

Empathy, Resilience, Belonging and Moral Choice in Tolkien's Middle-earth: Fantasy Literature as an Inclusive Resource for Adolescent Social-Emotional Learning

Mr. Gopinath S¹, Dr. R. Bhuvaneshwari²

¹Assistant Professor, Department of English, Vinayaka Mission's Kirupananda Variyar Arts and Science College, Salem, A Constituent College of Vinayaka Mission's Research Foundation (Deemed to be University), Tamil Nadu, India Email: gopinathsampath4674@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0001-1497-8574

²Corresponding Author: Dr. R. Bhuvaneshwari, Associate Professor, Department of English, Vinayaka Mission's Kirupananda Variyar Engineering College, Salem, A Constituent College of Vinayaka Mission's Research Foundation (Deemed to be University), Tamil Nadu, India Email: rvk.bhuvi@gmail.com ORCID: 0009-0009-5660-8430

Abstract

Since adolescence is a crucial period for health, identity, and social belonging, schools are progressively expected to support children with their emotional and relational development in addition to their academic success. Social-emotional learning, which is defined by the five skills of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making, has a lot of research supporting it, but it is often taught in ways that teens might find far from their own interests. Especially fantasy books offer another way for readers to face anxiety, grief, loneliness, and moral temptation from a safe imaginary distance. This article looks at J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* as an all-inclusive teaching tool for young social-emotional learning. Using qualitative textual analysis, it combines close reading, reflective thematic analysis, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning framework, inclusive pedagogy concepts, and Universal Design for Learning. Twenty-four narrative episodes were deliberately chosen and arranged in eight themes: identity, resilience, friendship, teamwork, compassion, moral decision, belonging, and emotional anguish. Based on the study, Tolkien's works depict empathy by means of the relationships between many or opposing characters, as shown by Bilbo's sympathy for Gollum and Aragorn's compassion for the dying Boromir. Though acknowledging its constraints, they show resiliency as ongoing work strengthened by friendship—as in the relationship between Frodo and Sam. In the Council of Elrond and the Battle of Five Armies, they highlight cooperation between hostile peoples; in Bilbo, Aragorn, and Eowyn they explore identity as change brought about by responsibility; they set moral choices under temptation and examine belonging as something developed by difference and withheld through suspicion. The essay also shows how these episodes might be approached using group projects, creative writing, visual, audio, textual, and dramatic techniques. It also presents the MIDDLE-EARTH Inclusive Learning Model, an eleven-component framework linking creative involvement with empathy, ethical reasoning, cooperation, reflection, and holistic growth. It says that Tolkien's fantasy is best thought of as a backup tool that gives different youngsters different ways to participate in the same moral and emotional discussion. The research is text-based, thus classroom trials for the teaching benefits are still required.

Keywords: J.R.R. Tolkien, Middle-earth, fantasy literature, adolescence, social-emotional learning, inclusive education, inclusive pedagogy, empathy, resilience, belonging, moral decision-making, narrative learning, Universal Design for Learning.

1. Introduction

The question of where students are placed has been less important in discussions regarding inclusive education than the question of what they are capable of experiencing, feeling, and becoming at school. This transformation is centered on adolescence. Adolescence is a time when people's emotional control, relationships with peers, moral reasoning, and sense of identity are solidified, and when many mental health issues manifest themselves. Hence, schools are crucial locations for health promotion, and they are required to give literacy and numeracy the same attention as belonging, resilience, and empathy [1]. SEL (social-emotional learning) is the most extensively explored reaction to this demand. It has yielded obvious improvements in academic performance, social and emotional skills, and behavior, and some of these improvements endure over time [2,3]. However, teenagers are very discerning audiences. Programs that seem infantile or instructional are frequently disregarded, and effective work for this age group has to appeal to young people's need for autonomy and respect [4].

For a long time, literature has been suggested as a potential answer to this issue. According to [5], stories invite readers to enter other minds, track intentions and effects, and practice social situations without the risks of actual encounters. Because meta-analytic evidence that reading fiction boosts social cognition is good but modest, the empirical record is more reserved than the theory [6]. The logical conclusion is that literature is a potential resource whose worth is dependent on how it is selected, presented, and taught. Fantasy literature presents the issue in a particularly intriguing way. They are simpler to discuss because of the imagined worlds, which put loss, fear, exclusion, and moral temptation at a distance, and reading about a fantasy protagonist has been linked to more upbeat attitudes toward marginalized populations in adolescents, young adults, and children [7].

