

# **The River at Green Knowe Study Guide**

**The River at Green Knowe by Lucy M. Boston**

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## Plot Summary

"The River at Green Knowe" is a young adult novel written by L. M. Boston and first published in 1957. It details the summer holiday adventures of three young children, of which two are displaced, and the third is the great-niece of one of the women renting the house of Green Knowe.

As the summer in the country village of Penny Sokey rolls around, and the culinary aficionado Miss Sybilla Bun and archeologist Dr. Maud Biggin decide to rent the river island manor of Green Knowe. They decide to host two children from the Society for the Promotion of Summer Holidays for Displaced Children. Maud also sends for her great-niece, Ida, to come and visit to keep the children company.

The three children arrive soon after. Ida is eleven, small for her age, but very confidence. She has emerged as the leader of the trio of friends. Oskar, a Russian refugee, is tall, proud, and independent. Ping, of Chinese origin, is quiet, polite, and meek. The three children befriend one another quickly, and set off on many adventures. Along the way, they return a baby swan to its mother, discover an abandoned mansion, come upon a hermit, and discover a treelike giant named Terak and his mother.

The children also endeavor to help Dr. Biggin and her research into giant peoples, by bringing her a giant tooth, which she presents at the archeological society she is a member of. Unfortunately, the society believes the tooth is a fraud. The children then decide to keep helping, and bring Dr. Biggin to the local stop of a traveling circus to see Terak perform. However at the circus, Dr. Biggin believes Terak is merely a trick or a fabrication. The children are heartbroken in the end, wondering why adults never see the amazing things in front of them. Oskar remarks very sadly that adults are always looking to the past rather than seeing what they have here and now and the book ends with that bittersweet observation.



# The Children Arrive at Green Knowe - Introduction to the River

## The Children Arrive at Green Knowe - Introduction to the River Summary

The Children Arrive at Green Knowe - Old friends Miss Sybilla Bun and Dr. Maud Biggin send to the Society for the Promotion of Summer Holidays for Displaced Children an invitation for two children to stay with them for the summer. Dr. Maud Biggin is an avid reader, archeologist, and historian, who is writing a new book. Miss Sybilla Bunn is a kindly, overweight woman who loves baking and cooking. To host the children, the two ladies have rented the riverside manor house, Green Knowe. Miss Bun worries how the children will get along and play, but Dr. Biggin isn't worried, because children always play whether there are toys and a playroom at hand, or not. Dr. Biggin's great-niece, Ida, is also coming to visit.

At tea time, the taxi arrives with three children. Ida is eleven and confident, but small for her age. Oskar is also eleven, is tall, and is proud. Hsu, whom the other two children call Ping, is nine, is quiet, meek, and polite. Ida appears as the leader of the little group. They will be staying in the attic room of the manor house, which has three windows, and the three children are amazed at the size and decor of the home. Green Knowe stands on an island in the river. The children are happy and excited to be able to explore. As they settle in, the reader learns that Oskar's father has been killed by the Russians for thinking independently of the state.

The next morning, after breakfast, the children go down to the edge of the garden at the river, where there is a boathouse. The children go down the river in a canoe, watching all the signs of morning life as they go, from hens running back and forth to butterflies and dragonflies flitting this way and that. There are plenty of noises and sounds as well, which leads Ping to say that everyone is trying to say something. The children notice a swan and several baby cygnets, and Ida is horrified that the mother is pushing away the littlest one. They take the baby cygnet with them, and find the baby's real parents, which happily take the cygnet back.

The three children then go for a swim in the river. They decide to swim to the bottom and see what they can find. Ping catches an eel, but lets it go. Ida finds a lock key. And Oskar finds an old helmet for a knight, which fits his head perfectly. They pick weeds and flowers and use them as a plume for the helmet, and head back for lunch. Miss Sybilla Bun doles out second helpings to the children, but Ping is small and slight and cannot eat his second helping.

