

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Out of the Silent Planet

by  
C.S. Lewis

### Book Information

C.S. Lewis, Out of the Silent Planet

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Collier Macmillan, 1962

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160 Pages

Book Level: 7.4

Interest Level: UG

This is volume one of the renowned space trilogy that uses techniques of science and fantasy to point up earthly morals.

**Topics:** Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; Science Fiction, Other Worlds; Science Fiction, Traveling in Space; Series, Space Trilogy (C.S. Lewis)

### Main Characters

Augray the sorn who carries Ransom to Meldilorn to meet Oyarsa

Devine a former schoolmate of Ransom who abducts him, and whose motivation for traveling to Malacandra is seizing the gold found on the planet

Dr. Elwin Ransom a middle-aged philologist and avid walker who is abducted and taken on a space-ship to Malacandra where he befriends the local creatures and learns their language

Hnobra the leader of the hross village where Ransom is sheltered

Hyoj the hross who befriends Ransom and leads him to safety

Maleldil the kind and good, all knowing, all powerful, all present ruler of the universe

Oyarsa the master spirit who promises to protect Ransom and passes judgment on Weston and Devine

Weston a respected physicist who also abducts Ransom, and is the brains behind the experiment involving the planet Malacandra

Whin the hross who tells Ransom to flee to Augray for safety after Weston and Devine kill Hyoj

### Vocabulary

**eldila** spirit-like beings seen on Malacandra and in the heavens

**handra** Malacandrian word for earth or soil

**handramit** a canyon or valley on Malacandra

**hnakra** a beast that inhabits the waters of Malacandra

**hrossa** the fishermen of Malacandra

**pfifltriggi** the artisans of Malacandra

**philologist** a person who studies linguistics or languages

**sorns** the intellectuals of Malacandra

### Synopsis

An ordinary walking tour turns into an unexpected adventure for Dr. Elwin Ransom, a philologist at Cambridge College, England. While trying to locate and usher home a mentally challenged boy for his worried mother, Ransom stumbles into the laboratory of a physicist and his partner, for whom the boy works. Ransom tries to rescue the boy from the two men, who are treating him roughly. While questioning the men's actions, Ransom learns one of the men, Mr. Devine, is a former schoolmate, and his partner is Professor Weston, a famous scientist. After a conversation with the men, Ransom is knocked out by a blow to the head and drugged.

When Ransom awakens, he finds himself in a strange environment, through the windows of which he can see the stars and a large moon-like sphere that, much to his shock, turns out to be the Earth. He overhears Weston and Devine talking about offering him for sacrifice according to orders they had been given. He also learns that their destination is an inhabited planet called Malacandra.

After landing on the planet, Ransom escapes his captors and runs away. He encounters a strange-looking creature who appears to be harmless. Ransom is surprised to hear the creature speak. Because languages are his life's work, Ransom tries to communicate with the creature. The two manage to converse and strike up a friendship. The creature, a hross named Hyoj, takes Ransom to his village. Hyoj answers many of Ransom's questions about Malacandra and its inhabitants. He

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learns that Devine's reason for returning to Malacandra is the gold found on the planet.

Over the course of several months, Ransom travels across Malacandra, meets other kinds of creatures, and discovers Malacandra is really Mars. Ransom finally goes to see Oyarsa, the spirit who rules Malacandra, after his friend Hyoui is killed by Devine and Weston. Oyarsa explains that Earth alone, of all planets in the solar system, is unknown. A rebellion led by the Bent One against Maleldil has caused Earth to be cut off from the rest of the universe and to earn the name, The Silent Planet.

Oyarsa questions the three humans and passes judgment on them. Ransom is absolved of blame, but he and his fellow travelers are given the opportunity to leave on their space-ship. They are given ninety days to complete their trip back to Earth, after which their ship will disappear. They make the trip and barely return on time to leave the ship before it disappears.

The story ends with Ransom remembering his experience on Malacandra and proposing to learn more of the ancient planets' stories by studying the past. And that is another story.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

Studies have shown that certain colors can evoke certain emotional responses from those who look at them. Consider the extent to which the author describes Malacandra's palette of colors. What feelings do the pale colors of Malacandra's landscape evoke in the reader? How does this relate to the personalities and actions of the characters?

*Malacandra's colors are muted and pale. These colors relay a feeling of calmness. The inhabitants of this planet are characterized as being peaceful and gentle.*

### Literary Analysis

C.S. Lewis is noted for the way he weaves his philosophy and religious beliefs into his stories. In this story, Lewis has named his main character "Ransom." Consider the common meaning for the word ransom. What significance does Ransom's name have as it pertains to this story?

*A ransom is payment given for the release of something. The character Ransom is transported to Malacandra to be offered in payment for the gold the two captors want to take back to Earth.*

### Inferential Comprehension

In this story, the spirit-like characters are surrounded by a celestial or heavenly light. How does this description compare with today's reports on similar sightings?

*Various reports also cite the presence of light around heavenly beings, which some people believe are angels.*

### Constructing Meaning

While sharing his philosophy about seeking out and hunting the dangerous hnakra, Hyoui tells Ransom that life wouldn't be as sweet if there were no danger in the lakes. How does this philosophy apply to people in today's world such as mountain climbers, skydivers, etc.?

*Because of the danger involved with the hunting of the hnakra, Hyoui understands he is taking a risk by being in the area where the beasts are found. He is willing to take that risk because it makes the experience more satisfying. People often find satisfaction in facing a frightening experience and conquering it.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Setting** The main setting for this story is the planet Malacandra, which turns out to be Mars. The author has created a landscape full of geographical features. Research the major features of the planet Mars and describe the similarities and differences between Lewis's

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Malacandra and the real-life planet.

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** During his wanderings on Malacandra, Ransom encountered primitive pictures recorded in stone. These pictures showed highlights of Malacandrian history, including some extinct creatures. Draw a "cave mural" that would depict something from American history that people of the future might discover. Then create a key or legend to identify the symbols or characters on your drawing. Ask your fellow students to decipher what your mural is saying.

**Extending Meaning** The creatures portrayed in this story had bodies quite different from those of their human visitors. As explained by the author, their bodies were appropriately designed for their environment and the work they did. Design and draw a native inhabitant you might find on the moon. Then describe its special features, or adaptations, that help it to survive on the moon.

**Recognizing Details** Remembering was important to the hrossa and sorns in *Out of the Silent Planet* to the extent that, for them, it took precedence over the actual occurrence itself. Humans rely on visual aids such as photographs to help them remember people and events. Take a favorite photograph, write your recollection of the person or event pictured, and share it with your classmates.