

## Book Discussion Notes –Phantom Tollbooth

1. YLBC – Opening and business
2. Narration – \_\_\_\_\_
3. Author Review – Juster - \_\_\_\_\_
4. Discuss Toy, item from home that reminds you of book
5. Each person say “I like \_\_\_\_\_ because” (each character)

### Discussion:

Question	Answer
<b>Title</b>	<b>The Phantom Tollbooth</b>
<b>Author</b>	Norton Juster
<b>Year Written</b>	1961
<b>Setting – Time</b>	Unclear, but relatively modern
<b>Setting – Place</b>	The Lands Beyond, a strange fantasyland

### Overview:

Characters in Juster's book grapple with issues relating to life in cities (such as noise), the boredom bred by instant entertainment, and the laziness of students in modern schools. At the same time, the book also incorporates some of Carroll's ideas about creativity and imagination

### Characters:

Question	Answer
<b>Protagonist(s)</b> – Leading character, hero, or heroine of a drama or other literary work who traditionally, undergoes some sort of change (pushing something forward). –	Milo
<b>Adjectives to describe Protagonist(s)</b>	
<b>Antagonist</b> - An antagonist is one that contents with or opposes another, adversary or opponent, the villain. The antagonist of a story is the character that provides an obstacle for the protagonist.	Demons or Ignorance (the loathsome creatures who chose to live in ignorance) – I say Demons, because they push ignorance... they want to thwart moving forward...
<b>Adjectives to describe Antagonist(s)</b>	

### Rising Action, Climax, Falling Action, Resolution

Question	Answer
<b>Conflict (Man vs. Man, Man vs. Nature, Man vs. God, Man vs. Himself, Man vs. Society)</b>	To release the princesses Rhyme and Reason from imprisonment in the Castle in the Air. (Man vs. Society)
<b>Rising action</b> - During rising action, the basic internal conflict is complicated by the introduction of related secondary conflicts, including various obstacles that frustrate the protagonist's attempt to reach his goal. Secondary conflicts can include adversaries of lesser importance than the story's antagonist, who may work with the antagonist or separately, by and for themselves or actions unknown, and also the conflict	After Faintly Macabre tells him the story of the princesses' disappearance, King Azaz charges him with the mission of finding and releasing them
<b>Falling action (Emotional Climax)</b> - The falling action is that part of the story in which the main part (the climax) has finished and you're heading to the resolution.	The armies of Wisdom, led by Azaz and his brother the Mathematician route the demons and welcome Rhyme and Reason back to the land.
<b>Climax</b> - The third act is that of the climax, or turning	After much travel and difficulty, Milo find the princesses

point, which marks a change, for the better or the worse, in the protagonist's affairs. If the story is a comedy, things will have gone badly for the protagonist up to this point; now, the tide, so to speak, will turn, and things will begin to go well for him or her. If the story is a tragedy, the opposite state of affairs will ensue, with things going from good to bad for the protagonist. Simply put, this is where the main part happens or the most dramatic part.	and manages to get them out of the Castle in the Air. Once on the ground, the group is surrounded by hordes of demons
<b>Resolution</b> - comprises events between the falling action and the actual ending scene of the drama or narrative and thus serves as the conclusion of the story.	Milo saves the princesses, returns home learns the tollbooth is gone. He realizes that there are all sorts of fantastic adventures to be had anywhere, even in his own bedroom. He has learned the value of education and appreciating everything around him.
<b>Meaning of the Title</b>	The Phantom Tollbooth is Milo's gateway to growing and learning.
<b>Major Themes</b>	The value of education; appreciating the things of everyday life; learning to use common sense; escaping boredom
<b>Minor Themes</b>	Gift giving, wise use of time