After lunch, they go upstream, and decide that they should make a map of the river, and decide Green Knowe will be at the center of the map. The children come across an island full of thick underbrush and overhang, and name it Tangle Island, believing



nobody has been on the island for a long time. Further down, the river splits in two, and each fork splits yet again. They want to explore more, but it is time to head home for the day. Ping, ever the polite one, makes sure they return on time so as not to be rude to their hosts.

## **The Children Arrive at Green Knowe - Introduction to the River Analysis**

L. M. Boston's young adult novel, "The River at Green Knowe", appears superficially to be a simple and straightforward children's tale, but as the novel progresses, the reader discovers a rich philosophical complexity that underpins the events in the novel. These become apparent from chapter to chapter, and help the children to gain maturity and come of age to a measurable degree.

When Ida, Oskar, and Ping all come to Green Knowe, they are all displaced for various reasons. Oskar and Ping have left their homelands and Ida has left her home for the summer, to come to a new and unknown place. Each one of them arrives with a sense of loneliness, but all of them become fast friends, and find a sense of unity together. They feel as if they belong, and their friendship grows. They set out on many adventures, using Green Knowe and the island upon which it stands as a base to launch.

Green Knowe, for Ida, Oskar, and Ping, becomes the center of the map that they create which details their discoveries. Extrapolated, it can be seen that Green Knowe is at the center of their summer world. Everything magical and exciting that happens on their adventure ultimately brings them back to their arrival at Green Knowe.

Taken further, the children set off on their adventures from Green Knowe by using a canoe and sailing from island to island. This can also be understood in a metaphorical sense, as the river courses past, taking the children from one adventure to the next, making the plot wonderful and fast-paced, just as the river is also swift and steady. Indeed, it can be further explained that the pastoral and relatively perfect setting of the Green Knowe's river works metaphorically for the idyllic and innocent world in which the children live. Their idealistically-pure thoughts are manifested physically in the placid river world around them.



# Owl Palace Island and Hermit Place Island - Flying Horse Island

## Owl Palace Island and Hermit Place Island - Flying Horse Island Summary

Owl Place Island and Hermit Palace Island - The children go to town to buy white paper for their map and discover the holiday season is now in full swing. The river is full of boats and tourists. Ida decides she, Oskar, and Ping will get up early in the morning to go exploring when there are no people around, and then return for breakfast, and spend the day in the sun. The moon is setting when they head out the first morning. The world is new to them in this setting, and the river becomes wider, and the bottom becomes clear and weedless. They come across an abandoned building near the water's edge, and get out to see it. It is so old that its former use cannot be determined.

The house is also near marshbeds, which lead out to the sea. The children cannot understand why such a beautiful place is abandoned. The children go inside the old building and discover it is inhabited by an owl. The children leave the owl to his place, and go across the river. They discover the owl house is on an island, and continue on. As they go past the island, they come upon a man with a beard and long hair, and a loincloth. The children visit his island near the bog, and offer him some toffee. The man -a hermit- has shunned life, money, and shops. he lives in a tree house, high above the water. Everything the hermit has, the river has provided. The hermit helps guide them up the river. They then return home for breakfast.

Flying Horse Island - Ida, Okskar, and Ping spend the hot day sleeping on the banks of the river and going swimming. The children decide to spend the night on the island across from Green Knowe, with signs that say "Landing Forbidden." So far, Ida, Ping, and Oskar recount how they have explored and named Tangle Island, Owl Palace Island, Swan Nest Island, and Hermit Island. They look forward to exploring the new island. At midnight, the children head out to the island, which they discover smells very good. Ida says it must be the meadowsweet flower giving off such a good fragrance. The children discover he island is full of horses. Ping uses the magic of the river to give the horses wings. The horses become more friendly, but the fire alarm goes off and the horses take flight. The children then return home to go back to sleep.

## Owl Palace Island and Hermit Place Island - Flying Horse Island Analysis

The first adventures undertaken by Ida, Oskar, and Ping, do much to demonstrate the imaginations of the children, and the magic that surrounds Green Knowe and the river which flows past the house and island. The adventures begin on a relatively small scale,



each one growing successively grander and larger than the previous -though, to the children, all adventures are equally grand. Reuniting a baby swan with its proper mother proves to be just as exciting and adventurous as coming across flying horses.

