

# **A Wrinkle in Time Study Guide**

**A Wrinkle in Time by Madeleine L'Engle**

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## Overview

*A Wrinkle in Time* is the story of a sister and brother, Meg and Charles Wallace Murry, who rescue their father from captivity on the planet of Camazotz—and in the process save the universe from the clutches of an evil power called IT. They are aided in their struggles by Calvin O'Keefe, a friend who travels with them across the universe.

The novel introduces an entertaining cast of characters, many of whom exist only in the realm of the imagination.

Odd as some of these characters are— the three strange old ladies, Mrs. Who, Mrs. Whatsit, and Mrs. Which, who guide the children through the galaxies; the tentacled monster, Aunt Beast; and IT, a disembodied human brain—both the characters and the plot seem believable.

*A Wrinkle in Time* is much more than an intergalactic adventure story. L'Engle examines such issues as the nature of good and evil, the meaning of love, and the importance of self-sacrifice. She wishes to show readers what constitutes noble and admirable human behavior, yet her story is never a sermon. It is, instead, a chance for the reader to watch Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace face challenges, overcome them, and grow as a result of their tests.

## About the Author

Madeleine Camp L'Engle was born on November 29, 1918, in New York City. The only child of a foreign correspondent, L'Engle early on developed strong interests in reading, drawing, and writing. As a result of her father's poor health, the family eventually moved from New York City to Switzerland, and L'Engle attended a series of boarding schools in the United States and Europe.

L'Engle graduated with honors from Smith College in 1941 and pursued a career in the theater, believing that it would help prepare her to be a writer.

While working in the theater she met her husband, actor Hugh Franklin, whom she married in 1946. When Franklin decided to give up the stage the couple moved to Connecticut, where they ran a general store and raised three children, Josephine, Maria, and Bion.

During this time L'Engle wrote three novels, but initially could publish none of them. Two of the books—*A Wrinkle in Time* and *Meet the Austins*—were later very successful, but publishers had trouble deciding whether they would appeal more to an adult or a young adult audience.

L'Engle has documented her career in four nonfiction books: *A Circle of Quiet* (1972), *The Summer of the Great Grandmother* (1974), *The Irrational Season* (1977), and *Walking on Water* (1980). She received the Newbery Medal in 1963 for *A Wrinkle in Time* and the American Book Award in 1980 for *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*. *A Ring of Endless Light* was named a Newbery Honor Book in 1981, and in 1984 she received the Catholic Library Association's Regina Award for her body of work.

L'Engle has been writer-in-residence at several schools, including Indiana University, the Ohio State University, and the University of Rochester. She currently lives in New York City.



# Plot Summary

Meg Murry is a teenager who is having problems fitting in at her high school. Meg's brother, Charles Wallace, is also different. Not only can he speak like an adult, but he also always intuitively knows what Meg and her mother are feeling and thinking. Meg's mother is a beautiful scientist who cares for her children, but misses her husband, who disappeared a year ago. Meg loves her family, but hates that they seem odd and don't fit in.

Meg is awakened one night by a huge storm. While sharing a midnight snack, the Murrys have an unexpected guest, a Mrs. Whatsit. She is an oddly dressed old lady who casually tells Mrs. Murry that there is such a thing as a tesseract. Mrs. Murry is frightened. The tesseract was something she and her husband were working on before he disappeared.

The next day, Meg and Charles Wallace meet Calvin O'Keefe, a boy who attends Meg's school. Calvin is also different, but he has learned to hide it and seems normal. He tells Meg that they are going to be friends. The children meet Mrs. Who, another visitor who tells them that it is almost time to go rescue Mr. Murry. The children need to rest, eat and prepare for the journey.

That night, Meg and Calvin talk about her father, and his top-secret work for the government. Charles Wallace interrupts them to say it is time to go. They meet Mrs. Which, the third stranger, and are immediately sucked into a void that lands them on the beautiful planet Uriel.

On Uriel, the children learn that there is an evil cloud called the Dark Thing that devours light, stars and planets, and leaves only evil and darkness. The children learn that the Dark Thing has shadowed Earth for a long time, but there are many good creatures fighting to keep the Dark Thing from taking over the universe.

Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which explain that a tesser is a wrinkle in time, a way to travel quickly between planets. Although traveling in the fifth dimension is scary for Meg, it is a way to get to Camazotz, a planet taken over by the Dark Thing, where Meg's father is being held prisoner.

Camazotz seems like Earth, but the people all act the same, like robots. They are controlled by a giant brain named IT, which is also trying to control Mr. Murry. While rescuing Mr. Murry, Charles Wallace believes he can fight IT, but IT is too powerful, and Charles Wallace becomes robot-like. Meg, Mr. Murry and Calvin try to rescue Charles, but IT is too powerful, and they tesser out of Camazotz before they can be hypnotized as well.

Meg realizes that she must return to Camazotz alone to rescue Charles Wallace. Meg faces IT with the love that she has in her heart. She uses her love to break the spell on Charles Wallace, and they tesser back home to be reunited with the Murry family and



Calvin. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which all join the happy reunion before having to move on to another adventure.

Although Meg's story is a science fiction tale of rescuing her father, Meg wrestles with big ideas and grows up during her time away. Meg learns that her faults and her differences can be strengths against the sameness of conformity. She learns that she can solve problems on her own without depending on her parents and other adults. Meg also learns that appearances can be deceiving and that she needs to look below the surface.



# Chapter 1

## Chapter 1 Summary

Meg Murry, a thirteen-year-old girl, wakes up in her room during a "dark and stormy night." She feels that this scary night is just another link in the chain of bad things that are happening to her. Meg constantly gets in trouble at school, doesn't get along with other girls her age and gets into fights with boys when they make fun of her brother, Charles Wallace. Meg hates being an oddball, and wants to be normal like everyone else.

