Analyzing how Modern Literature Draws on Tradition:

There is a saying that there are no new stories in the world. There certainly are many creative ways to tell a tale, but the more you read, the more you will see stories that remind you of others. Many **modern works of fiction draw on traditional stories, religious works, and mythology** for their plots, characters, or themes. Sometimes authors do this on purpose. They might retell a classic tale in a new way for modern audiences. Other times, authors may simply be influenced by works they have read. Bits and pieces might show up later in their own work.

Here is an example of a lasting tale and its transformation through different times in history.

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| In Roman myth, Pygmalion is a sculptor who is not very interested in having a relationship.  However, he creates a statue of a woman so beautiful that he falls in love with it. He prays at the altar of Venus (goddess of love) to bring his creation to life. His prayer is answers, and he marries his living statue.  http://blog.library.villanova.edu/news/files/2013/10/Pygmalion-and-Galatea.jpgIn 1912, playwright George Bernard Shaw adapted this ancient story into a five-act play called *Pygmalion*. But the characters are Professor Henry Higgins, a phonetics teachers, and Eliza Doolittle, a flower-seller from the streets. Higgin, like the original Pygmalion, doesn’t think much of women. But he makes a bet with a friend that he can take the low-born Eliza and pass her off as a duchess simply by transforming the way she speaks. He “brings her to life” by teaching her to speak well, and then he realizes he has fallen in love with her. It added twists of setting and well as plot to the original tale. Most importantly, Shaw added a feminist twist. In the end, Eliza leaves the professor, who takes her for granted, and marries someone else.  Shaw’s story, in turn, was adapted into a stage musical (also later filmed) under the name *My Fair Lady*. The feature film stars Rex Harrison as Henry Higgins and Audrey Hepburn as Eliza Doolittle. Obviously it added musical numbers to communicate some of the plot, plus changed the ending to have Eliza stay with the professor, which most modern audiences thought was the happier ending. |

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| **Directions:** | **Read the introduction, passages, and sample question below. Then answer the questions that follow.** |

The Lord of the Rings trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien is well known by readers as three volumes of fantastical tales filled with heroism, wizardry, and extraordinary creatures. This trilogy is part of a larger series of books that Tolkien wrote dealing with history and events of Middle-earth, a mythical setting he created. Tolkien draws on many sources for inspiration. Some readers have noticed that his magical stories contained biblical images, allegories, and themes – not unlike C. S. Lewis’s The Chronicles of Narnia. In fact, Tolkien, a devout Catholic, was a friend of Lewis and influenced him to become a Christian. Read the following biblical passages and the brief synopsis of the three books that make up the Lord of the Rings. Then answer the question that follows.

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| **Excerpts from the Bible**  **Jesus dies and is resurrected three days later**  (1 Corinthians 15) King James Version (NKJV)  3 For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. 6 After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep.  **The apostle Paul teaches the Law of Christ**  (Galatians 6) New International Version (NIV)  **1**Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. **2**Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. **3**If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. **4**Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, **5**for each one should carry their own load.  **Jesus as the bread of life**  (John 6) New International Version (NIV)  **43**“Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. **44**“No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day.**45**It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. **46**No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. **47**Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. **48**I am the bread of life. **49**Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. **50**But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. **51**I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”  **God makes plans for us that might not be what we wanted**  (Proverbs 16) **1**To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue.  (Proverbs 19) **21**Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the Lord’s purpose that prevails.  (Job 15) **8**Did you overhear the plans God made? Does human wisdom belong to you alone?  (Isaiah 28) **29**All this wisdom comes from the Lord Almighty. The plans God makes are wise, and they always succeed.  **The significance of loyalty**  (Psalms 85) **11**Human loyalty will reach up from the earth, and God’s righteousness will look down from heaven.  (Proverbs 3) **3**Never let go of loyalty and faithfulness. Tie them around your neck; write them on your heart. |

