so? Discuss.

      v. Now that Bilbo has been analyzed, discuss any defining characteristics found in other characters in this excerpt, including Gandalf, Thorin and the other dwarves. What word(s) would you use to describe them? Are they
more akin to the kinds of characters who would take part in an adventure? How so? Cite examples.

vi. Discuss the tone of the excerpt you’ve just read. Is Tolkien’s narration “light” or “dark” in mood and connotation? Think of adjectives to describe the tone and language Tolkien uses in this introduction to the characters and mythology of Middle Earth. Why do you think Tolkien tells the story the way he does?

Extension (additional 60 minutes)

f. Diagram (W.7.4, 9 and SL.7.4). Now that we’ve broken Bilbo’s personality into a Venn diagram, have students do this same exercise for themselves! Have them imagine themselves as comprised of two competing impulses, in the same fashion as Bilbo Baggins. These impulses can be linked to familial heritage, like Bilbo, or just their own personalities. Have students share their Venn diagrams with the class if they feel comfortable.

g. Create (W.7.3-4, 9 and SL.7.4-6). As we learn in the excerpt, Bilbo has some ancestors with some larger-than-life, mythological stories. Ask students to think of the stories and legends that have been passed down through their own families, and make each of them write a paragraph or two about a particular story, with accompanying illustration(s) similar to Tolkien’s. Once finished, have students present their stories and illustrations before the class. (A collection of many Tolkien illustrations can be found here: http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/Category:Images_by_J.R.R._Tolkien)

4. Think (10 minutes)
   a. Respond (W.7.1, 4). Ask students to read the “Think” questions, watch the corresponding video clips, and respond to the questions, either in class or for homework.

5. Write (50 minutes)
   a. Discuss (SL.7.1). Read the prompt you have chosen for students, and then solicit questions regarding the prompt or the assignment expectations. Whichever prompt you have chosen, make sure you are clear about the assignment expectations and the rubric by which you and the other students will be evaluating them.

   b. Organize (RL.7.1 and W.7.1-2, 5). Ask students to go back and annotate the text with the prompt in mind. They should be organizing their thoughts and the points they’ll address in their writing as they make annotations. If you’ve worked on outlining or other organizational tools for writing, this is a good place to apply them.

   c. Write (W.7.1-2, 4-6, 8-10). Have students go through the writing process of planning, revising, editing, and publishing their writing responses.

   d. Review (W.7.4-6). Use the StudySync “Review” feature to have students complete one to two evaluations of their peers’ work based on your chosen review rubric. Have the students look at and reflect upon the peer evaluations of their own writing. What might you do differently in a revision? How might you strengthen the writing and the ideas?
Extension (additional 100 minutes)

e. **Write** *(W.7.1-2, 4-6, 9-10).* For homework, have students write an essay using one of the prompts you did not choose to do in class. Students should publish their responses online.

f. **Write** *(W.7.1-2, 4-6, 9-10).* How much do familial traits and legacies matter? In the context of *The Hobbit*, why does it matter that Bilbo’s ancestors were either adventurous or idle? How are people affected by their heritage, genes, etc., and how are they *not* affected? Explore these concepts in an essay of at least 300 words.

g. **List** *(W.7.3-4, 9).* Before they set out to defeat Smaug and recapture the dwarves’ home, our fourteen adventurers may need a few things. Make a list of some things they’ll want to bring with them on their adventure. Be creative! Include items both practical and unconventional.
SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIALS

Key Vocabulary

1. burglar (n.) – A person who secretly enters a building to steal something
2. pinch (n.) – A bad or desperate situation ("in a pinch")
3. descendant (n.) – A person related to people or groups living in the past
4. revive (v.) – To become strong or active again
5. parlour (n.) – (US spelling: parlor) A living room
6. dignity (n.) – The quality or state of being worthy of honor and respect; a way of acting that suggests poise and honor
7. intricate (adj.) – Complex, consisting of many parts
8. obstinately (adv.) – Stubbornly
9. prudent (adj.) – Cautious in a way that shows wisdom or good judgment
10. remuneration (n.) - Compensation

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. In the opening passage, the character Gandalf is referring to is ____________________.
   a. Thorin
   b. Gloin
   c. Bilbo
   d. Bullroarer

2. The narrator suggests that the game of golf ____________________.
   a. was named in honor of a slain goblin
   b. is not frequently played in Middle Earth
   c. both a and b
   d. neither a nor b

3. Gloin expresses concern that Bilbo ____________________.
   a. is really a grocer
   b. is not tough enough
   c. does not want to come along on the adventure
   d. is too young

4. “Bilbo, you were a fool; you walked right in and put your foot in it.”