At the heart of any such discussion should be J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. They have been the topic of a vast corpus of literary study that addresses mythology, language, and ethics [8,9], and they are among the most popular works of contemporary fantasy, inhabited by characters who face moral, psychological, social, and physical difficulties. Their promise as a source for comprehensive, school-based social-emotional learning has received less attention. Although a preliminary and non-systematic search for this essay did not turn up any research that maps Tolkien's narratives to the SEL abilities within an inclusive pedagogical framework. The intersection is discussed in this essay. It proposes literature-based activities and a planning model for classroom use, and it explores chosen Tolkien narratives as resources for fostering empathy, resilience, cooperation, emotional awareness, belonging, and ethical decision-making in a variety of adolescent students.

2. Adolescence, Social-Emotional Learning and Inclusive Education

According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL is the process by which individuals acquire and use the information, abilities, and attitudes necessary to comprehend and control emotions, establish and achieve objectives, demonstrate empathy, create supportive connections, and make wise choices. Five linked skills are highlighted in its framework. Recognising one's feelings, abilities, and feeling of purpose is what self-awareness is all about. The regulation of emotions, perseverance, and goal-seeking are all part of self-management. Having social awareness entails understanding diversity, showing compassion, and seeing things from other people's viewpoints. Relationship abilities include communicating, cooperating, settling disputes, seeking or offering aid, and responsible decision-making about constructive, ethical choices regarding conduct and social interaction [10]. The analytical vocabulary for the current study is offered by these five talents.

A additional demand is added by inclusive education. According to the statement, such chances must be made available to all students, including those with disabilities and others who experience obstacles to participation. It also views exclusion from learning, friendship, or classroom life as a systemic flaw rather than an individual student's one [11]. Black-Hawkins and Florian define inclusive teaching as a strategy that offers everything that is usually available to everyone rather than supplying something extra or different for individuals who have been recognized as needing it [12]. UDL converts this commitment into design guidelines by advocating for several avenues for participation, representation, and action and speech [13]. For teenagers, who place a great deal of importance on peer approval for their sense of belonging, these principles are especially significant. Therefore, a literary resource that can be viewed in a variety of ways and that regards difference as a typical characteristic of any group is in line with both the objectives of inclusion and SEL.

3. Fantasy Literature and Narrative Learning

In a created world fantasy represents a literary genre showcasing events that stray from widely accepted realities. Tolkien himself defended this genre in his essay *On Fairy-Stories* claiming it offers Escape Consolation and Recovery a novel lens through which to view everyday life and he separated the escape of a prisoner from the flight of a deserter—a distinction vital for education. Evading hardship need not equate to fantasy; it can be a methodology for tackling challenges from a perspective that makes them more approachable and comprehensible. Three key processes clarify why this might be advantageous for adolescents. The first is proximity. Students often find it easier to engage in conversations about a character's distrust of a vulnerable animal or a young woman's feeling of entrapment than to address similar concerns in their own lives. The second is identification. Studies show that when students connect with a fantasy protagonist it contributes to more positive attitudes towards others. This shows

that educators should encourage engagement through storytelling audio resources or drama instead of focusing solely on text-based assignments. The third is a collective reference point. A recognized fantasy context offers the class a shared language of characters and events enabling personal responses to be juxtaposed without revealing identities. Each of these processes lacks exhaustive evidence and none are automatic. They should be perceived as elements that quality instruction can enhance.

4. Tolkien and Middle-earth as a Narrative Environment

The Hobbit was published in 1937 while The Lord of the Rings came out in three volumes in 1954 and 1955 followed posthumously by The Silmarillion which provides the mythological backdrop of the same universe. Shippey has contended that Tolkien should be recognized as the author of the century citing his serious approach to themes like evil temptation and ordinary courage which stands out among fantasy writers [8]. Flieger's examination of language light and fragmentation reveals how thoroughly Tolkien envisioned Middle-earth as a cohesive secondary world a sub-creation filled with its own histories and cultures [9]. This coherence holds educational value as a detailed world can support the kind of immersion that fosters empathy. Middle-earth also features ordinary individuals grappling with extraordinary challenges. The hobbits are humble attached to their homes and lack grand heroism yet they provide readers with a connection to an ancient world [8]. They confront hunger fear sorrow betrayal and the burden of responsibility relying on assistance from others who differ in species status and character. The diverse inhabitants of Middle-earth (hobbits elves dwarves men wizards and others) must find ways to work together despite deep-seated suspicions. These characteristics create a rich environment for exploring social and emotional experiences though the narrative is not without challenges as its portrayal of various peoples and races has sparked debate and calls for critical analysis [15].

5. Research Design and Analytical Framework

Based on textual and thematic analysis, this study employs a qualitative research methodology. It considers literary works as data that illustrates social and emotional experiences, and it investigates what these representations contribute to teaching inclusive lessons. The analysis was carried out utilizing the hybrid methodology [16] of reflexive thematic analysis. Through repeated reading, the categories were inductively refined and deductively deduced from the CASEL framework. There were no personal data or people engaged.

