



Mosswood Connections

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster: Lesson and Activities

Summary:

This ingenious fantasy centers on Milo, a bored ten-year-old who comes home to find a large toy tollbooth sitting in his room. Joining forces with a watchdog named Tock, Milo drives through the tollbooth's gates and begins a memorable journey. He meets such characters as the foolish, yet lovable Humbug, the Mathemagician, and the not-so-wicked "Which," Faintly Macabre, who gives Milo the "impossible" mission of returning two princesses to the Kingdom of Wisdom.

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Language Arts - 5th Grade

- LA.5.2.1.2: the student will locate and analyze the elements of plot structure, including exposition, setting, character development, rising and falling action, problem/resolution, and theme in a variety of fiction.
- LA.5.1.7.7: the student will compare and contrast elements in multiple texts
- LA.5.2.1.4: the student will identify an author's theme, and use details from the text to explain how the author developed that theme
- LA.5.3.5.1: the student will prepare writing using technology in a format appropriate to the audience and purpose.

Activities

- *Go on The Phantom Tollbooth Journey:*
- Going through the Land of Expectations (Materials: dice, shiny rocks, dead flowers.)
Tell the kids that they will either get a flower or a rock.
Roll a dice; if odd you get a rock, if even you get a flower.



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Give either an old wilted flower or a pretty rock. Discuss what their expectation had been.

- ✓ Dictionapolis (Materials: Vocabulary words)
- You can't get in the gate until you pass the vocabulary test

- ✓ The Market Place (Materials: Magnet Words)
- Put word magnets in sentences

- ✓ In the Jail (Materials: Blindfolds)
- Team problem solving exercise: blindfolded obstacle course

- ✓ The Royal Banquet (Materials: Alphabet Cookies)
- Eat your words: alphabet cookies. Before they can eat the cookies see who can make the longest word.

- ✓ Colorful symphony (Materials: Classical Music, paper, markers or crayons)
- Listen to music, draw what you see

- ✓ Create a Character Collage (Materials: Drawing Paper, crayons or markers, Pencils, Magazines, Glue)
- SUGGEST that students start their collages with a drawing of a character from The Phantom Tollbooth.
- PROVIDE magazines from which students can cut out words and phrases that describe their character. Students can surround their drawings with the cut-out words. Have them write a short explanation describing their character and telling why they chose these words. Have students paste these explanations to the backs of their collages.
- DISPLAY the collages in a classroom gallery. Students can try to guess who the characters are based on the words and illustrations. They can check their guesses with the answers on the back of each collage

- ✓ Use a thesaurus to find 5 synonyms of do, said, blue, round, fat, thin, went, try, saw, tall, big. Then pick one of the words and use it in a sentence

Phantom Tollbooth Writing Prompts

- ✓ Imagine that you have a Tollbooth delivered to your house. Where would you go? Write about your travels.



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- ✓ The Mathemagician had an amazing pencil that could do all sorts of tricks. Choose one of the following topics to write about: “Why pencils are absolutely amazing” or “What my magic pencil can do”
- ✓ Describe how different letters taste to you.
- ✓ Write about a time that you were so bored that you were in “The Doldrums”.
- ✓ Are words more important? Or are numbers more important? Tell my why.
- ✓ Which part of the Lands Beyond would you most like to visit? Which would you most like to avoid? Why?
- ✓ Is Milo a well-developed character? Is he a hero? Why or why not? (You may pick another character if you wish to do so.)
- ✓ Why is it so important to rescue Rhyme and Reason? What would've happened to Milo and to Wisdom – If they were never rescued?
- ✓ If you were to create a symphony that could be seen but not heard what would it look like?
- ✓ What happens to the tollbooth after it disappears?

The Phantom Tollbooth Comprehension and Discussion Questions:

Chapter 1:

- Nothing interests Milo. What interests you?
- Is seeking knowledge a waste of time? Why or why not?
- Why does Milo decide to go to Dictionapolis?

Chapter 2:

- Where is the first place that Milo sees on his journey? (“Expectations”)
- Who does he meet? (the Whether Man)
- “Expect everything, I always say, and the unexpected never happens.” Is it possible to expect everything?
- Where did Milo go next?
- What are doldrums?
- Who does Milo meet in the Doldrums? (The Lethargarians and Tock, the watchdog)
- How does Milo get out of the Doldrums? (By thinking)

Chapter 3:

- What is Tock’s job? (To make sure that no one wastes time.)
- What does the gateman say that they need to enter Dictionapolis?
- What reason does he give them?
- What type of market do Milo and Tock see?

Chapter 4:

- Was Tock interested in the words in the Word Market?
- Who does Milo meet at the market?



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- What creature does Milo meet at the market?
- How does the Spelling Bee feel about the Humbug?
- What happens next?