Not able to sleep, Meg goes downstairs to the kitchen. On the way, she takes stock of herself and her life. She looks at her reflection in the mirror, and sees her mousy brown hair, braces, and large thick glasses, all things she hates.

When she reaches the kitchen, Meg meets her youngest brother, Charles Wallace. Charles is only five, but he is already a unique person. Although he doesn't speak in public, Charles is very smart and speaks to his family in phrases an adult would use. Charles offers Meg some hot cocoa, since he has already started to boil the milk. Meg wonders how he always knows what she and her mother are thinking.

Meg's mother joins Charles and Meg in the kitchen for a snack. Mrs. Murry is a beautiful scientist, who loves her husband. Mr. Murry disappeared during a top-secret mission, and no one can tell her where he is. Mrs. Murry still believes he will return, and writes letters to him every day. The neighbors gossip that he ran off with another woman. Meg knows that couldn't be true, but she is confused about where he is exactly and what he is doing.

A noise at the door causes Meg to remember the tales of tramps stealing sheets. Charles Wallace says that it was probably Mrs. Whatsit who stole the sheets. He met her and her two friends while exploring the haunted house in the woods. Meg's mother goes to investigate the sound, and comes back escorting Mrs. Whatsit, an old woman with layers of clothes, and a voice like an unopened gate.

Mrs. Whatsit says that the storm blew her off-course, and she smelled that this was Charles Wallace's house. Mrs. Whatsit admits that she did steal the sheets, but that she needed to use them. She takes off her boots, eats a tuna sandwich, and talks to Mrs. Murry about how lucky Charles Wallace is that he has such an understanding family. Then, at the end of the conversation, she tells Mrs. Murry that, "There is such a thing as a tesseract." Mrs. Murry turns white and seems very upset, as Mrs. Whatsit leaves.





## Chapter 1 Analysis

This chapter introduces the main character Meg, a typical teen desperately wanting to be the same as everyone else. Meg hates that her family is gossiped about, and she struggles with the need to fit in and be normal.

Hints that this is not an ordinary family come early in the chapter. Meg's five-year-old brother doesn't talk to others, but he talks to the family in full, adult sentences. He also has the ability to read Meg's and her mother's minds and to anticipate what they need. Meg's father is a renowned scientist who was working on a top-secret project when he disappeared, and no one knows where he is.

Things get even stranger when Meg meets Mrs. Whatsit, a neighbor living in the neighborhood haunted house. Mrs. Whatsit talks to Mrs. Murry about a "tesseract." Although Meg doesn't know what a tesseract is, the word is enough to scare Meg's mother.



# Chapter 2

## Chapter 2 Summary

Meg wakes up the next morning and finds out that the tesseract is a scientific concept that her mother and father were working on. She goes to school with her 10-year-old twin brothers, Sandy and Dennys who are upset that they missed the fun during the night. Because she is tired, Meg gets in trouble in class, and is sent to the principal's office.

Mr. Jenkins tries to get Meg to face facts and admit that her father is gone for good. She yells at him, and he calls her "the most belligerent, uncooperative child in school."

At home, Charles Wallace wants her to come with him to visit Mrs. Whatsit and her two friends. On the way to the haunted house, Meg and Charles talk about how he can sense her feelings, as if she were talking to him in another language.

During the conversation, Meg and Charles run into another boy from school, Calvin O'Keefe. Meg knows that Calvin is a smart fourteen-year-old basketball star in school.

Calvin calls himself a "sport" in his family of eleven brothers and sisters. He means that he is different, too, in both looks and brains. Calvin says that he was compelled by a sense that he needed to be at the house. Charles Wallace tries to read whether he is good or not, but can't tell. Charles invites Calvin to dinner, and he accepts.

At the haunted house, Meg, Charles and Calvin meet Mrs. Who, a plump woman with enormous thick glasses. She quotes Latin phrases, and mentions that it is almost time to rescue Meg's father. She advises that they rest and fuel for the journey ahead. Although confused, Meg, Charles and Calvin go to the Murry home to eat and wait.

## Chapter 2 Analysis

Again, in this chapter, the theme of being different is highlighted. Meg again lets her anger and distaste for gossip get the better of her, and talks back to her principal, Mr. Jenkins. Charles Wallace talks about how he needs to hold himself back from reading so that the other kids won't hate him too much when he starts school.

Meg and Charles Wallace also meet Calvin, who is older and a sports star in school. Although he seems to fit in, he is also different, both in his appearance and in the fact that he follows feelings that tell him what to do. Calvin is actually excited to meet the Murrays, since he relates to them immediately and recognizes that he has found kindred spirits.

Meg, Charles and Calvin meet Mrs. Who, another strange-looking visitor at the haunted house. Here, again, appearances are deceiving. Although the house has all the

trappings of being a scary place, it really is not. Mrs. Who says that things are almost ready to rescue Mr. Murray, and the sense of excitement and fear rises for everyone.



# Chapter 3

## Chapter 3 Summary

Calvin, Meg and Charles Wallace head to the Murry home. Calvin seems glad that he has met Meg, and wonders if she knows how lucky she is. He points out that she has a beautiful mother who cares about her and doesn't try to change her. Meg is startled to realize that he is right.

After dinner, Meg talks to her mother about Mr. Murry. Mrs. Murry admits that she loves him and misses him, but that she doesn't know what to do except wait. Meg and her mother also discuss Charles Wallace and why he's so different. Meg wants definite answers from her mother, but Mrs. Murry tells her to be patient. Some things just are, and can't be explained.

