

Comparing child
protagonists in the
lion, the witch and the
wardrobe and ursula
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Both C. S. Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* tackle the idea of the child-protagonists having to go on a type of journey to defeat their respective foes and partaking in a search for their self-identity in the process. However, these ideas are taken on in very different ways as Lewis uses more Biblical implications to suggest the synonymy of finding one's self-identity with rejecting sin and finding the path to Christ, whereas Le Guin puts a more secular, introspective spin on the search, suggesting that one should confront themselves to discover who they really are. Delving into the characters of Edmund, Peter and Ged, the concept of change and turning points reflect the implications of the messages about self-identity that both authors sought to convey.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, each of the four children undergoes a journey of self-discovery upon entering the realm of Narnia, some more evident than others. The most obvious character that has a notable journey of self-discovery is Edmund. In the beginning of the novel, Edmund comes across as a selfish, defiant, attention-seeking and greedy bully. Granted many of these traits stem from middle-child syndrome and the effect of his relationship with Peter. Still, he constantly discourages Lucy and goes so far as to turn on his siblings for the royal title and Turkish delights that the White Witch offers him before having a change of heart. He becomes consumed and defined by his envy and need for attention. Edmund is so blinded by his lust for revenge on his brother and his greed that it takes him witnessing the White Witch turning an innocent party of animals into stone for him to realize that she is truly evil and does not have his or anyone else's best interest at heart. It is then that, " Edmund for the first time in this story

felt sorry for someone besides himself. It seemed so pitiful to think of those little stone figures sitting there all the silent days and all the dark nights, year after year, till the moss grew on them and at last even their faces crumbled away." This is a major turning point in his spiritual journey because he begins to discover his true purpose and realizes the error of his ways, although it is too late for him to undo by this point. His redemption at the hands of Aslan says a lot about the author's view of the importance of forgiveness and second chances in the journey to discover oneself. If he were condemned for his mistake, he would not have had the chance to mature into a brave, noble hero or to realize his purpose as the rightful King that Narnia needed him to be.

Peter also displays his own proof of growth and discovery when they encounter the lamppost while chasing the White Stag. Although Susan is, by her own nature, reluctant to go past the vaguely familiar lamppost, Peter says, " For never since we four were Kings and Queens in Narnia have we set our hands to any high matter, as battles, quests, feats of arms, acts of justice, and the like, and then given over; but always what we have taken in hand, the same we have achieved." Where before Peter and Susan were cautious to even believe in and explore something unfamiliar to them, his words here show that travelling through Narnia and fighting against the White Witch with Aslan made him a lot more confident in their ability to overcome anything they encounter, as well as more open-minded to the unknown. The unifying theme and overarching lesson learned throughout their time in Narnia is one of selflessness, which is evidenced by the fact that the children did not choose to stay in Narnia once they felt the urge that

they should leave. They instead gave up a life of royalty and took all that they learned about themselves back into the “real world” with them. Lewis used this story as a large allegory for his own Christian spiritual beliefs, with symbolic figures such as Aslan and the White Witch representing good and evil, respectively. He uses the plight of Edmund as a metaphor to imply that resisting the traps of evil and temptation can bring any sinner down the path to goodness, which is our implied individual purpose. For example, when Edmund is first introduced to the Witch, her status and what she offers him appeal to her and he even finds himself defending her to Peter, saying, “which is the right side? How do we know that the Fauns are in the right and the Queen (yes, I know we’ve been told she’s a witch) is in the wrong? We don’t really know anything about either.” Because he sees the potential in power (and Turkish Delights) that the Witch offers, he tries to convince himself that the Witch is just misunderstood rather than truly evil. However, once he is further exposed to the Witch’s mercilessly wicked ways and the danger she imposes, he comes to his senses. It is this realization and the rejection of continued involvement with the Witch that allows him to be saved by Aslan. The practicality of extracting and applying the larger proposal made by a metaphor to Christian ideology depends on the beliefs of the reader, but even those who are not religious can draw meaning from the suggestions made, such as the rejection of temptation, selfishness and greed for a greater cause. The message as revealed through Edmund is much more biblical where the message revealed through Peter, that self-discovery can come to those who are open-minded and willing to be wrong, is one that can be more universally applied. Although the religious overtone can come across heavily in some of the story’s moments, it is still very likely that the <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-child-protagonists-in-the-lion-the-witch-and-the-wardrobe-and-ursula-le-guins-a-wizard-of-earthsea/>