Chapter 5:

- What happened to the salespeople at the market? (Their words were mixed up)
- Who did Milo meet next? (Officer Shrift)
- What did he want to do to Milo? (Put him in prison for 6 million years.)
- Who is in the dungeon and what was her job? (The Which. She was responsible for choosing which words were to be used for all occasions.)
- What does “Brevity is the soul of wit” mean?

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Chapter 6:

- The land where Dictionapolis is was once known as the land of Null. What does “Null” mean and who came to build the Kingdom of Wisdom? (Null means nothing. A prince sailed from the Sea of Knowledge and he built a city which grew into the Kingdom of Wisdom.)
- Who built the city of Digitopolis and Dictionapolis? (The king’s sons)
- Who did the king adopt? (Rhyme and Reason)
- What happened between the two prince brothers and Rhyme and Reason? (The brothers fought over whose city were better and when Rhyme and Reason said that they were equally they were banished to the Castle in the Air.)
- How do Milo and Tock get out of prison? (They just press a button and leave.)

Chapter 7:

- Where do Tock and Milo go next? (They go to the royal banquet.)
- King Azaz commands Milo to entertain him. What does Milo offer to do and what is the king’s reaction? (Milo offers to count to 1000 and the Kings growls at him to “Never mention numbers here.”)
- What does Milo request for dinner and what does he get? (Milo asks for a “light meal” and they bring him brilliantly colored lights then he asks for a “square meal” and they bring him squares.)
- What does Milo have to do during the banquet? (Literally eat his words.)
- What is a “half-baked idea”? (It is an idea that is not completely thought through.)

Chapter 8:

- What does Milo suggest to the king? (He suggests that he brings Rhyme and reason back.)
- Where does King Azaz send Milo? (To go on a dangerous journey to bring back Rhyme and Reason.)
- What does the Humbug volunteer to do? (He is sent to help Milo and Tock on their journey to the Castle in the Air.)
- Did he really volunteer? (Not at all.)



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Chapter 9:

- Who does Milo meet on the way out of Dictionapolis? (Alec Bings, who can see “whatever is inside, behind, around, covered by, or subsequent to anything else.”)
- What is the only thing that Alec cannot see? (He can’t see whatever is right in front of his nose?)
- What does Alec think everyone should have? (Their own point of view.)

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Chapter 10:

- Who do they meet next? Does he match his name? (The Giant. No, he is the smallest giant in the world.)
- Who lives next door to the giant? (The tallest midget in the world but really they are the same person.)
- What happened to the City of Reality? (The people rushed from place to place until they stopped paying attention to how things looked. Because nobody cared the city began to disappear.)
- What does Alec tell Milo that he needs to do to have a city that blends both illusion and reality?
- (Milo needs to bring back Rhyme and Reason.)
- What music do they play at the evening concert? What does it sound like? (They are playing the sunset and you cannot hear it, you watch it.)

Chapter 11:

- What does Milo decide to do? (Conduct the symphony himself.)
- What happened when Milo try to conduct the symphony of dawn? (He changed all the colors and lost a week’s time. “Nothing was the color it should have been, and yet, the more he tried to straighten things out, the worse they became.”)
- What does Alec give Milo? (A telescope that can see the smallest things and that “can see things as they really are.”)
- Who does Tock and Milo meet next? (The doctor of dissonance.)
- What type of a doctor is he and what does he diagnose as Milo’s problem? (He is a doctor of annoying sounds and he says that Milo “is suffering from a severe lack of noise.”)
- Why does the doctor only treat illnesses that don’t exist? (Because if he can’t cure them then there’s no harm done.)
- Who does the doctor give his medicine to when Milo and Tock refuse to take it? (He gives it to Dynne.)
- What is the awful Dynne? (Noise that you wish would stop.)

Chapter 12:

- What is missing in The Silent Valley? (All sounds.)
- How do the people in the Silent Valley communicate? (They communicate with signs.)
- What happened to all their sounds? (The soundkeeper provided them with sounds which were to be returned after use and put back in alphabetical order but the people got too busy to listen so the sounds just disappeared. Then Dr. Dischord



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tried to help by giving them medicine but the medicine just caused noise which made the Soundkeeper furious and she abolished all sounds.)

