



A Wrinkle in Time Study Guide

by Teri Shagoury

*For the novel by
Madeleine L'Engle*



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A Wrinkle in Time Study Guide
A Progeny Press Study Guide
by Teri Shagoury
edited by Andrew Clausen
cover design by Andrew Clausen

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Synopsis

It is a dark and stormy night. Alone in her attic bedroom, Meg Murry lies awake worrying about the storm, her troubles at school, and her many faults. When she joins her brother, Charles Wallace, and their mother in the kitchen for a midnight snack, they are interrupted by the arrival a strangely dressed woman. The stranger, Mrs. Whatsit, upsets Mrs. Murry when she announces, “There *is* such a thing as a tesseract” before hurrying out the door.

Two years earlier, Meg’s father disappeared while experimenting with tesseracts. Mrs. Whatsit, and her friends Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, know where Mr. Murry is, and they enlist Meg, Charles Wallace, and their friend Calvin O’Keefe to help rescue him.

Traveling by tesseract, the three children are taken on a journey through space to the distant planet of Camazotz where a shadow of evil—a “Black Thing”—has enslaved the population. Though Mr. Murry is found and freed from his prison, Charles Wallace is ensnared by a powerful enemy known only as IT.

Because she shares a close relationship with Charles Wallace, only Meg can save him, but to do so she must rely on her faults and her weaknesses, and learn to trust when hope seems lost.

Although *A Wrinkle in Time* can be classified as science fiction, it also contains elements of fantasy, philosophy, Biblical truth, and a glimpse of the cosmic battle between the forces of good and evil waged in a distant galaxy.

Chapters 5 & 6

Vocabulary:

Write down the meaning of the following words. Then use each word in a sentence of your own.

1. **substantial**

Definition:

Your sentence:

2. **stifle**

Definition:

Your sentence:

3. **arrogance**

Definition:

Your sentence:

4. **illuminate**

Definition:

Your sentence:

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5. **anticlimax**

Definition:

Your sentence:

6. **nondescript**

Definition:

Your sentence:

7. **myopic**

Definition:

Your sentence:

8. **aberration**

Definition:

Your sentence:

9. **plaintively**

Definition:

Your sentence:

10. **propitious**

Definition:

Your sentence:

11. **chink**

Definition:

Your sentence:

12. **dissolution**

Definition:

Your sentence:

Dimensions:

Mrs. Who's description of traveling by tesseract might seem awfully confusing. Perhaps the following might help.

A point has no dimension. It has neither length nor width nor height. We might even think of it as the "zero" or "null" dimension.

The first dimension is a line. It has only length. If you imagine a one-dimensional world, then the inhabitants of that world would all appear to each other as points.



Any person there would only be able to see the front (or back) of his neighbor to the left or the right.

For an example, imagine yourself as a very small pebble lodged in the middle of a drinking straw. You would only be able to move in two directions. If there were any



other pebbles in the drinking straw with you, you would only see the ones to the left or the right of you. Even if there were one hundred pebbles in the straw, you would only be able to see two of them. You wouldn't be able to move around your neighbors to visit other pebbles. You could never even be sure that more pebbles existed.

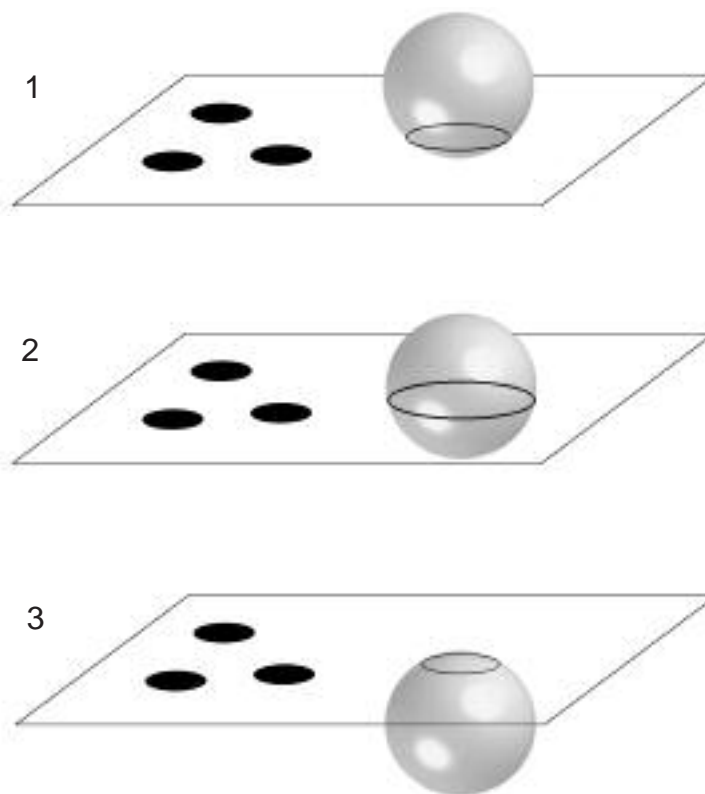
This example is somewhat flawed because even a drinking straw has more than one dimension. A line does not.