The Hobbit (H) and The Lord of the Rings' three books, The Fellowship of the Ring (FR), The Two Towers (TT), and The Return of the King (RK) [17-20], made up the corpus. The Silmarillion was utilized exclusively as background. Passages are located by book and chapter, such that FR II.10 refers to Book II, Chapter 10 of The Fellowship of the Ring, because pagination varies among editions. The episodes were chosen specifically because they demonstrated empathy, resiliency, friendship, cooperation, identity, belonging, emotional conflict, ethical decision-making, social exclusion, and transformation. In order to be utilized in teaching, an episode was preserved if it was a definable, bounded, and locatable occurrence focused on a character's emotional, relational, or ethical experience and understandable without a thorough understanding of Tolkien's larger mythology. There were 24 episodes in total (Table 1 & 2), with three index episodes being retained for each of the eight categories.

The analytical framework combined literary analysis, thematic analysis, inclusive pedagogy, and the CASEL competencies. The analysis progressed from story event to character experience, then to social-emotional proficiency, and eventually to inclusive pedagogical possibility. Sections 6 to 14 discuss the first three stages, and sections 15 to 19 explain the fourth stage. The author's educational viewpoint was reflected in the reflexive attention given to it, as well as an audit trail of an episode register, an explicit standard for trustworthiness, and an episode's location by book and chapter. The passages are paraphrased rather than quoted, and the data in the tables represent the analytic sample rather than the prevalence of themes in the books. Through the sub-skill of emotional awareness, emotional battle was connected to self-awareness and collaboration to relationship skills.

Table 1. Analytical Framework and Coding Categories

Category	Working definition	Tolkienian example	SEL competency	Educational application
Empathy	Recognising and responding to another's feelings or suffering	Frodo–Sam; Frodo–Gollum	Social awareness	Empathy discussion
Resilience	Sustained effort and recovery under hardship	Frodo's journey	Self-management	Reflective writing
Friendship	Reciprocal, supportive bonds and communication	Frodo–Sam; Merry–Pippin	Relationship skills	Paired and collaborative tasks
Cooperation	Joint action towards a common goal across difference	The Fellowship's collective mission	Relationship skills (teamwork)	Group problem-solving
Moral choice	Weighing values and consequences in decisions	Frodo's decisions; Bilbo and the Arkenstone	Responsible decision-making	Ethical discussion
Identity	Recognising and developing one's sense of self and purpose	Aragorn; Éowyn; Frodo; Bilbo	Self-awareness	Identity activity
Belonging	Acceptance, membership and the experience of exclusion	Fellowship; community; outsiders	Social awareness (inclusion)	Inclusion activity
Emotional struggle	Experiencing, naming and bearing difficult emotions	Frodo; Gollum; Bilbo	Self-awareness (emotional awareness)	Emotion mapping
Ref: [10,16]				

Table 2. Episode Register: Selected Episodes Used in the Analytic Corpus

ID	Category	Narrative episode (paraphrased)	Location	SEL competency
EM1	Empathy	Bilbo spares Gollum out of pity	H 5	Social awareness
EM2	Empathy	Aragorn consoles the dying Boromir	TT III.1	Social awareness
EM3	Empathy	Frodo and Sam respond differently to the sleeping Gollum	TT IV.8	Social awareness
RE1	Resilience	Frodo endures the Morgul wound and recovers at Rivendell	FR I.11–12; II.1	Self-management
RE2	Resilience	Sam resists despair and temptation and rescues Frodo	TT IV.10; RK VI.1–2	Self-management
RE3	Resilience	Crossing Mordor; Sam carries Frodo up Mount Doom	RK VI.2–3	Self-management
FR1	Friendship	Sam, Merry and Pippin insist on accompanying Frodo	FR I.5	Relationship skills
FR2	Friendship	Sam follows Frodo into the river at Parth Galen	FR II.10	Relationship skills