Meg and Calvin go for a walk, and Calvin asks further about Meg's father. Meg admits that she knows he was working on a top-secret space project for the government. She is afraid that his bosses probably don't know where he is and can't get in touch with him. Calvin lets her cry out her misery, which makes her feel better.

Charles Wallace interrupts to say that it is time to go rescue Mr. Murray. Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who appear and bicker about the weather and who is older. Then, Mrs. Which appears as a glimmer of silver, and says that they have much to do.

## Chapter 3 Analysis

In this chapter, Meg becomes better friends with Calvin, who offers some perspective on her life. He makes her realize that she is lucky to have a family who cares about her and what she does.

Meg also learns that, although her mother puts on a cheerful face for her family, she is very sad. Mrs. Murry still loves her husband very much, but doesn't have any answers about where he is or how to reach him. She has accepted that she doesn't have all the answers, and convinces Meg that she needs to accept that not everything can be explained.

Meg has that proven immediately, when she meets Mrs. Which, not a person, but a shimmer of silver with a voice.



# Chapter 4

## Chapter 4 Summary

The sight of Mrs. Which makes Meg scream, but before she can react further, Meg is swept away into nothingness. Meg is torn from Calvin's hold and is in a place where she can't hear, see, or feel. She thinks that her body is gone, and that even her heart has stopped beating. She is lost in a terrifying void.

Then, after a while, tingling in her body signals that something is happening. She sees Charles Wallace through a cloud, although she can't see Calvin. Then, suddenly, she and Calvin are through the cloud and in a strange, beautiful place.

The beautiful place is the planet Uriel. It is a place of light, beauty and song. Mrs. Which appears, in the form of a traditional witch, with green skin, a long nose and a broomstick. Meg wants to know whether her father is near, but he is not. They are on the planet to rest, and to see what they are up against.

Mrs. Whatsit is told to change into her real form. Before their eyes, she becomes a beautiful creature, half human, half horse with rainbow wings. She is godlike in appearance, but insists that she be treated the same, and that she is honored to be on this mission. She takes the children up on her back, and gives them a flying tour of the planet.

Meg, Charles and Calvin are dazzled by the planet and the creatures on it. There are other winged horses that make music through their wings. The music is difficult to translate, but the words give thanks to the Lord and bring a sense of peace and wonder to the children. The peace is broken, though, when Mrs. Whatsit takes them up through the clouds into space.

Mrs. Whatsit commands them to look at the stars in front of them, and they will see what they are fighting. They see a black shadow that is spreading across the sky. Wherever the shadow spreads, light is swallowed up. The children recognize that the dark cloud is a thing that is evil and destructive. Meg realizes that her father is fighting that evil, wherever he is.

## Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter continues the theme of appearances being deceiving. Mrs. Whatsit isn't the old lady she appears to be, but transforms into a wonderful creature. The flowers the children pick from the planet are not just pretty, but they act as oxygen masks during the flight.



Mrs. Whatsit shows Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin the danger that they are facing, and the thing that is imprisoning their father. It is a frightening sight, but it fills the children with a resolve to be brave and rescue Mr. Murry.

The themes of love fighting against evil and light against darkness are raised in this chapter.



# Chapter 5

## Chapter 5 Summary

Meg learns that her father is behind the black cloud, and that he can't escape on his own. But the witches are sure that, with Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin's help, Mr. Murry can be freed. Mrs. Which readies them for another journey, but the children want an explanation of how they are traveling.

Mrs. Who tries to explain a tesseract as a line that is brought together to shorten the distance. Meg still doesn't understand, so Charles Wallace tries to explain it through math. A tesseract is the fifth dimension, which takes time and squares it with space. Meg and Calvin understand enough to go on to the next place.

The next planet they visit is in Orion's belt and is the home of the Happy Medium. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which have brought the children to her so that they can see what they are fighting. The children realize that they are fighting evil, but The Happy Medium shows them that the fight has been waged on Earth for a very long time. Through the Happy Medium's crystal ball, the children see that Earth is covered with a smoky haze, but that the shadow hasn't totally engulfed their home planet yet.

The children learn that the shadow has been covering the Earth for a time, but that there are men who have fought the evil it contains throughout time. Charles Wallace, Calvin and Meg name the fighters of evil that they can think of: Jesus, Buddha, Leonardo DaVinci, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Euclid and Copernicus, and many others have kept Earth safe.

After this recitation, Meg impatiently asks to see her father. But there are more sights to see in the crystal ball.

## Chapter 5 Analysis

Meg, Calvin and Charles Wallace learn about how they are traveling or tessering. The concept is explained in a very unique way, using pictures. Mrs. Whatsit tries to explain the notion quickly to Meg, but she doesn't understand until Charles Wallace explains it using scientific terms. Once again, there is a gulf between Meg wanting a rational explanation for what is happening and the reality that some things can't be explained, they just are.

When the children visit the Happy Medium, they learn that Earth has been shadowed with the Dark Thing for many years. Thus, L'Engle uses symbolism to explain the presence of evil. She also gives them hope, however, by having the children list the fighters of evil throughout history. Men of religion, artists, thinkers, mathematicians and scientists have all fought against the evil. This gives the children the resolve to keep going even though they are frightened.

Meg turns her fright, again, into anger and an impatience to find her father and do something. She is still not able to accept that understanding a situation is sometimes better than rushing in without a clue.