#### Other Characters:

Who	Adjectives
Milo	The main character, Milo is a little boy who goes through all of his days in a state of horrible boredom. This routine changes when Milo takes a trip through the mysterious make-believe tollbooth that appears in his bedroom one day
Tock	Milo's friend Tock is a literally a "watchdog." A giant clock makes up part of his body, and he constantly makes ticking noises. He patrols the Doldrums and stops people from wasting time
Humbug	The Humbug is an insect who lives only to flatter people—especially himself. The Humbug is ignorant about everything from math to geography and proves himself the fool by his constant attempts to say intelligent things. After trying to brown-nose his way to favor with King Azaz, he accompanies Milo and Tock on their journey
King Azaz	King Azaz is ruler of the realm of letters and words. Azaz and his brother argue over which is more important—numbers or letters, and they banish the princesses Rhyme and Reason. Once he realizes the foolishness of his squabble, King Azaz sends Milo to rescue the princesses
Mathemagician	Azaz's brother, the Mathemagician, lives in a world of numbers. Unlike Azaz, the Mathemagician has doubts about releasing Rhyme and Reason.
Rhyme and Reason	The two princesses were adopted by the King of Wisdom and raised alongside Azaz and the Mathemagician. When Azaz and the Mathemagician asked them to determine whether numbers or letters are more important, Rhyme and Reason say each is equally valuable. The brothers then imprisoned the two princesses in the Castle in the Air

<b>Faintly Macabre - The Which</b>	The two princesses were adopted by the King of Wisdom and raised alongside Azaz and the Mathemagician. When Azaz and the Mathemagician asked them to determine whether numbers or letters are more important, Rhyme and Reason say each is equally valuable. The brothers then imprisoned the two princesses in the Castle in the Air
<b>Faintly Macabre - The Which</b>	Faintly Macabre, has been imprisoned since Rhyme and Reason disappeared. It was once her duty to select the words to use for every occasion, but she became corrupted by her power and began to hoard the words for herself. Faintly tells Milo the story of the imprisoned princesses and inspires him to broach the subject with King Azaz
<b>Alec Bings</b>	Milo first meets Alec Bings in the Forest of Sight, where Milo sees a boy floating several feet off the ground. Alec explains that in his family, everyone's head remains at the same height from the day they are born until the day they die and that their legs grow toward the ground. Alec has the special ability to "see through things" and can see anything except that which is right before his eyes.
<b>Chroma</b>	Conductor of the great color orchestra in the Forest of Sight, Chroma makes sure all the colors of the day are properly handled. When he decides to take a rest, Milo makes a mess of the colors of the day
<b>Dischord and Dynne</b>	Dr. Dischord, a quack doctor, prescribes medicines of terrible noises to all of his patients and has an assistant, a smoke monster named Dynne. Dischord and Dynne invent new sounds, peddle noise pulls, racket lotions, clamor salves and hubbub tonics in the Valley of Sound
<b>The Soundkeeper</b>	Once ruler of the Valley of Sound, the Soundkeeper becomes dismayed with the lack of appreciation of beautiful sounds and the rise of Dr. Dischord's terrible practice. In protest, she cuts off sound and retreats to the fortress where she keeps all sounds made since the beginning of time
<b>The Dodecahedron</b>	The Dodecahedron has twelve different faces wearing twelve different emotions. He leads Milo and his companions through the numbers mine, where workers chisel out gemlike digits, to the city of Digitopolis
<b>The Everpresent Wordsnatcher</b>	More nuisance than demon, the Everpresent Wordsnatcher is a bird who flutters around the Mountains of Ignorance turning the words of others around to illustrate his own cleverness
<b>The Terrible Trivium</b>	The Terrible Trivium is a demon with no facial features. He lives in the Mountains of Ignorance and preys upon travellers, convincing them to undertake tasks that can never be completed
<b>The Demon of Insincerity</b>	The Demon of Insincerity looks like a cross between a beaver and a kangaroo. He tries to scare Milo and his companions off their path through the Mountains of Ignorance by throwing half-truths at them, which are only dispelled when they see this demon for what he really is
<b>The Gelatinous Giant</b>	The Gelatinous Giant is so huge that Milo first mistakes him for a mountain. He is the epitome of spinelessness. He hides in the Mountains of Ignorance and tries to look exactly like everything