The old house discovered by the children can be viewed metaphorically in two important ways. First, it is the imagination -abandoned and forgotten by children that have since become adults- and it is renewed and rediscovered by Ida, Oskar, and Ping. Second, it serves as a threshold for discovery. By entering and exploring the abandoned building, they are walking through the door to greater imagination and magic, still.

The Flying Horses on Flying Horse Island can also be viewed in a similar metaphorical context. Just as the exploration of the abandoned house compels the mechanization of their imagination, the flight of the horses can be seen as the flight of the children's imagination because each adventure becomes bigger than the last.

Yet, the children also have their first taste of coming of age as well. As unique and exciting as it is to discover the hermit, the horrors of society that the hermit describes as leaving behind bring a dampening weight to the innocent world of Ida, Oskar, and Ping. The things that the hermit describes, however, matter little at the time to the three children, though the reader identifies that the reasons the hermit left town resonate clearly in the mind. The river is an Eden to which the hermit has returned, and the river itself can be viewed in a Biblical sense as an Eden. Cast out of the childhood of Eden, the adults spend their lives seeking to return in some way.



# Mouse Island - The River in Flood

## Mouse Island - The River in Flood Summary

Dr. Biggin will be hosting a meeting of their archeology committee at Green Knowe, and her friend Old Harry has sent along a sample of grass seeds, which is believed to be the main cereal food of the Ogru giants in Abyssinia. Dr. Biggin and Dr. Bunn will feed some of the grass to Ida, to see if it will help her grow at all. Dr. Biggin and Dr. Bun measure Ida's height before sending her off to play. The children go over to Green Knowe's orchard, an island itself, connected by a bridge over a moat. They will spend the day and picnic lunch there. They discover a small path -a road for mice. The children build mouse nests, and Oskar continues working on his while Ida and Ping eat lunch. Ida and Ping both take a nap.

When Ida and Ping wake, they chase away a cat, and discover that Oskar has finished his nest -and is only two inches tall. Oskar goes to sleep, and Ida and Ping keep watch over him. When he wakes, they bring Oskar back for teatime. Oskar explores the mouse routes in the house, and Ida and Ping tell Dr. Biggin and Miss Bun that Oskar met a thatcher on the way home, and is learning how to thatch. Ida and Ping ask Miss Bun and Dr. Biggin not to put out mouse traps, just as a storm appears outside. Ida and Ping bring food up for Oskar. That night, Oskar returns to normal size.

The storm has risen the level of the river. The coursing water brings Ida, Oskar, and Ping along at a fast speed, which they enjoy. But unfortunately, all the locks along the river are open, for water to escape into the sea. They decide to go to the sea, but stop for lunch along the way near a windmill. There, they discover a giant tree-like man who is bathing in the sun. The children introduce themselves, and the giant -Terak- is happy to be noticed. But his mother comes along, chiding him for being seen, saying that they will run out of places to hide. Terak's mother cautions him to watch the children, who promise not to say anything about the giants to anyone else.

Terak recalls that his mother and father once lived with other giants in the mountains faraway, but came down after a rockslide to see the world. They built a house and lived away from the mountains. Terak's mother and father are brought by English explorers to Bristol, where they are shown off to the public and laughed at, from which Terak's father dies while trying to catch circus clowns and beat them. But suddenly, Terak must hide, as a search party comes for the three children to bring them back. As they head away, Terak calls goodbye, which the search party members mistake to be a cow. The children bring home a giant's tooth.

## Mouse Island - The River in Flood Analysis

The adventures of the children continue on Mouse Island, and as the river floods. Perhaps to no greater height do the imaginations of Ida, Oskar, and Ping, and the magic



of the river aspire than the transformation of Oskar into a mouse, and the discovery of Terak the Giant. The metaphors are rich between the two chapters.

In Oskar's transformation into a mouse, he becomes the epitome of a quiet little creature, unseen and unnoticed, except for instances of nuisance. Children, in general at the time, can be seen in the same fashion, the old adage that children should be seen and not heard, and were thus left largely to their own devices.