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The second dimension is a plane. It has length and width, but no height. Try this example: use a large sheet of paper as a representation of a two dimensional “world.” Cut a number of small circles from another sheet of paper and place them on this “world.” Imagine that these circles are the inhabitants of the two-dimensional world. Assuming that they have some means of mobility, it’s easy to see that these circles have much more freedom of movement than the residents of a one-dimensional world. They could conceivably move around and visit all their neighbors. Without the dimension of height, imagine how these circles must appear to each other.



Now imagine a three-dimensional object, such as a sphere, intersecting this two-dimensional world. To any of the circles living in that world, a sphere would appear as just another circle. (Fig. 1) But as the sphere moved down through their world, it would seem to mysteriously change its size. (Fig. 2, 3). Perhaps this is the reason Mrs. Whatsit can easily change her shape: she is a being from a higher dimension, but appears merely three-dimensional when she enters our three-dimensional world.



Now pick up one of the circles and put it down someplace else on the two-dimensional world. From the point of view of one of those inhabitants their circular friend would have seemed to disappear from one location only to magically reappear in another. Though this movement through “space” is completely normal to you, to

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the inhabitants of a two-dimensional world, it is virtually impossible because they have no conception of “up” or “down.”

In the same way, Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Whatsit use a higher dimension to easily transport Meg, Charles, and Calvin to another planet. Like the circle you moved, Meg, Charles, and Calvin moved through a dimension they did not understand to arrive at a location far from their starting point.

Allusion:

An *allusion* is a brief reference to a literary or historical person or event with which the reader is assumed to be familiar. Authors can add meaning to a story by drawing upon the thoughts and feelings a reader associates with the allusion.

Identify the original source the author alludes to in the following passages from *A Wrinkle in Time*.

1. “When shall we three meet again, / In thunder, lightning, or in rain,” came Mrs. Who’s voice. (Chapter 4)
2. The resonant voice rose and the words seemed to be all around them so that Meg felt that she could almost reach out and touch them: “*Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, . . .*” (Chapter 4)
3. Mrs. Who seemed to evaporate until there was nothing but the glasses, and then the glasses, too, disappeared. It reminded Meg of the Cheshire Cat. (Chapter 5)
4. Mrs. Who’s spectacles shone out at them triumphantly, “*And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.*” (Chapter 5)

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5. One white-faced man in a dark suit looked directly at the children, said, “Oh, dear, I shall be late,” and flickered into the building.
“He’s like the white rabbit,” Meg giggled nervously. (Chapter 6)

Questions:

1. What is “The Black Thing”?
2. Why did Meg feel “flattened-out” on the second planet they visited?
3. How did the three Mrs. Ws take precautions so Mrs. Murry would not be worried about her children?
4. According to Mrs. Whatsit, why is the earth such a troubled planet?

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5. What do the children see in the crystal ball that reveals the true nature of Mrs. Whatsit?

Thinking About the Story:

6. *Personification* is a literary technique in which animals, objects, or even abstract concepts are given human qualities and characteristics. Though the Happy Medium is a character in the novel, in what way does she *personify* the concept of a “happy medium”? How does the Happy Medium’s planet also reflect the concept of “medium”?
7. How does Meg react to seeing Calvin’s mother in the crystal ball? How did it alter her feelings for Calvin?
8. How does seeing a picture of her own mother give Meg renewed energy?

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9. What “gifts” did each of the three Mrs. Ws give to the children? Complete the table below by listing each gift in the appropriate space.

	Calvin	Meg	Charles Wallace
Mrs. Whatsit			
Mrs. Who			
Mrs. Which			

10. Why does Mrs. Whatsit say that the danger is greatest for Charles Wallace?
11. In general terms, describe the appearance of the town on Camazotz and the behavior of its citizens. What is unusual about the boy bouncing the rubber ball?
12. What is the mother’s reaction when the children knock at the door to return the rubber ball?

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13. Describe the other interactions with the inhabitants living on Camazotz—for example, the paperboy and people on the street.

14. The paper boy tells Charles Wallace,

We are the most oriented city on the planet. There has been no trouble of any kind for centuries. All Camazotz knows our record. That is why we are the capital city of Camazotz. That is why CENTRAL Central Intelligence is located here. That is why IT makes ITs home here.

What do you think “IT” is?