plot can be understood alternatively or enjoyed objectively for what it is (especially by children who may be too young to grasp the symbolic meaning) which is what makes it a classic.

In Ursula Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea*, protagonist Ged undergoes the most dominant search for identity when sets out to defeat an unleashed shadow only to find that his rival all along was essentially just himself. Like Edmund, Ged starts off as a bratty, pride-driven and immature teen. The reader cringingly witnesses him make several mistakes due to his need to show-off his magic and prove himself to others, such as when he tries to impress the daughter of the lord of Re Albi or when he accidentally summons a spirit in his fight with Jasper. However, it is that same pride that starts Ged's quest for self-identity after he unleashes the shadow. Led by guilt from the fate of Archmage of Roke, this turning point takes him from loud and proud to timid and paranoid that he will make another big mistake but in order to find his happy medium, he has to learn to balance between the two sides of himself and between what he thinks he can do and what he can actually do. With the help of Vetch's reassuring attitude, Ged comes to a realization, " All the years and places of his brief broken life came within mind's reach and made a whole again. He knew once more, at last, after this long, bitter, wasted time, who he was and where he was." It is here that Ged begins to think more clearly and rebuild his confidence, although he was still afraid of what could happen to those around him. Finally, at the end of his quest, after facing many obstacles and returning to Ogion, he realizes he mustn't kill the shadow but instead, he has to embody it, which is symbolic of him learning to live with the good and bad parts of himself. He realizes

that he had been his own worst enemy all along and is able to get closure and learn about who he really is at the same time.

While this story can be perceived through a biblical lens as a religious metaphor such as *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the intended overtones here are more ethically guided than religiously. There are several moments when Ged must decide whether he should use his powers and he is often forced to choose between the morally-acceptable choice and the dutiful choice, such as when Loethe is dying and his parents ask Ged to save him. He remembers the advise of Master Herbal to let dying people go but his conscience leads him to try anyway and he is forced to deal with the consequences. Although the reader can take this as him choosing to follow good Christian virtues and help save a dying person, in the context of the story, Ged's moral guidance was at the forefront of most of the issues. Additionally, Le Guin makes the search for identity a central idea and something that Ged pursues subconsciously as he hunts the shadow where it's more of an afterthought in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. In *A Wizard of Earthsea*, the relationship between Ged and his shadow give the implication that sometimes we stand in the way of our own success and limit ourselves. Likewise, his internal struggle to actualize the potential that he and those around him know he has after he fails multiple times is also an implication of the need to move past mistakes and embrace both sides of oneself in order to reach that potential.

These proposals are something that anyone can relate to and apply to their own lives in their personal quests for self-identity. The general themes of pride and maturation are so common that it is likely that there are many <https://assignbuster.com/comparing-child-protagonists-in-the-lion-the-witch-and-the-wardrobe-and-ursula-le-guins-a-wizard-of-earthsea/>

people like Ged, on a journey overcome their blunders and tap into their potential, though the journeys probably differ greatly. Indeed, the fear of failing or making another mistake that changes Ged from the fearless, boisterous young boy he was into the more timid teenager he becomes is something that young to teenage readers can relate to their own lives. Taking a note from him, learning how to find the balance between being an overly confident, irrational youth and a cautious, cowardly adult is a life-long journey. Moreover, it is possible to relate to Peter on a similar level, because sometimes it seems easier and safer to stick with what you know and not open your mind to new possibilities. Although being open-minded hasn't led me to experience magic, it has definitely helped me to understand myself and those around me better.