- What is Milo asked to do? (Visit the Soundkeeper and bring back one sound.)
 - What word does Milo take from the Soundkeeper? (He takes the word “but”)
- Chapter 13:
- What happens when the word “but” strikes the Soundkeeper’s fortress? (“Every sound that had ever been made. . . came hurtling out of the debris in a way that sounded as though everyone in the world was laughing, whistling, whispering, humming, screaming, coughing and sneezing, all at the same time.)
 - Who returns the escaped sounds and why? (The Dynne because none of them “are awful enough for me.”)
 - What does the Soundkeeper give Milo? (A small brown package of sounds.)
 - Who do they meet and how does Milo, Tock and the Humbug figure out his name? (His name is Canby and they figure it out because everything he tells is what he “can be”.)
 - What does it mean to “jump to conclusions”? (It means to assume something without having all the necessary information.)
- Chapter 14:
- They see a sign which has the distance listed in different measurements; the Humbug wants to travel by miles because it is shorter, Milo wants to travel by half-inches because it is faster. What is wrong with their reasoning? (It is all the same distance.)
 - What do you think of the statement “as long as the answer is right, who cares if the question is wrong?”
 - Why is Milo embarrassed about numbers? (He is not very good at math.)
 - Who owns the mine and what are they mining for? (The mathematician owns the mine and they are mining for numbers.)
- Chapter 15:
- What do they eat and how does it make them feel? (They eat subtraction stew and it makes them hungrier as “The more you eat, the hungrier you get.”)
 - How does the Mathemagician get from place to place? (He erases everything and begins again or he draws a straight line because a straight line is the shortest distance between two points and when he needs to be in more than one place at a time he multiplies.)
 - Where does Milo try to go next? (He goes up a flight of stairs to the Land of Infinity.)
- Chapter 16:
- What happens when Milo tries to go to Infinity? (The stairway goes on forever.)
 - Why is the boy that he meets only .58 (a little more than half-way) there? (Because the average family has 2.58 children and he is the .58. This is a good time to explain averages.)



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- If averaging everything meant everything was equally shared, would you like that? Why or why not?
- What is the only thing that the Mathemagician says can be done easily? (Be wrong.)
- What does it mean when Milo asks, “Why is it. . .that quite often even the things which are correct just don’t seem to be right?” (Both the kings are technically correct in what they are saying but they are not communicating with each other which causes all the problems.)
- Why does The Mathemagician say that he won’t agree to bring back Rhyme and Reason? (Because he and Azaz haven’t agreed on anything since Rhyme and Reason were banished and he never will.)
- How does Milo convince him to bring them back? (By telling him: “...each of you agrees that he will disagree with whatever each of you agrees with. . .and if you both disagree with the same thing then aren’t you really in agreement?)
- What does the Dirty Bird do? (He uses the homophone of the words they say; i.e. “by” becomes “buy”.)
- Is the Dirty Bird a demon? (No, he is just a nuisance.)
- “Blank expression”
- What does the man with the blank expression ask them to do? (He asks them to do useless tasks that go on endlessly.)

- Chapter 17:
- How does the magic pencil help Milo? (It tells him how long his task will take.)
- Why do you think that Tock’s alarm started to go off? (Because the man with no face was beginning to alarm him.)
- Who was the man with no face? (The Terrible Trivium which is a play on the word trivia.)
- Have you ever been distracted by trivia, have you ever procrastinated doing something important by getting busy with trivia instead?
- How did they get away from The Trivium? (He got distracted by a pile of pebbles.)
- What happened next? (They got tricked into falling into a pit by a fiend who always gives bad advice.)
- How is Milo able to see past his disguise as a fiend and realize that the creature really isn’t scary? (He uses his magic telescope and finds out that the creature is a very small demon of insincerity.)
- What is the Gelatinous Giant afraid of? (Everything.)
- What happened next? (All the demons came out to destroy the visitors and protect Ignorance.)



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Phantom Tollbooth Vocabulary

Doldrums: a spell of listlessness or despondency; a part of the ocean near the equator abounding in calms, squalls, and light shifting winds; a state or period of inactivity, stagnation, or slump

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Lethargy: abnormal drowsiness; the quality or state of being lazy, sluggish, or indifferent.

Procrastinate: to put off intentionally and habitually; to put off intentionally the doing of something that should be done

Overwrought: extremely excited; elaborated to excess

Philosopher: a person who seeks wisdom or enlightenment: scholar, thinker

Perilously: to act in a way that is full of or involving danger

Cabinet: a small private room or closet, case with drawers, etc.; a council room for chief ministers of state; a body of official advisors

Quagmire: soft miry land that shakes or yields under the foot; a difficult, precarious, or entrapping position; predicament

Flabbergast: to overwhelm with shock, surprise, or wonder: dumbfound

Upholstery: materials (as fabric, padding, and springs) used to make a soft covering especially for a seat

Commendable: worthy of praise

Reality: the quality or state of being real; a real event, entity, or state of affairs

Illusions: the action of deceiving; a misleading image presented to the vision

Discord: lack of agreement or harmony (as between persons, things, or ideas); a combination of musical sounds that strikes the ear harshly

Din: a loud continued noise; *especially:* a welter of discordant sounds; a situation or condition resembling a din

Audible: heard or capable of being heard

Dodecahedron: a solid having 12 plane faces



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Lurking: to lie in wait in a place of concealment especially for an evil purpose; to be concealed but capable of being discovered; *specifically:* to constitute a latent threat

Resolutely: to act with firm determination

Context: the interrelated conditions in which something exists or occurs:
environment, setting