This ignoring of children is contrasted with Terak, Ida, Oskar, and Ping, who in the end, do want to be noticed. Terak, especially, wants to be noticed and to be loved. The tale of Terak's parents can be viewed, in certain regards, as the leaving of Eden to live in a new world, only to discover that Eden was indeed perfect, and could never be regained.



# Dr. Biggin Finds a Giant's Tooth - The Circus

## Dr. Biggin Finds a Giant's Tooth - The Circus Summary

In the attic, the children feel guilty about not telling Dr. Biggin about the giants, because she studies them. The children decide to find a way to let Dr. Biggin discover the tooth. They put it on the newly-graveled path outside the manor. The children wait impatiently for Miss Biggin to discover the tooth. The children watch in anguish as Dr. Biggin comes out to think, and kicks the tooth absentmindedly. Suddenly, she realizes what she is kicking. At dinner, she is very happy, though she will not say why. The next day arrives, with the meeting of the Society. The children help prepare the house, and then head out for the day.

The river is busy with boaters and holidaymakers and vacationers. Ida, Ping, and Oskar head up a small tributary. The children notice the clearness of their reflections, and believe it is as if they have twins, or water ghosts. They all dive in to pretend to be water ghosts. Later on, Oskar discovers a green bottle with something inside. They will have to bring it home to uncork it. When they return, Green Knowe is full of cars and people from the Society. Inside, the members of the Society are thundering their belief that the giant tooth is a fake, but Dr. Biggin stands her ground. The other members notice the children, and settle down. The members of the Society then leave, and Dr. Biggin is still determined that she has evidence of giants.

Upstairs, the children uncork the bottle and discover a picture message about the Island of the Throning Moon. The message is from 1647, by Piers Madely, vicar of a local parish, who recounts a horrifying experience, but the message cannot be read. The children decide to try to discover the island. They will begin with Green Knowe, and see what the moon looks like above it. They realize it is the island spoken of in the confession. Suddenly, all around them, people in deer antlers and waving sticks emerge from the shadows in a nighttime ceremony around some sort of wickerwork building. At the end, they race toward the river, past the children, and flee in canoes.

The next morning, Ida asks her Aunt Maude about Stone Age people and wickerwork cathedrals. She confirms this. Miss Sybilla Bun recalls that the previous evening was so beautiful, it made her want to do something wild, like dancing on the lawn.

As the summer winds down, Ping announces that a circus will be in town, but Ida and Oskar want to go out on the river, for it is their last day there. Ping explains that Terak will be in the circus, and the children are excited. Because the circus is shorthanded, the children work there to earn money to bring Dr. Biggin. Miss Bun refuses to go, because of the animals in captivity.



Ida, Oskar, and Ping, are glad to have Dr. Biggin's company, for she talks of exploration and far off peoples. They get to the circus, watch the show, and at last, Terak comes out to perform, though he is in disguise. The audience loves him. Dr. Biggin says she enjoyed the show, though Terak is a fake. The children are incredulous. They want to take Dr. Biggin to Terak, but Dr. Biggin is too rational for it. As they head back to the canoe, Ping is unhappy, wondering why when the thing that grownups want most is right in front of them that they refuse to see it.

## **Dr. Biggin Finds a Giant's Tooth - The Circus Analysis**

Friendship has begun between the children and the adults, though it is friendship of a different kind. It is one of companionship and respect, rather than fully participating in childhood adventures. The closest the children come to getting the adults to participate in their adventures is when they prompt Dr. Biggin to attend the circus, and this is done because the children like and admire Dr. Biggin enough to want to help her.

The greatest adventures are still occurring, as the possibility of the meshing of Dr. Biggin's world and the children's world by seeing Terak excites the children more than anything else, though by far the most intriguing incident is the one with the deer people. Occurring immediately after the archeological society meeting, and owing to the beads worn by one deer person, and by Miss Bun, and taking into consideration Miss Bun's comment about wanting to do something wild like dancing in the lawn, the reader can imagine that it was perhaps the adults from the society participating in an historical event of some kind.