ID	Category	Narrative episode (paraphrased)	Location	SEL competency
FR3	Friendship	Merry and Pippin support each other in captivity and escape	TT III.3–4	Relationship skills
CO1	Cooperation	The Council of Elrond pools knowledge and resolves to destroy the Ring	FR II.2–3	Relationship skills
CO2	Cooperation	Dwarves, Elves and Men unite at the Battle of Five Armies	H 17	Relationship skills
CO3	Cooperation	The hobbits organise resistance in the Scouring of the Shire	RK VI.8	Relationship skills
ID1	Identity	Bilbo's transformation from homebody to adventurer and back	H 1, 8, 19	Self-awareness
ID2	Identity	Aragorn's acceptance of heritage and responsibility	FR I.9–10, II.2; TT III.1; RK V.2, V.8	Self-awareness
ID3	Identity	Éowyn's path from constraint to self-chosen vocation	TT III.6; RK V.2–3, V.6, V.8, VI.5	Self-awareness
MC1	Moral choice	Bilbo gives away the Arkenstone to avert war	H 16	Responsible decision-making
MC2	Moral choice	Frodo decides to go on alone to protect his companions	FR II.10	Responsible decision-making
MC3	Moral choice	Faramir declines to take the Ring	TT IV.5	Responsible decision-making
BE1	Belonging	Legolas and Gimli move from distrust to friendship	FR II.7–8; TT III.7–8	Social awareness
BE2	Belonging	Thorin's doubt of Bilbo gives way to reconciliation	H 17–18	Social awareness
BE3	Belonging	Outsiders: Bilbo in Hobbiton, Strider in Bree, Sméagol's expulsion	FR I.1, I.2, I.9–10	Social awareness
ES1	Emotional struggle	Bilbo's anger and shame when asked to give up the Ring	FR I.1	Self-awareness
ES2	Emotional struggle	The Fellowship's grief after Gandalf's fall	FR II.5–6	Self-awareness
ES3	Emotional struggle	Frodo's lasting wounds and departure from the Shire	RK VI.7–9	Self-awareness
Ref: [17-20]				

6. Empathy and Social Awareness

Tolkien's tales portray empathy most vividly across opposed or unbalanced stances. Bilbo gets the opportunity to assassinate the unarmed Gollum as he flees from the goblin tunnels in *The Hobbit*. He is struck by a sudden realization of the creature's long, lonely misery, and instead of killing it, he jumps past it (H 5). The pity shown here isn't sentimental. As the narrative later demonstrates, it is a perspective-shifting act that costs Bilbo something and changes the course of events. Another sort of empathy is shown in Aragorn's answer to the passing Boromir in *The Two Towers*. Aragorn does not admonish Boromir for admitting that he attempted to steal the Ring from Frodo. Until his death, he remains by his side and assures him of his victory (TT III.1).

The Stairs of Cirith Ungol confrontation is the most enlightening episode. Gollum is discovered by Frodo to be worn out and old. Gollum is awakened by a flash of tenderness as he softly touches him. Gollum retreats into suspicion

when Sam, who has witnessed nothing but his deception, speaks harshly (TT IV.8). Two friends read the same person differently, and their divergent readings have ramifications. Before, Gandalf had advised Frodo to have compassion for Gollum (FR I.2). These events demonstrate that empathy is a moral decision that may be misunderstood, exploited, and interpreted. Without turning social awareness into a slogan, they offer teachers a tool to discuss it with adolescents [17-19].

7. Resilience and Self-Management

Resilience in Middle-earth is characterized as sustained effort in the face of physical and psychological hardship, and it is consistently supported by others. (FR I.11–12, II.1) Elrond and his companions watch Frodo recover at Rivendell after being stabbed by a Morgul blade at Weathertop and losing strength during the trip to the Ford. Frodo is believed to be dead by Sam, who battles with melancholy before choosing to press on with the mission. He eventually resists the Ring's pledge of majesty and goes to Frodo's aid (TT IV.10; RK VI.1–2). The two companions travel through a land of hardship in Mordor. Sam carries Frodo, whose strength has failed, on the slopes of Mount Doom after rationing his own supplies (RK VI.2–3). The narrative is equally candid about the endurance limits. At the Crack of Doom, Frodo asserts ownership of the Ring and does not finish the work by his own free will (RK VI.3). The combined result of tenacity, mutual support, and prior acts of kindness, not the self-management of any one character, is what makes the journey possible. This is an important correction for teens to the notion that resilience is a solely individual quality. It demonstrates that even outstanding self-management may fall short without relationships, and it places the capacity to endure inside of relationships [18-20].

8. Friendship and Relationship Skills

These writings show friendship as having open lines of communication, providing and receiving support, keeping promises, and dealing with risks. In "A Conspiracy Unmasked," Frodo finds that Sam, Merry, and Pippin have been aware of his plan for months and have made plans to accompany him. Frodo welcomes their company since they vow to protect his secrets but won't let him face problems by himself (FR I.5). After Frodo leaves on his own across the river at Parth Galen, Sam, who is unable to swim, follows him and is dragged into the boat, and Frodo then acknowledges that they are destined to go together (FR II.10). Merry and Pippin assist one another after being taken by the Uruk-hai; Pippin purposely leaves a message for possible saviors, and the two flee together into Fangorn (TT III.3-4). Relationship skills are demonstrated in these episodes. Their desire to share the risk outweighs Frodo's desire to act alone in order to defend his pals, and the tale presents this talk as a show of devotion rather than disobedience. They give teenagers a paradigm of friendship where care is expressed through presence and shared effort, and where the right to reject exclusion is acknowledged [18,19].