# Chapter 6

## Chapter 6 Summary

The Happy Medium shows the children a patch of dark sky, where the horror of the Dark Thing makes them sick. Suddenly, through the darkness, a bright light shines, dispelling the evil and making the sky normal again. Mrs. Whatsit explains that a star gave up its life to fight the darkness. Meg, Charles and Calvin learn that Mrs. Whatsit was once a star that gave up its life to fight. Charles Wallace kisses Mrs. Whatsit.

The Happy Medium then shows the children their homes. Calvin is shown his home, where his slovenly mother is yelling and hitting his brothers and sisters. Meg holds Calvin's hand in sympathy. At the Murry house, Meg and Charles see their mother writing a letter to their father. As they watch, Mrs. Murry gives in to her despair and cries tears that she doesn't show in public.

Seeing this, Meg becomes angry and impatient to rescue her father. The children tesser to Camazotz. The tesser through the Black Thing is more horrible than Meg has ever experienced. Meg perceives the evil as a cold, dark thing that wants to devour her. Camazotz looks very much like Earth, with the same trees and weather.

Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which cannot go with the children, but they do give them gifts to help them fight. Mrs. Whatsit strengthens Calvin's gift of communication, gives Meg her faults, and reminds Charles Wallace of the resilience of childhood.

Mrs. Who quotes Calvin a passage from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* about a person trapped in a cloven pine. She cautions Charles Wallace that, although he is smart, he is still a child and doesn't know everything. Mrs. Who gives Meg her glasses to use only when the situation is at its worst.

Mrs. Which commands the children to find Mr. Murry and to stay together. Finally, Mrs. Whatsit tells Calvin to take care of Meg. Charles protests, declaring himself capable of taking care of Meg without Calvin's help. Mrs. Whatsit warns Charles that he is in the greatest danger because of what he is and his special gifts.

The children start to walk toward the town, and realize that it looks very much like Earth, with its buildings and people. There is something frightening, however, in how everyone does everything at the exact same time and with the same rhythm. All of the children play in exactly the same way, and their mothers call them in to dinner at exactly the same time. Meg, Charles and Calvin meet one boy who plays by his own rules, but the boy's mother seems frightened, and talks about Aberrations and papers.

A boy on a bicycle delivering papers questions them. The boy is proud of his town, and says that CENTRAL Central Intelligence is there, as well as IT. The boy has a funny, robotic way of talking, as if he wasn't really saying the words, but being controlled by something else. Charles Wallace also can't read his mind.



Meg is impatient, thinking that finding her father will give her all the answers. The children continue into the center of town. Charles and Meg argue about whether the people are people or robots. Calvin feels that by entering CENTRAL Central Intelligence, they are going into great danger.

## Chapter 6 Analysis

Again, the children discover that appearances can be deceiving. In learning that Mrs. Whatsit was once a star, Meg realizes that she is somewhat out of her grasp of knowledge. Mrs. Whatsit can become whatever she needs, and her appearance as a witch or a beast are only part of what she can be, and only a part of what the children can comprehend.

Mrs. Whatsit also represents the glory and the danger in fighting evil. She defeated evil in a glorious way, but was destroyed by it at the same time.

The glimpse of Meg and Calvin's homes also has an effect on Meg. She realizes that she is really lucky to have the family she does, and offers comfort to Calvin when he is embarrassed by his own family. The sight of her mother's unhappiness makes Meg sad as well, but this again turns to anger and impatience to free her father. She again thinks that her father will resolve her questions and her mother's unhappiness.

On Camazotz, Meg realizes that there is a dark side to being like everyone else. The citizens of Camazotz are frightened of anything different, and seem like robots in how they behave and react. Her family and Calvin have told Meg that her faults make her unique, but she hasn't quite believed it. Again, words haven't been sufficient to convince her. On Camazotz, however, Meg can see how being the same as everyone else is a limiting, frightening, boring state.



# Chapter 7

## Chapter 7 Summary

The children can't figure how to get inside the walls of the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building. They talk to a man who says he is fond of children, but that he needs to report them. When he does this, the wall slides back and the children are able to walk inside, and find themselves in a room of machines.

Charles Wallace is afraid, and tells Meg that something is trying to get to him. The children notice a man in a chair. The man doesn't move his lips, but speaks right into their brains. Meg can't tell if he is kind or cruel, because all she can focus on is his red eyes and the light pulsing above him. Charles warns her not to look at the man, since he will hypnotize them.

The man starts saying that there is no need to fight him, that he just makes all the decisions to spare pain, and that everyone is happy on Camazotz. He starts reciting the multiplication table. Charles Wallace and Calvin fight the pull of his voice with nursery rhymes and the Gettysburg address, and Meg cries out for her father. The children have won the first test.

Meg asks to see her father, and the man argues with her. She becomes impatient with him. Charles doesn't think he's real and kicks him, saying he thought that he was a robot, since the voice wasn't coming out of him. Charles is getting cocky and, forgetting Mrs. Who's advice, thinks that he can understand the man without getting affected by him. In exploring the man's mind, Charles is almost hypnotized, until Meg tackles him and brings Charles to his senses. Meg has now made the man angry.

Meg asks for food. The children are brought a turkey dinner. Meg and Calvin think it tastes great, but Charles complains that the food tastes like sand. The man says that Charles is barricading his mind so that the man can't give him the illusion of taste. He can get through the cracks in Calvin and Meg's minds.

Again, Charles wants to see what the man is, and asks the man if Charles can get out once he is in. The man says of course, and Charles believes him, again forgetting that he is young and evil is strong. The man is able to hypnotize Charles, and Charles becomes a different person, calling Meg "dear sister" and asking why she is being belligerent and uncooperative. Charles Wallace has been taken over by the man with the red eyes and is no longer her baby brother.