Oskar remarks sadly that adults are always looking to the past. This is a profound remark for one very important reason. Whereas the children have their whole lives to look ahead to, adults often look to the past for various reasons. Often, it is to reflect on their own childhood, the loss of their own dreams, and the loss of their own ideals. Here, the reader can recall that the river is an Eden-like paradise to which the hermit has returned. Extrapolated, the river itself can be viewed in a Biblical sense as an Eden for childhood. Cast out of the childhood of Eden, adults spend their lives seeking to return in some way, somehow.



# Characters

## Ida

Short for her age of eleven, Ida is the great-niece of Dr. Maude Biggin. Ida is confident and brave, and is the leader of the trio of friends that consist of herself, Oskar, and Ping. She has been invited to Green Knowe for the summer by her Aunt Maude, to keep Oskar and Ping company. The three of them become friends quickly, and share the attic room in the manor, from which they can see the grounds off the manor, and the river.

Ida is also gentle and kind, as well as protective and watchful. She takes great care, for example, to watch over Oskar when he is the size of a field mouse. Ida and the others know how very much Dr. Biggin wants to find a giant, so they plant a giant tooth in the gravel path, and bring Dr. Biggin to the circus, where Terak is performing.

## Oskar

Oskar is a Russian child of eleven years in age. He is strong, brave, and proud. His father has been killed for disagreeing with the state. Oskar becomes fast friends with Ida and Ping when he goes to stay with them at Green Knowe for the summer. He is strong-headed and adventurous, and becomes the size of a mouse while on Mouse Island. Along with Ida and Ping, Oskar brings Dr. Biggin to the circus to see Terak the giant, but Dr. Biggin is unimpressed, believing Terak to be a fake.

## Ping/Hsu

Ping/Hsu is a quiet, polite, and thoughtful nine year-old. Along with Ida and Oskar, he goes to Green Knowe for the summer holiday. He becomes fast friends with both Ida and Oskar, and is unfailingly kind and sincere. He makes sure that the others are prompt and punctual for meals, not wanting to offend either Miss Bun or Dr. Baggin.

While in town, Ping sees that the circus has come, and that Terak the Giant will be performing. He races back to tell Ida and Oskar, and the three of them bring Dr. Baggin to the circus. Despite Terak's presence, Dr. Baggin refuses to accept it, saying it is a circus trick. Ping is unhappy, wondering why adults never see what is right in front of them.

## Dr. Maud Biggin

Dr. Maud Biggin is an historian and archeologist who rents Green Knowe for the summer with Miss Sybilla Bun. The two of them send for Maud's niece and children from the Displaced Children Society, to care for for the summer. Maud Biggin is kindly,



studious, and brilliant. She is seen originally as cold and distant, but throughout the summer, the children warm up to her.

Dr. Biggin is also a member of an archeological society, at which she presents a giant's tooth as evidence, and is labeled a fraud. Hoping to make her feel better, the children bring her to the circus to see Terak the Giant, but Dr. Biggin dismisses Terak as a circus trick.

## **Miss Sybilla Bun**

Miss Sybilla Bun is sweet and large woman, who together with Dr. Maud Biggin, rents Green Knowe for the summer. The two of them send for children from the Displaced Children Society to care for for the summer. Miss Bun loves to cook and bake, and does so for the children, Dr. Biggin, and for the Archeological Society. Miss Bun refuses to go to the circus at the end because she doesn't like seeing animals caged up.

## **Old Harry**

Old Harry is a gentleman and member of the archeological society to which Dr. Maud Biggin also belongs. Old Harry is, further, friends with Dr. Biggin.

## **Terak**

Terak is a treelike giant, who together with his mother, live in a windmill, and are discovered by Ida, Ping, and Oskar. Terak later becomes a circus performer, and his performance is seen by the children and Dr. Biggin. Dr. Biggin dismisses Terak as a circus trick.

## **Terak's Mother**

Terak's mother, perhaps 500 years old, is a treelike giant who is fearful of people and the places in England. She and Terak's father came down from the mountains years before, and were lured to England by explorers, where they were put on display and laughed at. After the death of Terak's father, Terak's mother traveled around with her son, shunning people and society.