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| **Summary of the Lord of the Rings trilogy by J. R. R. Tolkien**  This sequel to *The Hobbit* begins with a flashback: Many years ago, in the mystical realm called Middle-earth, the Dark Lord Sauron forged a potent talisman called the One Ring to gain power over all the raves of Men, Elves, and Dwarves. But Sauron was defeated in battle, and the ring was lost. It was eventually found by two hobbits. But one hobbit came under the ring’s evil spell’ he slew his cousin and took the ring for himself. He hid in the Misty Mountains, where the ring prolonged his life, turning him into a pathetic creature called Gollum. When Gollum lost the ring, the hobbit Bilbo Baggins found it.  Years later, Bilbo is leaving the Shire, home of the hobbits. He wills the One Ring (which he has been hiding) to his young cousin, Frodo Baggins. A visiting wizard, Gandalf the Grey, reveals the ring’s history to Frodo. He explains that Frodo is in danger, and the ring must leave the Shire. Frodo enlists the help of his friends Same, Merry, and Pippin. Thus their adventure begins.  In the meantime, Sauron’s spirit has survived, and he once again rules his realm of Mordor. But he needs the One Ring to regain his full power. Minions of Sauron capture Gollum, who is desperately searching for the rind, and Sauron discovers that Bilbo Baggins now has it. Sauron sends the Ringwraiths, his terrible and almost-immortal servants, for the rind. Attracted by the ring’s presence, the Ringwraiths almost catch the four young hobbits as they flee the Shire.  Cutting through the Old Forest, the hobbits meet a Ranger named Strider – who turns out to be Aragorn, long-lost heir to the throne of Gondor, the kingdom next to Mordor. Aragorn helps the hobbits escape, but the Ringwraiths wound Frodo with a poisoned knife. Aragorn explains that the Elf leader Elrond will give the hobbits refuge in Rivendell. With Frodo suffering from his wound and the Ringwraiths pursuit, Elrond saves them by making the river to flood behind Aragorn and the hobbits.  In Rivendell, Frodo is nursed back to health. Elrond and his council have learned that the Dark Lord has corrupted the once-good wizard Saruman, who now works on Sauron’s behalf. The threat is becoming dire: war is looming, and the One Ring must be taken to Mount Doom in Mordor, where it was forged, and tossed in the volcano’s molten center to be destroyed. Frodo volunteers for this crucial task. A “fellowship of the ring” forms to accompany and protect him consisting of the four hobbits, Aragorn, Gandalf, Gimli the Dwarf, Legolas the Elf, and the son of the ruling steward of Gondor, a man named Boromir.  The fellowship attempts to cross the Misty Mountains but it turned back by falling rocks, eerie noises, and a blinding snowstorm. So the cross underneath through the Mines of Moria, where they are attacked by orcs. There, Gandalf battles an ancient balrog demon and dies, sacrificing himself so that his friends can escape. They flee to Lothlorien, a beautiful forest realm of Elves, They meet Lady Galadriel, who gives them supplies and sends them on their way. One thing she gives them is *lembas,* a bread that sustains them like no other food can and increases their will to go on.  Along the way, Boromir is finally lured by the evil magnetism of the ring. He attempts to take it from Frodo. Frodo runs away from Boromir and decides to go on alone, feeling the pull of the ring growing stronger as he nears Mordor. Same follows Frodo and insists on accompanying him to Mount Doom.  After Frodo and Same depart, the orcs attack the others, killing Boromir and capturing Merry and Pippin. Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli pursue the orcs into the kingdom of Rohan, where the resident horse-lords surprise and slay the orcs. Unseen, Merry and Pippin escape into the forest where they are proitected by the ancient walking-tree creatures called Ents.  Three days have passes. As Aragorn tracks Merry and Pippin through the forest, he meets up with Gandalf, who was resurrected and is now “Gandalf the White.” Gandalf tells Aragorn that Merry and Pippin are safe, but warns they will have to take a stand. They do to Rohan, where Theoden, the king, has been bewitched by Saruman. Gandalf wakes Theoden just as orcs attack. However, Gandalf brings reinforcements to crush the orcs at last.  On another front, the peaceful Ents have learned about events from Merry and Pippin. Enraged, the tree people attack Saruman’s fortress Isengard and trap the evil wizard just as armies led by Gandalf and Theoden arrive. Gandalf strips Saruman of his powers. Merry and Pippin are reunited with the remaining fellowship. Unfortunately, Pippin looks into Saruman’s seeing-stone, a mystical device the wizard uses to communicate with Sauron. Sauron spies Pippin, Mistaking him for the Ring-bearer. Gandalf spirits Pippin off to Gondor to protect him.  Meanwhile, Frodo and Sam approach Mordor, with Gollum trailing them. They capture him and force him to reveal his secret entrance into Mordor. But Gollum betrays them by leading them to the great spider Shelob, who bites Frodo. Sam, believing Frodo is dead, takes the ring, vowing to continue the quest. Orcs appear, and Sam hides. As they carry Frodo off, Sam overhears them say he is just unconscious. Sam follows to rescue his friend.  Meanwhile, the war for Middle-earth rages as Sauron’s armies attack Gondor. But Aragorn, along with the Rohan army, defats Sauron’s forces. In Mordor, Same rescues Frodo, and they climb to the rim of Mount Doom. Frodo, growing ever weaker, is ensnared by the power of the One Ring and refuses to throw it into the volcano – but right then, Gollum appears! He leaps upon Frodo and bites off Frodo finger with the ring on it. Then Gollum, dancing with evil glee, slips and falls into the fiery pit, taking the ring with him. The One Ring is destroyed! Sauron’s fortress crumbles, his armies retreat, and the Dark Lord is vanquished forever. Aragorn returns to Gondor and is crowned king.  However, Saruman has escaped to the Shire, where he holds its citizens captive. When the victorious hobbits return, they mount a rebellion and overthrow Saruman, who is killed in the fighting. They restore the Shire and are proclaimed heroes. Sam marries the girl he has always loved. Frodo, however, remains wounded; some time later, he decides to leave the Shire. Accompanied by Bilbo and Gandalf, Frodo departs for the Undying Lands, a place removed from the realm of the world, where very few except the Elves are allowed to go. |

What similarities did you notice between the biblical passages and the synopsis of The Lord of the Rings? Tolkien draws on a number of biblical images, themes, and character types to tell the story. One example is that Gandalf symbolizes Jesus Christ when he sacrifices himself for others in the Mines or Moria and is brought back to life three days later, stronger than ever. Another example is that Frodo carries the burdens of others, as depicted in Galatians, by taking the ring back to Mount Doom – a heavy burden indeed! Now answer these questions about other allusions that Tolkien makes.

1. Which is the *main* conflict in The Lord of the Rings?
   1. The hobbits need to find a way to save their Shire from evil outside forces.
   2. All of the races must unite in order to defeat the ghastly forces of evil.
   3. Frodo and the fellowship must resist and destroy the ring to defeat Sauron.
   4. Aragorn must embrace his role as leader so the fight against Sauron can succeed.
2. How does the *lembas* that Lady Galadriel gives the fellowship relate to Jesus’ bread of life?

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1. What biblical theme is suggested by Gandalf coming back to life after being killed by the demon?
   1. Love and sacrifice can save you.
   2. Treat others like you want to be treated.
   3. Good always triumphs over evil.
   4. Justice and love are opposing values.
2. What other biblical themes, events, or character types might Tolkien have drawn from to tell the story?

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