9. Cooperation and Collective Action

Characters of varying types are depicted as having interdependent relationships in cooperation. At the Council of Elrond, the wizard Gandalf and representatives of the Elves, Dwarves, Men, and Hobbits all provide fragmented information. Moreover, an Elf and a Dwarf have a short disagreement because they both express mutual suspicion. After much discussion, the Council comes to the conclusion that the Ring must be annihilated, and Frodo offers his services (FR II.2–3). In the Battle of Five Armies (H 17), Dwarves, Elves, and Humans, who had been on the verge of fighting over a dragon's treasure, come together to oppose goblins and wolves in *The Hobbit*. In "The Scouring of the Shire," Merry and Pippin assist in organizing their fellow hobbits to oppose the ruffians who have taken power, and Frodo insists on reducing bloodshed (RK VI.8).

In every case, collaboration necessitates shared contemplation, information sharing, and the abandonment of prior hostilities, and the story makes it apparent that this is neither simple nor instantaneous. This realism is valuable for education. It gives a classroom a way to assess the circumstances in which groups cooperate effectively, and it gives them a lexicon for discussing conflict within a group without perceiving conflict as failure [17,18,20].

10. Identity and Self-Awareness

Identity is shown as being shaped, tested, and changed by accountability. Bilbo begins *The Hobbit* as a comfortable-loving hobbit who is hesitant to depart his home (H 1). His self-perception shifts as he confronts challenges, as seen by his sword's name after the spider escape (H 8), and upon his return, he discovers he can no longer be the polite neighbor he once was (H 19). His identity as Isildur's heir is revealed at the Council of Elrond, where he first appears as the dubious ranger Strider (FR I.9-10, II.2). Before claiming his throne, he acts as a healer after the siege of Minas Tirith and later considers that his choices have gone astray (TT III.1) (RK V.2, V.8). Adolescent readers may find Éowyn's narrative to be the most applicable. She is presented as a noble lady who is limited by the standards of her court (TT III.6). Disguised as Dernhelm, she battles with Merry against the Witch-king (RK V.3, V.6) and informs Aragorn that she worries about being imprisoned (RK V.2).

She chooses to be a healer rather than a shieldmaiden, renouncing the life of a shieldmaiden after her agony in the Houses of Healing (RK V.8, VI.5). Therefore, none of the characters move between roles imposed by others and roles they have chosen for themselves without paying a price. These episodes provide learners with a means of discussing expectation, vocation, and change without requiring them to reveal their own circumstances [17-20].

11. Moral Decision-Making

Middle-earth's ethical decisions are consequential, difficult, and frequently made under temptation or uncertainty. Bilbo uses the Arkenstone, which Thorin values above everything else, as a negotiating chip to prevent war in "A Thief in the Night" by handing it over to Bard and the Elvenking. He then explicitly confesses to Thorin what he has done and puts up with his rage (H 16). After Boromir tries to steal the Ring at Amon Hen, Frodo chooses to travel to Mordor alone to save his companions (FR II.10). Faramir declines to take the Ring when it is at his disposal, and both Gandalf and Aragorn had previously rejected it (FR I.2, II.2; TT IV.5).

Frodo's decision to betray Gollum is portrayed as an internal conflict between his desire for the Ring and a trace of affection for him (TT IV.3, IV.8-9). The story therefore illustrates characters weighing loyalty, honesty, safety, and the interests of others as it depicts the repercussions of both positive and negative decisions. The SEL framework outlines these components of responsible decision-making, which are provided in a way that encourages discussion rather than a single right response [17-19].

12. Belonging and Social Exclusion

Belonging is developed across variety and can be denied via mistrust. Starting from the historical mistrust between elves and dwarves, Legolas and Gimli's admiration of Galadriel signals a change (FR II.7-8); the two subsequently have a cordial rivalry at Helm's Deep (TT III.7-8). The appendices note their friendship's survival. Thorin first questions Bilbo's effectiveness in *The Hobbit*; at the conclusion of his life, he seeks Bilbo's apology and emphasizes friendship over riches (H 17-18). Additionally shown is outsider status.

Bilbo is seen as eccentric by his Shire neighbours (FR I.1); Strider is viewed with mistrust in Bree (FR I.9-10); Gandalf describes Sméagol's banishment by his family and people (FR I.2). The story reveals how exclusion affects the rejected individual and how shared experience and mutual recognition lead to acceptance. These episodes provide a collection of situations for a talk about school belonging and peer exclusion—serious without being linked to any one classroom [17-19].