## **The Hermit**

The Hermit lives on an island -which the children rename Hermit Island -in a tree house high off the ground. Having shunned his former life of banking and business, the hermit lives off the wild around the river, and is happy to be away from people.

## **Dr. Oldmolar**

Dr. Oldmolar is a dentist living in town, whom Dr. Maud Biggin consults with about the giant's tooth.



# Objects/Places

## Green Knowe Island

Green Knowe Island is an island in a river near the town of Penny Sokey. Upon Green Knowe Island stands Green Knowe, a majestic and magical manor rented for the summer by Miss Sybilla Bun and Dr. Maud Biggin. It is on Green Knowe Island that Ida, Oskar, and Ping come to stay, explore, and come across a Stone Age ceremony.

## Green Knowe

Green Knowe is the historic and majestic manor house rented out for the summer by Dr. Maud Biggin and Miss Sybilla Bun. It is the home where Ida, Ping, and Oskar stay for the summer holidays, using the manor as their base from which to launch upon their adventures.

## Tangle Island

Tangle Island is an old, uninhabited island discovered by Ida, Oskar, and Ping, while exploring. The island is overgrown with weeds, underbrush, and overhang.

## Hermit Island

Hermit Island is an island discovered by Ida, Oskar, and Ping, while exploring. On Hermit island they discover the Hermit, who has shunned society to live off the land and the river. preferring solitude.

## Owl Palace Island

Owl Palace Island is an island discovered and explored by Ida, Oskar, and Ping. Upon the island rests a gigantic old building, in which a single owl lives and reigns supreme.

## Flying Horse Island

Flying Horse Island is an island discovered and explored by the children in the dark. Wild horses roam the island, but are not very friendly. Ping wishes the horses had wings, and suddenly, the horses have wings and become much more friendly. When a fire alarm goes off, the horses take flight and leave the island.



## Mouse Island

Mouse Island is also the Orchard island of Green Knowe, lying across a moat. It is where Ida, Ping, and Oskar have a picnic, make mouse nests, and discover a little mouse road. It is also the island where Oskar becomes two inches tall, the size of a mouse.

## Helmet

A helmet is discovered by Oskar on the first day of exploration of the river. It is discovered by Oskar when he dives to the bottom to search for something exciting. He uses wild reeds and other plants to give the helmet a plume, and wears it for the rest of the day.

## Glass Bottle

A glass bottle is discovered by Oskar while out exploring, and he, Ida, and Ping bring it back to Green Knowe to open up. The bottle contains a confession from a local vicar in the 1600s, who saw something horrific and wild one evening. This prompts the children to explore the island upon which the events transpire.

## Canoe

A canoe, from the Green Knowe boathouse, is the main source of transportation for the children on their adventures. They take the canoe up and down the river, using it go from island to island, and ultimately, to go to the circus.



# Themes

## Friendship

Friendship is one of the three, major, and overarching themes in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. Friendship is prevalent in every chapter in the book, and serves as the foundation for the adventures of the three children, Ida, Oskar, and Ping. Friendship, which consists of camaraderie, belonging, mutual admiration and liking, and mutual respect and understanding, serves also as the glue that holds together Ida, Oskar, and Ping, who come from very different circumstances.

Ida is from England; Oskar is from Russia; and Ping is from China. They all speak English and their friendship overcomes their differences in gender, race, and upbringing. Though Ida emerges as the leader of the trio, each child considers the others important and worthwhile. Indeed, over the course of the summer, the children become friends with Dr. Maud Biggin and Miss Sybilla Bun, whose company they come to heavily value for different reasons and in different circumstances.

Friendship also is on display between the three friends in action as well. On Mouse Island, for example, Ida and Ping watch over the two-inch tall Oskar, while he is sleeping. They make sure he is not harmed by hornets, beetles, cats, or other creatures. Ping, ever the polite and thoughtful child, makes sure his friends and he are home in time for meals, so as not to offend Miss Bun or Dr. Biggin.