	around him because he thinks it is "unsafe" to be different
<b>The Senses Taker</b>	The Senses Taker spends his days in the Castle in the Air trying to rob people of their senses by bombarding them with detailed questions. His appearance as an ink-stained old man perched over an enormous book deceives Milo into thinking his purpose is anything other than wasting time
<b>Officer Shrift</b>	Officer Shrift is twice as wide as he is tall. In Dictionopolis, he works as a police officer, judge, and jailer all at the same time. Officer Shrift has a habit of sentencing people to millions of years in prison then immediately forgetting about them
<b>The Whether Man</b>	A peculiar fellow who says everything three times, the Whether Man is the caretaker of Expectations. He is so busy thinking about what could be and why that he never seems to go anywhere or get anything done
<b>The Lethargians</b>	The Lethargians, minute creatures, live in perpetual boredom in the Doldrums. They change colors to match their surroundings and sometimes enforce laws against thinking and laughing.
<b>The Spelling Bee</b>	Though he is a giant bee, the Spelling Bee is a self-taught master of spelling and enjoys randomly spelling the words he hears or speaks.
<b>The Half Boy</b>	The result of a statistic, the Half Boy is really the leftover .58 from the 2.58 children the average family has. He believes in the reality of averages and likes to spend his time on the staircase to Infinity
There are more, but these are the main Characters	

## The Characters

- Which character do you identify with?
- Which do you *admire or dislike*?
- Who in this book would you most *like* to meet? What would you ask—or say?

## The Story, the Plot and Your Experience

- Is the *plot well developed*? Is it believable?
- Does the book *remind you of someone*—or something—in your own life?

## Title, Themes, Style and Symbolism

- How does the title *relate to the book*? Can you pick out a passage that's profound or interesting—or perhaps sums up the central issue of the book?

## The Ending

- Did you *expect the ending* or did it *surprise* you?
- Was the ending *satisfying*? If you could *rewrite the ending*, would you?
- What ending would you have chosen for the story?

## Do You Want to Read More?

- What is the *future of the characters' lives*?
- Would it *make a good movie*? Is there a film adaptation of this book?
- Do you think people will still be reading it in 10 years, 50 years or 100 years?

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- “The two brothers were glad, however to go their separate ways, for they were, by nature very suspicious and jealous. Each one tried to outdo the other...” What sin were these brothers guilty of? Pride. The sin of pride

hurts so many, in so many ways. What virtue opposes pride? Humility. If the brothers remained humble, could all of the trouble have been avoided?

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- Are there any quotations from the book that you would like to share?
  - Chapter 3
  - “I never knew words could be so confusing.” Milo says to which Tock replies “Only when you use a lot to say a little.”
  - Chapter 5
  - You can get in a lot of trouble mixing up words or just not knowing how to spell them. If we ever get out of here, I’m going to make sure to learn all about them.” Milo to Tock
  - “... today people use as many words as they can and think themselves very wise for doing so. For always remember that while it is wrong to use too few, it is often far worse to use too many.” Faintly Macabre to Milo & Tock.
  - Chapter 10
  - “It doesn’t do any good,” Alec replied, “for they can never see what they are in too much of a hurry to look for.” Alec to Milo
  - Chapter 11
  - “I suppose there’s a lot to see everywhere, if only you keep your eyes open.” Alec to Milo as they part ways
  - Chapter 13
  - “For you can’t improve sound by having only silence. He problem is to use each at the proper time.” The Soundkeeper to Milo
  - Chapter 15
  - “It’s completely logical,” explained the Dodecahedron. “The more you want , the less you get, and the less you get, the more you have. Simple arithmetic.” Sounds like good, sound, Christian advice...
  - “But it’s only a big pencil,” the Humbug objected, tapping at it with his cane. “True enough,” agreed the Mathmemagician’ “but once you learn to use it, there’s no end to what you can do.” Talking about the pencil.
  - Chapter 16
  - “It’s very much like you’re trying to reach infinity. You know that it’s there, but you just don’t know where-but just because you can never reach it doesn’t mean that It’s not worth looking for.” The .58 child to Milo speaking about trying to reach infinity
  - Chapter 18
  - “You must never feel badly about making mistakes,” explained Reason quietly, “as long as you take the trouble to learn from them. For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons.” Reason to Milo
  - ...”But whatever we learn has a purpose and whatever we do affects everything and everyone else, even in the tiniest way.” Reason to Milo
  - ...”it’s much the same thing with knowledge, for whenever you learn something new , the whole world becomes much richer.” Reason to Milo
  - Chapter 19 “but you had the courage to try; and what you *can* do is often simply a matter of what you *will* do.”...
- Did you find any foreshadowing?