13. Emotional Struggle and Recovery

Tolkien's tales do not limit themselves to effective coping strategies. Bilbo's unwillingness to give up the Ring at his goodbye party causes a furious accusation against Gandalf, then humiliation, an apology, and the act of abandoning the Ring (FR I.1). The Fellowship is distraught following Gandalf's fall in Moria. Aragorn pushes them ahead; they rest, grieve, and hear the lament of the Elves in Lothlórien (FR II.5-6). It is obvious how much rest, ritual, and company help to restore one. The most difficult show is the results of the mission. Frodo sails West for healing while Sam grieves the separation and goes back to his family (RK VI.7-9; his wounds do not entirely heal; he is unable to return to his previous life in the Shire.) Recovery is shown as incomplete and contingent on other people. This is a chance as well as a warning in a school context. It calls teachers to be ready for students who see their own experience in it [18,20] and helps honest communication of loss and ongoing discomfort.

14. Comparative Interpretation: Tolkien and the Five Competencies

Taken together, the episodes demonstrate form youngsters may talk about all five CASEL abilities. Self-awareness shows up in Bilbo, Aragorn, and Éowyn's evolving sense of self as well as in the emotional awareness or lack thereof displayed by Bilbo, the Fellowship, and Frodo. Self-management shows up in Frodo and Sam's stamina. Social knowledge shows itself in compassion and among people in tolerance. Friendship and the Council's deliberation as well as the decisions of Bilbo, Frodo, and Faramir (Table 3) reflect relationship skills and responsible decision-making. The writings also demonstrate the bounds of ability. Frodo's failure at the Crack of Doom and his ongoing suffering prove that resilience and good decisions do not ensure a good result. This realism challenges straightforward models of SEL as the acquisition of skills and creates a path for talking about trauma, help-seeking, and the part that others play—all of which are pertinent to adolescent mental health [1, 10].

Table 3. Social-Emotional Learning Dimensions Identified in Tolkien's Selected Narratives

Tolkienian theme	Character / narrative	SEL dimension	Potential educational application
Empathy	Frodo–Sam; Frodo–Gollum; Aragorn–Boromir	Social awareness	Empathy discussion; perspective-taking
Resilience	Frodo; Sam in Mordor	Self-management	Reflective writing
Friendship	Frodo–Sam; Merry–Pippin; the Fellowship	Relationship skills	Collaborative learning
Cooperation	The Council of Elrond; the Battle of Five Armies	Relationship skills	Group problem-solving; jigsaw deliberation
Identity	Aragorn; Éowyn; Bilbo	Self-awareness	Identity activity; character mapping
Moral choice	Frodo; Bilbo; Faramir	Responsible decision-making	Ethical discussion; debate
Belonging	The Fellowship; Legolas–Gimli; outsiders	Social awareness	Inclusion activity
Emotional struggle	Bilbo; the Fellowship in Moria; Frodo	Self-awareness (emotional awareness)	Emotion mapping; reflective journal
Ref: [10,17-20]			

15. Fantasy as an Inclusive Pedagogical Resource

This essay's main thesis is that fantasy offers an creative setting in which difficult emotional and social problems can be subtly investigated. Since a debate starting from a character enables students to contribute from their own perspective, participation becomes less dependent on confidence, disclosure, or reading fluency. Tolkien's works provide many elements that support this application. Hobbits are common people in unusual circumstances. Many important events center around characters who are tiny, forgotten, or marginal, therefore giving students who feel marginal a way into the story. The secondary world is clearly designed enough to support absorption [8,9]. These theoretical affordances won't help every student. Those students who struggle with long, difficult texts will need help; the evidence on the benefits of fiction is minimal [6]. Other fantasy literature shows just that better intergroup attitudes can be related to protagonist identification; Tolkien hasn't been tested for this [7]. The assertion made here is therefore limited. Tolkien's stories provide a likely, well-known, and highly descriptive tool that may be tailored for several students; their consequences are under empirical investigation.

16. Narrative Identification and Empathy

Narrative identification helps to explain how these events might foster empathy. The register contains characters who feel isolated (Gollum, Strider), fear (Frodo at Weathertop), responsibility (Frodo, Aragorn), loss (the Fellowship in Moria), friendship (Sam and Frodo), and bravery (Éowyn, Merry and Pippin). These experiences will help students grasp the characters' emotions and cause. The instances of compassion for Gollum are especially helpful since they help one to view a character who is both dangerous and pitiful from a different angle. Learners might be expected to hold two concepts at once: Gollum has hurt and his misery is genuine. Sam's skepticism reminds us that the same episodes question whether empathy is rewarded or abused. This uncertainty can motivate the more demanding kinds of social awareness mentioned in the SEL framework, like appreciating the points of view of people unlike us [7, 10].