Friendship also bridges the gap between the children and Terak, the giant. The children promise to keep his secret an identity, and Terak is happy to have new friends. It is also friendship with Dr. Biggin that compels the children to bring her to the circus to see Terak perform, so that she may see that there really are giants in the world.

Friendship is further showcased between Miss Bun and Dr. Biggin, both of whom respect for and care for the other without fail. Together, they endeavor to bring the children to Green Knowe so that they might have a wonderful summer.

## Adventure

Adventure is one of the three, major, and overarching themes in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. Ida, Oskar, and Ping, who come from very different circumstances, all come to Green Knowe and are equal in the eyes of each other. The three of them embark on numerous adventures throughout the book, seeking out giants and hermits -much the way that Dr. Biggin would seek out an ancient race of people or a long-lost civilization.

The adventures the children have acts of voyage, discovery, and finding new and exciting things in new and exciting places will impact their lives in tremendous ways. Everything is, of course, seen through the eyes of the children, so returning a baby



swan to its proper parents is as much an adventure as entering an abandoned house to discover its owl resident.

Other adventures, such as discovering the hermit, or discovering the giant Terak, are grander and more exciting than others to the reader, though to the children, all their adventures are as equally grand. Perhaps the greatest adventures the children embark upon have to do with the discovery of the Stone Age tribe of people who dance beneath the moon and the children bringing Dr. Biggin to the circus to see Terek. They do the latter in the hopes that their own discoveries will be validated by someone as authoritative and adult as Dr. Biggin.

## Coming of Age

Coming of age is one of the three, major, and overarching themes in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. Coming of age typically describes the shattering of the world of innocence in which children live, sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. This shattering of innocence comes about by way of the reality of the world reaching into the world in which children exist, to make wonderful things seem less so. Preconceived notions and perceptions are challenged, and usually done away with.

In "The River at Green Knowe", Ida, Oskar, and Ping set off on numerous adventures, from returning a baby swan to its proper parents, to discovering a treelike giant named Terak. Such adventures are normally shunned by adults, and even then, are not considered adventures. The children see the river in beautiful, bucolic ways. It is as if they are the only ones who exist in the world, and everything is there for their discovery. Yet this is an illusion shattered by the beginning of the summer holidays, and the arrival of tourist season. The river is deluged by tourists, holidaymakers, and vacationers -all making the tranquil, pastoral river something far less magical to the children.

The children also come face-to-face with reality through the person of Dr. Biggin. The children, having discovered Terak, and Ping, having discovered Terak will be performing in the locally-visiting circus, encourage Dr. Biggin to attend with them. They are thrilled that Dr. Biggin will be able to see a real, live giant, and will be able to vindicate her own studies. Yet, adults do not see the world with the same wide-eyed wonder of children, as Ida, Ping, and Oskar come to discover with broken hearts. Dr. Biggin dismisses Terak as a circus trick. The novel ends with the children wondering why, when adults have what they want most right in front of their eyes, they do not see it at all.



# Style

## Point of View

L.M. Boston tells her novel "The River at Green Knowe" in the third-person omniscient narrative. Since the events of the book are so varied and the characters are so diverse in the ways that they approach the world, the third-person omniscient narrative works best to tell the novel. It allows readers to move through the book easily, as the events of which are centered around the children and therefore move quickly. Because the book is full of magical adventure, focusing the book around the point of view of any one of the three children, or of either Dr. Biggin or Miss Bun, would not have sufficed if done in the first-person narrative.

The third-person omniscient view also allows the reader to follow along on the adventures of the children, as a happy observer who may wish to go on his or her own adventures. The third-person also allows each of the three children to have their day in the sun, so that the reader does not feel left out by the first-person narrative mode.

## Setting

The setting of L. M. Boston's novel "The River at Green Knowe" is that of rural England, near the village of Penny Sokey. The plot revolves around the house of Green Knowe, and the river island where the manor house stands. The setting for the novel works perfectly in several ways.

First, the idea of adventure and exploration is often typified by boats and waterborne exploration. The children set off on their adventures by using a canoe, and sailing from island to island. In so doing, they move across rivers, oceans, and entire worlds.