Dig Deeper:

15. When talking about being chosen for this mission, Mrs. Whatsit confides to Calvin and Meg: “But of course we can’t take credit for our talents. It’s how we use them that counts.” What do you think she means by saying that we can’t take credit for our talents?

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16. Read Matthew 25:14–28. The term “talent” found in this parable was originally a unit of weight and then later became a monetary unit. The modern-day usage of “talent” to refer to one’s innate abilities is derived from this original usage. What does this parable teach about how we should use our talents?

17. What talents do you think you have? If you aren’t sure, ask your parents or friends. How can you use your talents in a way that is pleasing to God?

18. Meg tells the Happy Medium that her anger helps her, because when she’s mad she hasn’t got room to be afraid. Later Mrs. Whatsit tells Meg, “Stay angry—you will need all your anger now.”

Can you think of a situation where being angry helped you? Can you think of another time when being angry was harmful? Write about these situations in two or three paragraphs.

19. Read Proverbs 16:32, Proverbs 29:11, Ecclesiastes 7:9, Romans 12:16–21, Ephesians 4:26–27. In one paragraph, summarize what these verses—taken together—teach about anger.

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20. Read each of the passages below, and then write down what caused the anger of the person (or persons) shown.
- a. Exodus 32:1–20 (God, Moses)
 - b. 1 Kings 11:4–13 (God)
 - c. Job 42:7 (God)
 - d. John 2:13–16 (Jesus)
21. What do the examples above suggest about anger as a proper response?
22. In Chapter 5, when Mrs. Whatsit talks about the battle against evil, she prompts the children to think of the fighters on their own planet. Charles Wallace immediately says “Jesus.” Then the children list others, including artists, scientists, and religious figures.
- Read this section again. By including Jesus in this list, do you think the author is suggesting that the others mentioned are *equal* to Jesus? Explain your answer.

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23. Read Colossians 1:15–23. What does this passage tell us about the uniqueness of Jesus?

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23. Jesus is the image of God and the firstborn of all creation. All things were created by him and for him. He is the head of the church. The fullness of God dwells in him. All things are reconciled to God through Jesus' death on the cross.

Chapters 7 & 8

Vocabulary:

1. bilious; 2. opaque; 3. belligerent; 4. requisition; 5. gallivanted; 6. emanated; 7. deviate; 8. pedantic; 9. bravado; 10. tenacity; 11. obliquely; 12. enlightened

Questions:

1. The Man with Red Eyes calls himself the "Prime Coordinator." He does not speak audibly, but communicates to the children directly to their minds.
2. Charles tells Meg and Calvin not to look at the red light or the man's eyes because they might be hypnotized. Charles begins to repeat nursery rhymes, Calvin recites the Gettysburg Address, and Meg suddenly shouts out, "Father!"
3. Though the food is synthetic—nourishing, but with no taste—to Meg and Calvin it appears and tastes like a Thanksgiving dinner, complete with turkey, dressing, mashed potatoes and gravy. To Charles it tastes like sand. The Man with Red Eyes is able to control Meg's and Calvin's minds so that they think the food is delicious. But Charles is able to completely shut the Man with Red Eyes out of his mind.
4. The Man with Red Eyes says he will save them pain and trouble—that he, in his own strength, is "willing to assume all the pain, all the responsibility, all the burdens of thought and decision." He can alter their minds so that the bland, synthetic nourishment of Camazotz will have the appearance, aroma, and taste of a Thanksgiving dinner. He calls himself "peace and utter rest."
5. Charles Wallace's voice becomes different—flattened out. His eyes become cold. He calls the Man with Red Eyes their "friend," and says that the three Mrs. Ws are their enemies. He calls Meg "dear sister," which he has never done before. He refers to his father as "Murry." He advocates a surrender to IT.
6. The little boy is being conditioned—through the use of pain—to bounce the ball in rhythm. This is probably an example of the reprocessing that the spelling machine operator mentioned.

Mood:

7. Answers may vary. The walls are "dull, greeny marble" which makes the faces of the people look "bilious" and a "sickly green." Another wall is "solid, and icy cold," and Calvin's response when touching it is "Ugh."
8. Answers may vary. He seems to "contain all the coldness and darkness" they felt as they passed through the Black Thing. The man's eyes have a "reddish glow." They are "pulsing, throbbing, in steady rhythm." His eyes are "fiery." His mouth is "thin" with "almost colorless lips." He has a "soothing voice." In spite of the soothing voice, most students will recognize that these words and phrases are intended to make us thoroughly dislike the Man with Red Eyes.