## Chapter 7 Analysis

Meg, Charles and Calvin are taken to see a man with red eyes who tries to hypnotize them into believing that he is a good man. Again, Meg believes in appearances, and tries to understand the man by what she sees. She tries to look at his face in order to



see whether he is cruel or kind. Also, when she asks for food, she believes that she is eating a turkey dinner, when in fact she is eating synthetic food that is made to taste like turkey through hypnosis. Over and over again, Meg is being taught that she can't trust her senses, but must judge with something more.

The man tries to hypnotize the children by saying the multiplication tables. This is disturbing on two levels for Meg. For one thing, math has always been the only place where she shines. Here, math is being made into an instrument to trap her. Also, while Charles and Calvin are able to resist by relying on literature and history, Meg hasn't learned her lessons at school, and so she must rely on her anger and need for her father to resist.

Charles realizes that the man is not speaking for himself, but is being spoken through by someone or something else. He tries to fight physically, and when that doesn't work, Charles rushes into fighting with his mind. Charles is frightened, and, like Meg he turns to what has always worked before, his ability to read minds. But Charles is young and isn't as strong as IT, and is taken over and changed. He becomes something less than Meg's baby brother, another robot that spouts IT's words.



# Chapter 8

## Chapter 8 Summary

Meg and Calvin try to hold Charles to get him to come out of his trance. It almost works, but then the man with red eyes brings in guards to hold Calvin and Meg away from Charles. The man with red eyes admits that he is being controlled by IT, and tells Charles to take Meg and Calvin to see Mr. Murry.

Charles starts talking about how happy he and the people of Camazotz are, and tries to convince Meg that she should join him in accepting the man with the red eyes. He tells her that "Here on Camazotz, everyone is happy because they are all alike. Differences create problems." She argues that, although she hates being different, being like everyone else isn't appealing either.

Charles Wallace talks about the being that is controlling everyone on Camazotz as IT, the Boss and the Happiest Sadist. He says that IT keeps everyone free from unhappiness, by regulating their lives. Meg argues that the people of Camazotz are never unhappy, so they can never be truly happy.

On the way to see Mr. Murry, the children pass a room. Inside, the boy who couldn't keep the rhythm is being painfully shocked into obeying the rhythm. "After today," Charles says, "he'll never desire to deviate again." Charles doesn't seem to be bothered by this. The children finally reach a room with a transparent column. Trapped in the column is Mr. Murry.

## Chapter 8 Analysis

In this chapter, Meg realizes that again, her dreams of becoming like everyone else, when taken to the extreme, can be horrific. She is told that IT regulates the town of Camazotz to spare the people any unhappiness. Meg realizes that, although she is unhappy at times, being unhappy makes her appreciate the happy times more.

When Calvin and Meg try to bring Charles out of the grip of IT, they hold on to him. The notion that touch is a healing and comforting need is a theme that runs throughout the story. Calvin, Meg and Charles hold hands when tessering, when comforting each other, and when they journey on Camazotz. Although appearances can deceive, touch seems to be a way to comfort and connect.

The children are shown a room in which the boy who couldn't keep the rhythm is being tortured to keep time. Meg realizes that conformity comes at a cost. It means following someone else's rules and being punished for not doing so. It means hiding parts of yourself and always being frightened of being different. It means pain and suspicion and bad feeling. In fact, conformity is a form of evil.



# Chapter 9

## Chapter 9 Summary

Meg hurts herself running to her father, and Charles laughs. Again, Meg realizes that although Charles looks the same, an evil force is controlling him. Meg can see her father, in the room, but Mr. Murry can't see her. Meg thinks that her father looks older, as though he's been enduring for a long time. Charles doesn't seem to care that they've found Mr. Murry. Meg tries to tackle Charles again, but he anticipates her move, and punches her.

Calvin almost gets Charles out of his trance by using his communication gifts and talking to Charles about getting out of the cloven pine trap. Unfortunately, the words don't work, and Calvin is too exhausted to try to communicate with Mr. Murry.

Meg is frantic to get to her father, and remembers Mrs. Who's glasses. Meg puts them on and runs into the column holding her father. Angry that she beat him, Charles follows her into the room, but can't follow into the column.

In the column, Meg hugs her father, but realizes that he can't see her. The column is dark and still, and the only way she can see him is with Mrs. Who's glasses. Meg gives the glasses to Mr. Murry, and he carries her through the column to face Charles. Charles is very angry and says that IT is not pleased.

Mr. Murry seems drained and confused. He doesn't seem to realize that Charles is not acting normally but is in the grip of IT. Although Meg thinks that her father will solve everything, she realizes that he is frail and not full of the answers she had hoped for. Meg becomes angry with him, and with Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which. Meg believes that they abandoned the children to IT.

Charles Wallace takes Meg, Mr. Murry and Calvin to IT. Meg is horrified. IT was a brain... a disembodied brain... an oversized brain, larger enough than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying... a living brain... a brain that pulses and quivers and that seizes command.

The room with IT pulses with a force that tries to take away the ability to think. Meg, Mrs. Murry and Calvin fight IT by resisting. Meg remembers Mrs. Whatsit's advice and tries to use her faults, like stubbornness and anger, to fight.

Meg sees Charles Wallace with his jaw hanging slightly loose and his blue eyes twirling.

IT speaks through Charles Wallace, and says that everyone is happy because everyone is alike. Meg should embrace that concept, because she hates being different. Meg realizes that like and equal are not the same thing.



Meg thinks about hurting and cutting IT, but IT threatens that everyone in ITs power will also die, including Charles. Then, when Meg gets too weak to fight IT, her father tesserers her and Calvin out. Since he is a novice at tessering, it is painful, and Meg falls unconscious.

