

The Phantom Tollbooth
by
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“It seems to me that almost everything is a waste of time!” Milo finds life to be very boring, until one day when he comes home to find a mysterious package in his bedroom. Inside is ONE GENUINE TURNPIKE TOLLBOOTH along with a map. Since he has nothing else to do, Milo decides to drive through the tollbooth and into the Lands Beyond in his toy car, thus beginning a journey that will lead him through strange lands filled with fantastical characters where he will be sent on a quest to reunite the lands of Dictionopolis and Digitopolis by rescuing two sisters, Rhyme and Reason. In the process he will acquire a love for learning and find the anecdote for boredom.

Vocabulary

Using context, try writing a reasonable definition for each of these words. Look them up to see how well you did!

effusive

Milo was a little bowled over by the **effusive** greeting.

conciliatory

He continued in a more **conciliatory** tone.

tumult

But above all the noise and **tumult** of the crowd could be heard the merchants' voices.

promontory

The forest abruptly ended, and the road bent itself around a broad **promontory**.

disconsolate

The Soundkeeper grew worried and **disconsolate**.

pungent

A sweet yet **pungent** aroma filled the air.

nonchalantly

“Also correct,” yawned the Mathemagician, **nonchalantly** cleaning his fingernails with the point of his staff.

maliciously

The one eye he chose to open stared down **maliciously**.

ominous

An **ominous** silence dropped like a curtain around them.

desolate

He felt very lonely and **desolate** as his thoughts turned far away.

Activities

1. What does the title *Phantom Tollbooth* mean?
2. *Homonyms* are words that sound alike but have different meanings. Homonyms may be either *homophones*, words that sound alike but have different meanings and are spelled differently (pear/pair); or *homographs*, words that have the same spelling but may or may not sound differently (bass, a type of fish/bass, a deep voice; bat, baseball equipment/bat, an animal). *Synonyms* are words that have the same meaning.

3. Are the following examples of homonyms or synonyms?

salutations, welcome
kingdom, realm
whether, weather
certainly, yes
which, witch
nonsense, absurd
senses, census

4. *Idioms* are phrases that are not to be taken literally. For example, “The duke here can make mountains out of molehills” means that the duke over reacts because he makes too much of small matters.

Write what you think these idioms taken from the book mean:

The minister splits hairs.

The earl leaves no stone unturned.

The count makes hay while the sun shines.

The undersecretary hangs by a thread.

5. *Puns* are words or phrases that humorously suggest different meanings. Ex: being struck by lightning is a shocking experience. Explain how these puns are used in *The Phantom Tollbooth*:

Light meal
square meal
Spelling Bee

6. What are the elements that define a fantasy book? A science fiction book? An allegory? What genre is *The Phantom Tollbooth*?

7. Write an essay about which place you would rather live - Dictionopolis or Digitopolis? Why?

8. The Dodecahedron has 12 faces or sides. Find out the names for shapes that have 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 sides.

9. Character sketches include basic information like name, age, physical features, and personality traits. Do you like the character? Why or why not? Write a character sketch for each of the following characters:

Milo
Tock
Humbug
King Azaz
the Mathemagician

10. When we first meet Milo, he is very bored about life. Are you ever bored? What are some things that you can do when you are bored?

11. Characters can be *flat* or *round*. Flat characters are characters that stay the same throughout the book, while round characters are characters that change during the story. Milo is a round character. Describe how Milo changed in the story.

12. Throughout the book Milo learns many lessons. In your opinion, what is one lesson of the most important lessons taught?

Teacher's Help:

Vocabulary

effusive – overly demonstrative

conciliatory – tending to placate, bring peace

tumult - uproar

promontory – a high point of land projecting into the sea

disconsolate – hopelessly unhappy

pungent – having a strong smell

nonchalantly – indifferent, unexcited

maliciously – intentionally harmful

ominous – foreboding, threatening

desolate - barren

1. Phantom means ghost or figment of the imagination. A tollbooth is a booth where a driver pays to use a bridge or road. Milo uses the tollbooth to enter the world of Expectations and the strange lands beyond. Like a ghost, the booth vanishes as mysteriously as it appeared.

3. Homonyms or synonyms?

salutations, welcome (synonyms)

kingdom, realm (synonyms)

whether, weather (homonyms)

certainly, yes (synonyms)

which, witch (homonyms)

nonsense, absurd (synonyms)

senses, census (homonyms)

4. Idioms

The minister splits hairs.

making very small and unnecessary distinctions

The earl leaves no stone unturned.

to try everything possible to solve a problem

The count makes hay while the sun shines.

making good use of an opportunity

The undersecretary hangs by a thread.

in an uncertain, unstable state

5. Puns

Light meal – When he lifted the covers, shafts of brilliant-colored light leaped from the plates and bounced around the ceiling.

square meal – The waiters reappeared carrying plates heaped high with steaming squares of all sizes and colors.

Spelling Bee – “Perhaps I can be of assistance – a-s-s-i-s-t-a-n-c-e,” buzzed an unfamiliar voice, and when Milo looked up he saw an enormous bee.

6. Fantasy – a story that is speculative fiction (What if?); has elements of magic, fantastical creatures, unnatural events; with events that take place in a different world.

Science Fiction – a story that is speculative fiction (What if?), with events that take place in the future or in an alternative universe, and has a focus on science and technology.

Allegory – a story that has a hidden meaning, usually having something to do with politics, religion, or morality; uses symbolism where most things stand for something else.

The Phantom Tollbooth is both fantasy and allegory.

- 8. five sides – pentagon
- six sides – hexagon
- seven sides – heptagon
- eight sides – octagon
- nine sides – nonagon
- ten sides - decagon

11. In the beginning of the story, bored Milo is not interested in learning because he doesn't see any point in it. “It seems to me that almost everything is a waste of time,” he remarked one day as he walked dejectedly home from school. “I can't see the point in learning to solve useless problems, or subtracting turnips from turnips, or knowing where Ethiopia is or how to spell February.” After his experience with the Phantom Tollbooth, Milo is no longer bored with everything:

And in the very room in which he sat, there were books that could take you anywhere, and things to invent, and make, and build, and break, and all the puzzle and excitement of everything he didn't know – music to play, songs to sing, and words to imagine and then someday make real.”

12. Ex:

“You must never feel badly about making mistakes, as long as you take the trouble to learn from them. For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons.”