   In this quote, Bilbo is expressing that ____________________.
   a. he is glad he agreed to join the adventure
   b. he shouldn’t have been upset by Gloin’s words
   c. he wishes Gandalf hadn’t recommended him for the job
   d. it’s his own fault he got himself into this mess
5. The “mark” on Bilbo’s door signifying his interest in the job was put there by _________________.
   a. Gloin  
   b. Bilbo  
   c. Gandalf  
   d. Thorin

6. Based on the interaction in the excerpt, we can infer that ________________ is the leader of the expedition.
   a. Gloin  
   b. Thorin  
   c. Gandalf  
   d. none of the above

7. Bilbo has been recruited for the job because of his _________________.
   a. sneakiness  
   b. strength  
   c. wisdom  
   d. humor

8. “I tried to find one; but warriors are busy fighting one another in distant lands, and in this neighborhood heroes are scarce, or simply not to be found.”

   Based on Gandalf’s description, we can infer that the village where Bilbo lives is _________________.
   a. peaceful  
   b. beautiful  
   c. sparsely populated  
   d. wealthy

9. “All the others had ordered their breakfasts without so much as a please (which annoyed Bilbo very much), they all got up.”

   This passage suggests that Bilbo is _________________.
   a. stubborn  
   b. anxious  
   c. arrogant  
   d. well-mannered

10. Bilbo’s feelings about the impending adventure can be best described as _________________.
    a. excitement  
    b. apprehension  
    c. curiosity  
    d. confusion
Answer Key

1. C
2. A
3. B
4. D
5. C
6. C
7. A
8. A
9. D
10. B
Further Assignments

1. After completing this StudySync Premium Lesson, have students read the entirety of J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. Ask them to keep a reading journal or blog while reading and write one entry every day about the topics and events that occur in the book. Continue to discuss and expand upon the themes and issues that came up in the initial discussion, and once completed, have students write critical responses to the text. *(RL.7.1-4, 6, 10 and SL.7.1-3 and W.7.4, 9)*

2. A series of illuminating lectures about *The Hobbit* can be found at: http://www.tolkienprofessor.com/wp/lectures/the-hobbit/. Be sure students have read each section of the complete text before listening to the corresponding lectures. If completing the StudySync Premium Lesson only, they can listen to the first lecture; if they’re reading the entire novel, you can play them additional selections. (Be sure to listen to the lectures beforehand to determine if the slightly more challenging content is appropriate for your class.) *(SL.7.1-3)*

3. In the StudySync Library, search for the keyword ‘fantasy’ and assign students to read and complete one of the 22 StudySync Premium Lessons available in this genre. Similar texts include *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*, *The Lion, The Witch, and the Wardrobe*, and many more. Students should discuss and write about the fantasy genre after reading these additional selections: what are the shared trademarks of this genre? How are these fantasy worlds different or unique? What might have been the different inspirations for each of these works? *(RL.7.1-6, 10 and W.7.4, 9 and SL.7.1-3)*

4. Screen for the class one or more films in Peter Jackson’s *Hobbit* trilogy. Have students write an essay of at least 300 words comparing the book to the movie(s) and talking about some of the respective differences. Be sure students are giving specific examples from the text in their essay responses. What are some of the choices the filmmakers made in translating the book to the screen? What are some omissions, changes, etc.? Which version do students prefer? *(RL.7.7 and W.7.1, 4, 9 and SL.7.1-3)*

5. Though J.R.R. Tolkien himself was initially dismissive of attempts to read *The Hobbit* as an allegory, many scholars have written about the possible allegorical significance of the different places, characters and events in his classic novel. Define “allegory” for the class, discussing relevant examples of this literary concept, then have students do a little research on allegorical readings of *The Hobbit* in preparation for a class discussion about its historical context and different interpretations. *(SL.7.1, 3 and W.7.7, 9)*

6. If you are teaching *The Hobbit* to English language learners, you can have them shift the verb tense in the excerpt into present tense; you can ask them to replace each of the ten key vocabulary words with synonyms; and finally, you can have the class share folklore/fantasy stories from their native culture, writing paragraph summaries about their selected tales. *(ELL)*