## Chapter 9 Analysis

This is a pivotal chapter in the story. Finally, Meg sees her father and is able to rescue him from the confines of the column. She expects that once she rescues him, Mr. Murry will solve all of her problems. Instead, she begins to see that her father is only human, and very weak from his yearlong ordeal. Mr. Murry fails to understand that Charles is in the grip of IT and is unable to rescue Charles Wallace.

Meg has blamed her problems at school and in life on the fact that her father is missing, and has pinned her hopes on everything being better when she finds him. However, finding Mr. Murry has only added to her problems, since he isn't the all-knowing man she remembers. She still loves him, but is very disappointed in him.

Again in this chapter, Meg is reminded that her wish to be like everyone else is a mistake. IT tells her that he is making everyone alike so that they can be equal. In a flash of inspiration, Meg realizes that conformity is not equality. Equality is being what you can be in a free and open society. Likeness is being told how to be and having to conform out of fear.

This flash of insight lets Meg resist IT for a few minutes. But then she tries to resist IT by using her math and science knowledge, and again, IT almost gets her. IT understands math and science because IT is only interested in thinking and judging. IT doesn't understand the arts or creativity or resistance, because these involve feeling. When Meg feels, she can resist IT. When she thinks, IT can pull her in.



# Chapter 10

## Chapter 10 Summary

Meg wakes up, but is frozen and unable to move. She tries to tell her father that she is all right, but she can only lie there and listen to her father and Calvin talking.

Calvin and Mr. Murry are worried about Meg, but she is slowly coming back to life. Calvin asks Mr. Murry about how he ended up on Camazotz. It was an accident, since Mr. Murry was planning to go to Mars. Mr. Murry explains that he was the second of two scientists to tesser, and that he doesn't know what happened to the first scientist. Mr. Murry is anxious to get home, to warn the other scientists that they need to handle the power of tessering with more care.

They talk about Mr. Murry's experiences on Camazotz, and the fact that he had almost given in to IT when the children came to rescue him. The only thing that saved Mr. Murry is the fact that IT wasn't used to being resisted. Mr. Murry also mentions that time is deceptive on Camazotz, that it doesn't go in a straight line like that of the Earth, but curls in on itself. Mr. Murry doesn't know whether he was in Camazotz for a week or a year.

Meg is finally able to move, but she is still very cold and in a lot of pain from tessering through the Black Thing. Meg is very angry that her father left Charles with IT, and feels that Mr. Murry betrayed her. She was counting on him to solve all of her problems, and he disappointed her. When she asks where they are, her father and Calvin can't tell her.

Looking around at the rusty, shadowed planet, Meg is confused by her conflicting feelings. The planet is ugly, but the smell on the breeze is lovelier than anything she's ever experienced. Then, Meg notices that there are huge monsters moving towards her. The monsters are tall, and have tentacles instead of eyes. They are covered in fur and blend into the rusty landscape. Meg is very frightened when the head monster picks her up. She is cradled by the beast, and feels the waves of love and healing that the beast surrounds her with. The beasts calm Meg and then pick her up to take her away.

## Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter is a slow one compared to the others. In it, Meg is frozen and unable to move, and Mr. Murry and Charles are only able to talk and guard her.

Again, Meg learns that her father, far from being a superhero, is actually a man with faults who does not know everything. He got lost while tessering to Mars, he couldn't escape from Camazotz, and he is only able to save Meg from IT by tessering away. In the process he hurts Meg and leaves Charles Wallace behind. Calvin seems to respect Mr. Murry and understand why he made the choices he has. Meg, however, blames him for not being her savior.





Meg has learned that her faults are good when fighting against evil. Her anger and stubbornness were helpful in getting to her father and fighting IT. Meg doesn't realize the same anger and stubbornness need to be tempered with understanding, or they become hurtful to the ones she loves.

Again, appearance plays a part in the story. The beasts living on the planet look ugly, but they comfort Meg and help ease her pain. Although they look ugly, their fur is soft and smells wonderful. They do not have mouths, but they are able to communicate with their minds. Thus, although they look like monsters, and Meg is afraid of them, she learns that they are good.



# Chapter 11

## Chapter 11 Summary

Mr. Murry asks that the monsters not take Meg, but the head monster assures him that Mr. Murry will be close by. The Black Thing has Meg in its clutches, and the monsters need to take the pain and poison away before it can hurt Meg's soul. They take Meg away, and heal her body.

Meg's mind, however, is still in the grip of the Black Thing. She is suspicious of the monsters, but eventually realizes that their healing could not come from IT. IT only knew pain, not help. Meg is grateful to the beasts, but she is still bitter that her father abandoned Charles Wallace to IT. Her father had also not saved her from the Black Thing's poison, the beasts had. Therefore, Meg puts her trust in the beasts to help her save her brother.

Meg talks to the monster that takes care of her. The monster is very gentle, and says that she misses her youngsters, and treats Meg like a baby, feeding her and singing to her. Meg wants to call her something, and they settle on Aunt Beast, which amuses Meg. Aunt Beast is confused by Meg's insistence on "seeing" and "light." Because of their tentacles, the beasts can't see, but their world is full of communication with other creatures and planets, and beautiful sounds, smells and music. Meg realizes that Aunt Beast experiences the universe in a more complete way than any human could.

Meg joins her father and Calvin for food. She is still angry, and she hurts her father with her lack of faith and careless words. Meg expects her father and the beasts to go back to Camazotz to save Charles Wallace. Meg's father is too weak to go back, and the beasts cannot tesser into a shadowed planet. Meg and Calvin try to explain to the beasts what Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which are. They use words, which the beasts can't understand. Then, Calvin thinks of guardian angels and messengers of God, and Mrs. Which appears.

