

**Imagination For Better Not Worse:**  
***The Hobbit* in the Primary Classroom**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis argues for the power of story and, in particular, the story of *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien to help build optimism and hope. *The Hobbit* is under-used in primary schools and this thesis demonstrates that it is eminently suitable for children. Without imagination children are vulnerable to sadness and despair. The positive development of imagination through heroic tales is likely to benefit children emotionally and psychologically. The story of *The Hobbit* can be utilised to develop the concept of the Hero's Journey, a persistent trope in oral and recorded literature and an archetype for virtually all human experience. In addition, the thesis shows that critical thinking skills and multiple intelligences can be developed through the use of *The Hobbit*.

Depression in young people is now recognised as a serious public health problem in Australia. Research supports the view that children need optimism. This thesis discusses statistics regarding the increased prevalence of childhood depression and aggression as well as alarming youth suicide reports. The inquiry by the Victorian Parliament into the effects of television violence on children is examined and the scholarly works of Neil Postman, inter alia, are discussed to establish the overall pattern of positive association between television violence and aggression in children. Furthermore, the contention that many contemporary realistic texts do little to promote hopefulness in the young is supported with the opinions of scholars who are respected in the field of children's literature.

Tolkien was a devout Catholic but, even more importantly, he was able to restate traditional values through his imaginative works of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. This has relevance for Catholic educators who strive to relate Gospel values to

popular culture. Christian education must extend imagination beyond morality to help young people to find meaning and purpose in their lives. Through the use of *The Hobbit* and other books of this kind, children can begin to learn not to fear change, failure or setbacks but to see them as important challenges and opportunities for personal growth. This thesis argues for the likely value of a continuum of this type of learning that begins in early childhood, in order to provide a "buffer" for adolescence, particularly for those children who do not recover easily from setbacks. The story of *The Hobbit* is a powerful tool for primary education.

## **DECLARATION**

This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

This thesis contains no material extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published or written except where due reference is made in the main text and Bibliography.

Signed:

Date:.....

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My brother John Patrick Lappin (Glasgow) challenged me in my direction throughout various stages of my work in progress and forced me to a higher level of critical analysis of my research. I am also grateful to my brother for assisting me with the process of formatting this document.

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