

Writing Assignment on *A Wizard of Earthsea*

Write a long, well-developed paragraph on one of the topics below. If you'd like, you may divide your paragraph into multiple paragraphs, such as an introduction, body paragraphs, and conclusion.

1. Choose a major theme or motif from the story and discuss how it is expressed and developed over the course of the story. Mention specific details from the story such as characters, settings, and events that reflect this theme. Try to incorporate quotations from the book into your paragraph.

Here are some examples of themes and motifs you might choose to write about:

- the importance and power of friendship and trust
- the limitations of power
- the concept of balance and “Equilibrium” developed in the story
- the dangers of pride and the importance of humility

2. Discuss the evolution of Ged's character over the course of the story. What is his personality like at the beginning of the story, and how does it change? What events cause these changes? Discuss details in the story that indicate this ongoing evolution—although there is one major event that causes a drastic change in his personality, there are other details throughout the story that indicate smaller changes. What ideas do you think Le Guin is trying to express to the reader through these changes?

Here is an example of the kind of writing I'm looking for, on the topic of the responsibility that comes with power:

A Wizard of Earthsea is a novel about power. One important lesson regarding power that the novel teaches through Ged's experiences is that it is important to make careful decisions, because our choices and actions may have consequences that we can't control or foresee.

Ged has a difficult time learning this lesson. At the beginning of the story, he is impatient and proud. Ogion tries to teach him to be patient and humble, and he sets an example for Ged by refusing to use his magic except when necessary. But Ged still hungers for greater power. Heedless of the consequences of his actions, he begins reading through Ogion's spell-book without permission, and he unintentionally summons an evil shadow-creature. Ogion saves him, but Ged has already begun a destructive chain of events.

After he begins his studies at Roke, his teachers also try to make him understand the importance of using his power wisely. The Master Hand tells him that “to light a candle is to cast a shadow,” meaning that all actions have consequences. “You must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand,” he says, “until you know what good and evil will follow on that act.” Unfortunately, Ged doesn't see the wisdom in these words, believing that he will become powerful enough to control the effects of his magic. In an arrogant attempt to prove his power, he once again accidentally unleashes the shadow. This time, he almost dies, and Lord Nemmerle has to sacrifice his own life to save him. Overwhelmed by shame, Ged finally begins to accept the importance of his teachers' lessons, and for the rest of the story, he is reluctant to use his magic.

Near the end of the novel, as Ged's final confrontation with the shadow approaches, this theme again becomes important. Ged strives to maintain Equilibrium by not using his magic at all, because “on the course on which they [are] embarked, the saying of the least spell might change chance and move the balance of power and of doom.” He understands that the choices he makes have consequences that cannot be foreseen or controlled, so he is especially cautious.

What makes *A Wizard of Earthsea* so powerful is that the lessons it teaches apply to our lives in the real world as well. By exploring this theme in the story, Le Guin is telling us that in our own lives, we should be careful about the choices we make and the actions we take. Even if we don't have magic powers, we can still hurt others through carelessness, and there are always consequences that we cannot foresee.