Second, the pastoral and relatively pristine setting of the Green Knowe river works as a metaphor for the idyllic and innocent world in which the children live. Their ideally-pure thoughts are manifested in the physically-placid river world.

Third, the quiet isolation of the country, and its being unspoiled by encroachment from urbanization, allows imagination to flourish. It also allows the magic in the book to flourish.

## Language and Meaning

L.M. Boston, who tells her novel "The River at Green Knowe" in the third-person omniscient narrative, recognizes that her characters and her readers will be mostly younger. She therefore endeavors to tell her novel in language that is simple, poetic, and yet educated. For the young readers, and to make the story and the



characterization of those depicted therein more real and believable, the language employed is simple, yet also takes on the near-poetic nature of the setting of the novel.

Despite the simple, poetic, and flowing nature of Boston's prose, she also employs language that, in 1959, was common to educated young children of any Western country such as England. This further underscores the reality and credibility of Boston's characters and plot.

## Structure

L.M. Boston divides her novel "The River at Green Knowe" into chronological chapters, with each chapter being named. This is done for at least two reasons.

First, because Boston's readers will most likely be young, a simple, flowing, and uncomplicated structure is best. This allows the young reader to easily move between chapters and events without frustration.

Second, the chronological sequence also stands in for the passage of the summer holidays, moving from one adventure to the next, as children move from one summer day to the next. Each adventure is its own story and therefore according to the structure of the novel, warrants individual titles.



## Quotes

"The Society for the Promotion of Summer Holidays for Displaced Children. We will have two sent, and I will invite my great-niece Ida to take them off our hands" (Three Children Arrive at Green Knowe, p. 3).

"Beyond this, the river divided into two. Both ways looked promising, so they went a little way up each, far enough to find that both arms divided again. It was a labyrinth of waters waiting to be explored" (Introduction to the River, p. 29).

"We are displaced persons too," said Oskar. "We thought you wouldn't mind" (Owl Palace Island and Hermit Island, p. 43).

"Everything that you see came out of the river. It's wonderful what a little flood will bring down -wood with nails in it, sacks with bits of string- always useful, those two" (Owl Palace Island and Hermit Island, p. 51).

"Cabin cruisers chuffed majestically from distance to distance, and casual eyes looked down on the three sprightly children, never guessing that for them this busy summit of the day was the hour that didn't count" (Flying Horse Island, p. 57).

"Also, in order to cherish this secret memory and keep it from being rubbed out or discredited by the presence of humdrum holiday crowds, they decided not to go on the river at all, but simply to cross over the moat into the orchard belonging to Green Knowe and to spend the day there" (Mouse Island, p. 73).

"Dr. Maud grinned at Ida. 'I hope your voyage of discovery discovered something. They don't always, you know'" (The River in Flood, p. 116).

"The pool was a world as much their own as their most private thoughts. Ida's nicest dreams for a long time afterward were ringed with a palisade of swinging bulrushes" (Dr. Biggin Finds a Giant's Tooth, p. 127).

"There were massed shadows on the earth, but the sky was aware of the moon just under the horizon and was catching a reflection of its light and relaying to the river" (Dr. Biggin Finds a Giant's Tooth, p. 136).

"I can't understand -when it's the thing they want most in the world and it's there before their eyes -why won't they see it" (The Circus, p. 161).



## Topics for Discussion

Discuss the theme of friendship in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. What is friendship and how does it have an equalizing force on Ida, Oskar, and Ping? What acts of friendship do each of the friends commit for one another?

In terms of the construction of the novel, describe the meaning of the language in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. Why is this important? What does this sort of language do? What are the effects this language has on the book?

Discuss the theme of adventure in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. What is adventure? What are some of the adventures the children have? Are these adventures different or similar to the sorts of adventures adults have in mind? Why or why not? If so, why are they different? If not, why are they not different?

"The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston can be seen to use the river itself in a metaphorical sense. In what ways is the river used metaphorically, and how does it help the plot of the novel?

Discuss the theme of coming-of-age in the novel "The River at Green Knowe" by L. M. Boston. What does it mean to come of age? In what ways must the children come of age in the novel? How does this affect them?