17. Collaborative and Multimodal Learning

Several coded events are intrinsically group projects and might be transformed into classroom structures that also foster peer relationships—things quite important in adolescence. Re-enacting the Council of Elrond would involve little groups of people having different bits of information and having to share them in order to make a decision. Character maps can reveal how relationships and trust evolve throughout a story. Reflective journals enable every youngster to track a character's emotions secretly before sharing; circles of literature can assign roles in a manner fits their strengths. Organized discussion may investigate issues like whether Frodo was correct in going alone, therefore improving listening for contrary viewpoints—a major component of responsible decision-making. Approached through a route of modes that spans from text to audio, visual art, theatre, creative writing, and group project (Table 4), the stories can also be read. This supports the UDL idea of many means of involvement, representation, and action and expression [13]. One who struggles with independent reading can listen or share-read; one who prefers visual expression can map a trip; one who is more at ease with movement can participate in drama; all seek the same social-emotional objective. This is in line with increasing the resources open to every student in the classroom [12].

Table 4. A Multimodal Pathway for Using Tolkien's Narratives with Diverse Adolescent Learners

Mode	Example activity	Episode	Competency emphasised
Text	Shared close reading of a short extract with a character-feelings chart	EM1	Social awareness
Audio	Listening to a read-aloud, then discussing how a character feels and why	EM3	Self-awareness (emotional awareness)
Visual	Storyboard or map of the journey to Mordor with an emotion colour-code	RE3	Self-management
Drama	Hot-seating Bilbo about giving away the Arkenstone	MC1	Responsible decision-making
Creative writing	A letter from Éowyn to Faramir, or an alternative scene, in prose, poem, comic or voice recording	ID3	Self-awareness
Group activity	Jigsaw deliberation at the Council of Elrond, with separate information cards	CO1	Relationship skills
Ref: [12,13]			

Episode codes refer to Table 2. Activities are proposals and have not been tested in classrooms.

18. The MIDDLE-EARTH Inclusive Learning Model

This article suggests the MIDDLE-EARTH Inclusive Learning Model based on the study derived from the analysis in order to make these concepts applicable. Its eleven components are Meaningful narrative involvement, Creative participation, Diversity and belonging, Discussion and dialogue, Literary empathy, Emotional awareness, Ethical

decision-making, Active collaboration, Reflective learning, Transformative learning, and Holistic development (Table 5). There are five phases they fall under. Engage creates an significant and imaginative interaction with the narrative. Diversity and communication are promoted by Belong. Feel and judgement help one to grow in empathy, emotional knowledge, and moral judgement. Act and think converts these into group activity and introspection, and Grow covers the more-term transforming and all-around results. The model seeks the CASEL competencies [10,13] and rests on an inclusive pedagogical foundation, UDL, multimodal access, learner voice and differentiated support. In essence, Engage involves choosing an episode that fits the interests of the learners and then showing it in an easily readable format. Setting standards for courteous communication is what belong implies. Feel and assessment call for ethical conflict, emotion mapping, and perspective-taking. Grow asks learners to connect a character's growth to their own development; Act and reflect refers to group projects then learning logs. The phases are theoretical and not exactly in sequence. It hasn't undergone classroom testing.

Table 5. Components of the MIDDLE-EARTH Inclusive Learning Model

	Component	Classroom practice	Episode	Phase	SEL link
M	Meaningful narrative engagement	Choose episodes linked to learners' interests and concerns	EM1	Engage	Self-awareness
I	Imaginative participation	Map the world, draw scenes, enter the story through role	RE3	Engage	Self-awareness
D	Diversity and belonging	Examine how different peoples come to trust one another	BE1	Belong	Social awareness
D	Discussion and dialogue	Structured talk with sentence starters and turn-taking	CO1	Belong	Relationship skills
L	Literary empathy	Perspective-taking: what is each character feeling and why?	EM3	Feel and judge	Social awareness
E	Emotional awareness	Emotion mapping and reflective journals	ES2	Feel and judge	Self-awareness
E	Ethical decision-making	Debate dilemmas such as the Arkenstone or going alone	MC1, MC2	Feel and judge	Responsible decision-making
A	Active collaboration	Jigsaw deliberation; collaborative storytelling	CO1, CO3	Act and reflect	Relationship skills
R	Reflective learning	Learning logs; exit tickets; self-assessment	RE2	Act and reflect	Self-management
T	Transformative learning	Trace a character's change and relate it to learners' own growth	ID1, ID3	Grow	Self-awareness
H	Holistic development	Integrate cognitive, emotional, social and ethical goals across the unit	ES3	Grow	All five competencies
Ref: [10,13]					

Episode codes refer to Table 2. The model is theoretical and has not been tested in classrooms.