- When he gives Milo his mission, Azaz tells him that there is a serious problem with the quest. However, he will only tell Milo about it once he has completed his journey. The secret, it turns out, is that Milo's mission is impossible
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- Any interesting phrases?
  - “Good night, good night, good night” Chroma to Milo and Company

### **Christian's Good Night -**

*Words:* [Sarah Doudney](#), *Psalms of Life* (published by Houlston), 1871.

*Music:* [Ira D. Sankey](#), 1884 ([MIDI](#), [score](#)).

Sleep on, beloved, sleep, and take thy rest;  
Lay down thy head upon the Savior's breast;  
We love thee well, but Jesus loves thee best—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Calm is thy slumber as an infant's sleep;  
But thou shalt wake no more to toil and weep;  
Thine is a perfect rest, secure and deep—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Until the shadows from this earth are cast,  
Until He gathers in His sheaves at last;  
Until the twilight gloom be over past—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Until the Easter glory lights the skies,  
Until the dead in Jesus shall arise,  
And He shall come, but not in lowly guise—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Until, made beautiful by love divine,  
Thou, in the likeness of thy Lord shalt shine,  
And He shall bring that golden crown of thine—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Only “Good night,” beloved—not “farewell!”  
A little while, and all His saints shall dwell  
In hallowed unison indivisible—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

Until we meet again before His throne,  
Clothed in the spotless robe He gives His own,  
Until we know even as we are known—  
Good night! Good night! Good night!

- Sources: [Sparknotes.com](#)

## **Author Review – Norton Juster**

Norton Juster was born on June 2, 1929 in Brooklyn, New York, just prior to the Great Depression. There are still a number of people who attribute that catastrophic event directly to his birth.

He grew up in Brooklyn, studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, and spent a year in Liverpool, England, on a Fulbright Scholarship, doing graduate work in urban planning and learning to ride a motorcycle.

After spending three years in the U.S. Navy (1954-1957), he began working as an architect in New York. He opened his own firm and within a few years moved to Western Massachusetts and expanded his practice as Juster-Pope-Frazier. Their projects included the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art, educational and cultural projects throughout New England, and a number of buildings for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Virginia. He taught architecture and planning at Pratt Institute in New York and was Professor of Design at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, from 1970-1992.

He began writing seriously while in the Navy. His first book, *The Phantom Tollbooth*, was published in 1961. Winner of the George C. Stone Centre for Children's Books Award, it is recognized as a classic and continues to be treasured by children and adults throughout the world. It was made into a feature film by MGM in 1969 and, more recently, into a musical. In 2007, it was produced at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.. The nationwide tour will start in 2008

Other books he has written include *The Dot and the Line*, which was adapted into an Academy Award-winning film by MGM and famed animator Chuck Jones; *Alberic the Wise*; *Otter Nonsense*; *As: A Surfeit of Similes*; and the Caldecott Medal winner *The Hello Goodbye Window*. His latest book, *Sourpuss and Sweetie Pie*, is the sequel to *The Hello Goodbye Window*.

Mr. Juster is retired from the practice of architecture and from teaching but continues to write. He is currently adapting a short story he wrote into ballet and is working on several new books.

Norton Juster is married and lives in Western Massachusetts. He has a daughter and a granddaughter.