## Chapter 11 Analysis

Once again, Meg is looking outside herself for someone to save her. She becomes attached to Aunt Beast and loves her. Once she is feeling better physically, Meg asks that the beasts rescue Charles Wallace. Meg doesn't realize that she is in the grip of evil, in the same way that Charles Wallace was. She is being guided by hate, not love or understanding. She manages to hurt her father and alienate Calvin and the beasts with her unthinking words and actions.

Meg is growing up, and during her adventure she has learned that her parents have their problems and are not always able to solve hers. Mrs. Murry puts on a good front, but cries at the loss of her husband. Mr. Murry is drained and weak from fighting IT. Meg



loves both of them, but is frightened to realize that they can't protect or help her all the time. Meg's fear mixes with the Black Thing's poison to make her say ugly things.

The differences between Meg and the beasts go beyond looks and extend to communication. Again, Meg tries to relate to others using sight and words. The beasts, however, are used to communicating using indescribable music, their minds, and communing with all the creatures in the universe. The beasts are part of the universe in a way that Meg, and by extension the Earth, can never perceive. This makes Meg feel even more lonely and misunderstood.

Meg and Calvin realize that they don't really know who or what Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which are as they try to explain them to the beasts. Meg and Calvin try to use words and descriptions, but they are useless to beasts that can't see, but only know. Calvin realizes this, and comes closest to describing them when he calls them guardian angels. Guardian angels watch over people and protect them, much as the ladies do with the children.



# Chapter 12

## Chapter 12 Summary

Meg hopes that the three ladies can save Charles Wallace. They are her last hope. She demands that they do it, and they refuse. Then, her father offers, but they refuse him, as well. Finally, Calvin tries, but they don't want him either.

Meg realizes that they are waiting for her to offer to save Charles. She loses her temper, and cries out her disappointment and rage. During her outburst, the last of the Black Thing leaves her heart and mind.

Meg is finally calm enough to realize that no one can save Charles Wallace for her. She is the only one who knows Charles and can take him from IT. She tells the ladies that she understands why it has to be her, and gets ready to go back to Camazotz.

Aunt Beast offers to accompany her, but is refused. Meg tells Aunt Beast that she loves her, and says goodbye. As she's saying goodbye to Calvin, he kisses her. Then, she apologizes to her father. He objects to her going, and Mrs. Which insists that he let her do this for herself. Her father says that he is very proud of Meg.

Meg prepares to go with Mrs. Which, while Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who give her gifts. Mrs. Whatsit gives Meg her love. Mrs. Who gives Meg a quote from the Bible about the weak overcoming the strong. Meg goes to Camazotz and Mrs. Which tells Meg that she has something that IT has not. She needs to discover what that is on her own.

Meg heads towards IT trying to figure out what she has that IT doesn't have. Although she is scared to face IT again, she walks toward the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building and enters it to face both IT and Charles Wallace. Charles Wallace taunts her, and tries to convince Meg that the ladies are witches and that they have abandoned and tricked her.

Then, IT makes a mistake. Charles says that Mrs. Whatsit hates Meg. Meg replies that Mrs. Whatsit said that she loves her. Meg then realizes that love is what she has that IT doesn't have. She has love from other people, and she has love to give. She considers giving love to IT, but doesn't think she can. She does, however, love her brother, and can give him that love even though he is in the grip of IT.

Meg stands in the room with Charles and loves him with all her heart, both soundlessly and with words. Her love works. Charles's face goes back to normal, and he runs to Meg. Mrs. Which spirits them away from IT, and they land in the twins' vegetable garden. Meg and Charles Wallace are joined by Mr. Murry and Calvin in the garden. Everyone is happy that Meg saved Charles. Mrs. Murry, Sandy and Dennys come out to see what the noise is about, and there is a happy family reunion. Meg includes Calvin in the celebration, and she feels the warmth and love of the ladies watching over them as the book ends.



## Chapter 12 Analysis

In this chapter, many of the themes of the book come together. Meg realizes that she has let stubbornness and anger blind her to simple truth. The outside world is not the cause of her problems. Her insecurities and need for approval are internal. To solve her problems, she needs to stop depending on other people and start believing in herself.

Meg realizes that she is surrounded by people and creatures who love her in spite of, or even because of, her faults. Her family, Calvin, the ladies, and Aunt Beast all accept her for who she is. She realizes that their love is a powerful force and uses it against IT to rescue Charles Wallace.

Throughout the story, Meg has depended on sight, sound, and touch for reassurance and guidance. She reaches for a hand when tessering. She looks at a creature to see whether they look friendly or evil. She uses words to talk to creatures, even the ones who can read her mind.

When she goes to Camazotz a final time, Meg cannot depend on anything she is familiar with. She is traveling alone, so she can't hold anyone's hand. She realizes that looks can be deceiving, and that she must trust her feelings and her heart. When she faces Charles Wallace at the end, she cannot just verbalize her love. Rather, she needs to feel it and believe it in order to rescue him.

Because of the lessons about love, being different, and appearances, and because she has learned to trust herself, Meg rescues her brother and everyone returns safely to the Murry home. Although Meg cannot see Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which, she feels their love and happiness all around her.



# Characters

## Meg Murry

Meg lives in a New England town with her mother, father and three brothers. She is a typical thirteen-year-old, who hates her looks and has problems in school. Meg has mousy brown hair and wears thick glasses and braces. Meg is a genius at math, but is only average in all her other classes. Meg's faults, particularly anger and stubbornness, get her in trouble at school with her teachers, the principal, and other students.