19. Educational Implications and Limitations

Selected episodes can serve as a complement to, not a replacement for, evidence-based SEL programmes for teachers and school health teams [2,3]. Since the books are lengthy, short excerpts or audio provide sensible starting

points. Episodes with war, death, and loss should be teased with substitute responses and links to school counseling for upset teenagers. There are arguments about Middle-earth's depictions of people and "races" [15]; critical treatment of stereotypes can promote inclusion. The results support the idea that inclusive education policy ought to focus on belonging and social-emotional growth together with results [11]. They do not support demands for specific readings. Research has limits. This is a textual, not an empirical analysis. Adolescents were not seen; hence, educational impacts are hypothetical; no surveys or interview data were gathered. The author's interpretative choices are represented in the purposeful sample; other readers might pick or code different notes. Tolkien's writing mirrors a certain historical and cultural background. A first search helps to support the claim of a research gap. Studies on student reactions and SEL results, including those of disabled teenagers and contrasts with other fantasy authors, based in classrooms are required to assess the model.

Conclusions

Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* provide a lot of social-emotional information. They stand for empathy and compassion across different and opposing viewpoints, resiliency under friendship's help, teamwork across differences, identity as metamorphosis through responsibility, moral decision under temptation, belonging and exclusion, and loss and ongoing suffering. These episodes cover all five social-emotional learning competencies as well as their strengths and limits. Adolescents may explore such events from a distance in fantasy, and the tales can be presented in many ways to involve varied students in a single activity. This reading's importance is not only about the fact that Tolkien writes about choices and emotions. Its more important contribution is that it connects a well-known body of fantasy to the practical goals of inclusive, school-based health promotion and that it provides a planning framework, the MIDDLE-EARTH Inclusive Learning Model, from which teachers can do so purposely. Tolkien's writings should ideally be seen as a conversational starter about emotion, relationships, and ethics rather than a replacement for formalized SEL programs. Since the research is textual, assertions about efficacy still not fall under permanent control. The following phase is research conducted in classrooms with teenagers—those with impairments and other obstacles to participation—for whom these opportunities are realized tested..

Fundings

There is no funding support and grant/award for this manuscript. [Authors to confirm.]

Declarations

- Availability of data and materials

Not applicable. The study analysed published literary texts cited in the References; the episode register is given in Table 2.

- Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable. The study involved no human participants or personal data.

- Consent for publication

Not applicable.

- Author contributions

Both authors contributed to the conception, analysis and drafting of the manuscript and approved the final version. [Authors to confirm.]

- Competing interests

The authors declare that there are no competing interests.

References

1. Patton, George C., et al. "Our Future: A Lancet Commission on Adolescent Health and Wellbeing." *The Lancet*, vol. 387, no. 10036, 2016, pp. 2423–78.
2. Durlak, Joseph A., et al. "The Impact of Enhancing Students' Social and Emotional Learning: A Meta-Analysis of School-Based Universal Interventions." *Child Development*, vol. 82, no. 1, 2011, pp. 405–32.
3. Taylor, Rebecca D., et al. "Promoting Positive Youth Development through School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Interventions: A Meta-Analysis of Follow-Up Effects." *Child Development*, vol. 88, no. 4, 2017, pp. 1156–71.

4. Yeager, David S. "Social and Emotional Learning Programs for Adolescents." *The Future of Children*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2017, pp. 73–94.
5. Mar, Raymond A., and Keith Oatley. "The Function of Fiction Is the Abstraction and Simulation of Social Experience." *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, vol. 3, no. 3, 2008, pp. 173–92.
6. Dodell-Feder, David, and Diana I. Tamir. "Fiction Reading Has a Small Positive Impact on Social Cognitive Outcomes: A Meta-Analysis." *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General*, vol. 147, no. 11, 2018, pp. 1713–27.
7. Vezzali, Loris, et al. "The Greatest Magic of Harry Potter: Reducing Prejudice." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2015, pp. 105–21.
8. Shippey, Tom A. J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century. Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
9. Flieger, Verlyn. *Splintered Light: Logos and Language in Tolkien's World*. Rev. ed., Kent State UP, 2002.
10. Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning. CASEL's SEL Framework: What Are the Core Competence Areas and Where Are They Promoted? CASEL, 2020.
11. UNESCO. *Global Education Monitoring Report 2020: Inclusion and Education: All Means All*. UNESCO, 2020.
12. Florian, Lani, and Kristine Black-Hawkins. "Exploring Inclusive Pedagogy." *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2011, pp. 813–28.
13. CAST. *Universal Design for Learning Guidelines*, version 2.2. CAST, 2018, udlguidelines.cast.org.
14. Tolkien, J. R. R. "On Fairy-Stories." *Tree and Leaf*. George Allen & Unwin, 1964.
15. Fimi, Dimitra. *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.
16. Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2006, pp. 77–101.
17. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*. George Allen & Unwin, 1937.
18. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Fellowship of the Ring*. George Allen & Unwin, 1954.
19. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Two Towers*. George Allen & Unwin, 1954.
20. Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Return of the King*. George Allen & Unwin, 1955.