Parody:

9. Both Jesus and the Man with Red Eyes offer peace, rest, freedom, or ease of burdens. However, Jesus does not offer a trouble-free existence. Nor does he remove his followers' ability to make decisions. Instead, he tells his followers they will have trouble from the world, but he will give them peace in spite of hardship. The Man with Red Eyes only offers "freedom from responsibility," which is nothing more than the surrender of free will.

Thinking About the Story:

10. When one "whistles in the dark," one does something to alleviate his fears. Meg recognizes that Charles is not trying to be rude or funny. His arrogance is bravado to cover up his fears.
11. The spelling-machine operator uses reprocessing as a subtle threat. "You'd better not play any games around here or you'll have to go through the Process machine again and you don't want to do *that*." He regrets having to report the children, but he doesn't want to risk being reprocessed. He speaks of it with some fear. "I've been reprocessed once and that was more than enough."
12. The Prime Coordinator tells them that their father hasn't been *acting* like a father. He says that Mr. Murry abandoned his wife and children to go off on his own wild adventures. Similarly, Meg had overheard gossip that her mother had been abandoned by her husband.
13. Charles Wallace (or whatever is speaking through him) tells them that Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which are really their enemies. He says "They want us to go on being confused instead of properly organized."

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14. Charles says that everyone on Earth is confused and unhappy because they all live separate, individual lives. However, on Camazotz there is no individuality. Everyone has submitted to IT. There is no suffering or unhappiness because their troubles are over once they let IT take over their minds and their lives. IT also kills anyone who feels pain or discomfort.

15. The spelling-machine operator fears being sent to IT, so IT must be something that elicits fear. Charles Wallace calls IT “the boss.” He also says that IT “calls ITself the Happiest Sadist.” He says that all individuality on Camazotz has been done away with, and now Camazotz is just one mind: IT. IT apparently controls all minds on the planet.

Dig Deeper:

16. Answers will vary. Early in the novel, Meg attributes her problems to being different from everybody else in school and in her family. She sees herself as the oddball. It might be particularly tempting for Meg to join a society where all problems are solved by making everyone all alike. While differences can create problems if we let them, we read in Romans 12:1–8 and 1 Corinthians 12 that we were all created different with different gifts, and those differences are what make the body of Christ function.

17. Answers will vary. Absence of pain or trouble is not the same thing as happiness. Some people remain happy even in the midst of great difficulties. Others have neither pain nor troubles and still are not happy.

18. Rather than having a trouble-free life, Jesus reminds his followers that they *will* have troubles (see John 16:33) but that they may also have peace. Troubles will never separate us from the love of Christ (Romans 8:35–39) and the eternal glory we will achieve far outweighs these temporary troubles (2 Corinthians 4:17–18).

19. We should learn to see difficulties as opportunities for growth. The passage from Romans tells us that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope. The passage from James tells us to rejoice when we face different kinds of trials because it will test our faith and we will develop perseverance. The verses from 1 Peter tell us that we should not be surprised if we suffer grief because of trials we go through. We should remember that our faith is more precious than a trouble-free life and that our genuine faith will result in glory, praise, and honor when Jesus is revealed. Suffering and having the right attitude toward difficulties that come into our lives makes our faith stronger.

Chapters 9 & 10

Vocabulary:

1. hopeful / foreboding, fateful
2. exacerbated / relieved, alleviated
3. genial, gentle / acerbic, caustic
4. tolerating / hating, detesting
5. withstand, oppose, resist / yield, assent, accommodate
6. congeniality, sociability / hatred, aversion, horror

Questions:

1. He wore no glasses, which had been a trademark, his eyes seemed to look inward. He had grown a beard and his hair was long, almost to his shoulders, with a touch of gray. He looked like a shipwrecked sailor with an expression of suffering endurance on his face.

2. Charles says that to help her father Meg must surrender to IT.

3. Calvin remembers from his study of *The Tempest* at school that Ariel was stuck in a cloven pine and that it was the witch who put her there. Calvin told Charles, “You are like Ariel and IT is the witch who put you in there.” Mr. Murry is trapped in a tubular shaped column, like a pine, and Meg suggests that the quote applies to both Charles and her father.

4. Meg puts on Mrs. Who’s glasses and is able to pass through the wall into the cell with the transparent column. Apparently the glasses allow her to rearrange the atoms in the wall just as Charles had done earlier.

5. Meg expects everything to be all right once she reaches her father. (“Father will make it all right, Meg thought. Everything will be all right now.”) All her efforts had been wrapped up in finding him. After she’s found him, she realizes that their struggle is not over, and that he has no easy solutions to their predicament.

6. IT is a disembodied brain, somewhat larger than normal. IT is “completely revolting,” and “the most horrible, the most repellent thing” Meg had ever seen. IT emits a pulsing, overwhelming rhythm, and Meg struggles to avoid falling into this rhythm.