Meg loves her family, but they are also odd. Charles Wallace, her five-year-old brother is a genius who can tell what Meg is thinking. Meg's mother is a beautiful scientist, who Meg both adores and resents at the same time. Meg also desperately misses her father, who went on a trip a year ago. Mr. Murry was part of a top-secret mission for the government when he disappeared.

Meg's life takes an unusual turn when she meets three visitors who take her to rescue her father. On the way, Meg becomes friends with Calvin O'Keefe, a boy from her high school. Calvin is also special, but he has better learned to hide his differences.

Through her adventures, Meg grows up and learns some truths about herself and the world around her. She learns that her faults and differences make her unique, and that trying to fit in can lead to dangerous conformity. At the beginning of the story, Meg depends on other people to solve her problems. At the end, however, Meg finds that she is strong enough to overcome her fears and rescue her brother alone. Finally, Meg learns not to judge by outward appearances, which can be deceiving.

## Charles Wallace Murry

Charles Wallace is Meg's small, blond, five-year-old brother. Charles isn't in school yet, and he refuses to speak in front of people other than his family. He is a genius, however, and within the family, he speaks in complete sentences, uses difficult words, and understands complex ideas. Charles can also read Meg and her mother's moods and minds. His mother calls him "new."

Charles has a sense about people and can tell whether they are good by delving into their minds. Charles loves his sister, but realizes that she is not like him. He shares more in common with their new friend Calvin, since Calvin also reads people and is a good communicator.

Charles Wallace's talents make him unique and special, but he is not mature enough to handle the consequences of using his power. Charles is a typical know-it-all five-year-old, and his gifts make him arrogant. He puts himself into danger in Camazotz by thinking that he can defeat IT, a powerful evil entity. Charles' sister eventually rescues



him, and his adventures make him more humble and aware of how much he needs to learn.

## Calvin O'Keefe

Calvin is a fellow student at Meg's high school. He is a popular athlete. Calvin reminds Meg of her father, since Calvin is tall, thin, with red hair and bright blue eyes. Calvin is one of eleven children and calls himself a "sport," something different, unique and separate from his brothers and sisters. Calvin loves his family, but they are poor and don't seem to care as much about him. Calvin is very smart (he is a junior at the age of fourteen) but he has learned to hide his differences and fit in at school.

Calvin becomes friends with Meg and Charles Wallace. He feels protective of them both, especially Meg. Calvin's gift is his ability to communicate with other beings. He seems to be a steadying influence on the Murry children, and someone with a more balanced way of dealing with life. Although he is empathetic, he does not let his feelings rule his actions to the extent that Meg does. Although he is smart, Calvin is more humble than Charles Wallace.

In the face of authority, Calvin is respectful and polite. He makes Meg aware of how lucky she is to have the loving parents that she does, and lets her know that he loves her for herself - faults and all.

Mrs. Whatsit

Mrs. Whatsit first appears on a dark and stormy night, an old woman dressed in layers of clothes who speaks in a pleasant "unoiled" kind of voice. She talks of mysterious things like tesseract and being blown off course. Meg, Charles and Calvin learn that she is the youngest of the three ladies, and the most able to verbalize with humans.

The children learn that appearances can be deceiving, and that Mrs. Whatsit is capable of being many things. On Uriel, Mrs. Whatsit changes into a beautiful winged horse/human creature, which fills the children with awe. The children also learn that Mrs. Whatsit was once a star that gave up its life to fight the Black Thing.

Although she is young compared to the other two ladies, Mrs. Whatsit calculates that she is over 200 million years old in Earth time. Mrs. Whatsit gets in trouble sometimes for her sense of humor and her talkativeness.

## Mrs. Who

Although not as young as Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who is the middle-aged lady of the trio. She wears large, thick glasses, and finds it easier to quote from great works than to speak in her own words. What Mrs. Who says is hard to understand, because she quotes from Latin, Shakespeare and the Bible. The children (and the reader) must decipher the meanings hidden in the quotes she uses.



Mrs. Who gives Meg her glasses as a gift, and Meg uses them at a pivotal point in the story to find a way to her father.

## **Mrs. Which**

Mrs. Which is the oldest of the visitors to Earth. She is too old to be comfortable materializing, so often she appears as a shimmer or glimmer of silver. On one planet, she amuses the other two ladies by appearing as a traditional witch, green with a broomstick.

Mrs. Which also has difficulty verbalizing, so her words are drawn out, like an echo.

Being the oldest of the trio, Mrs. Which is the most severe, but, as Mrs. Whatsit says, Mrs. Which is also tolerant of the younger ladies, and Mrs. Whatsit confides that it is an honor to work with her. Mrs. Which is also the lady with the most experience in tessering.

Mrs. Which is almost always right, as when she cautioned the Happy Medium against showing Meg, Charles and Calvin their home on Earth. The sight just made them sad, as she figured it would. The only mistake she made during the story was when she forgot that humans couldn't survive on a two-dimensional planet. Her mistake made the children uncomfortable, but no one was hurt, and she was able to laugh at herself afterward.

## **Mrs. Murry**

Mrs. Murry is Meg's mother, a beautiful auburn-haired scientist who works at home, conducting experiments and taking care of her children. Her husband disappeared a year ago, but she still writes to him every day. She has traveled to Washington DC to discover his whereabouts, but no one can tell her where he is. Although she is matter-of-fact in front of her children, in private she is miserable.

Mrs. Murry, although she is a scientist who likes answers, also realizes that there are mysteries in the world that can't be explained. She knows that her son, Charles Wallace, is something "new" and that his abilities are far beyond most humans. She also is not fazed by the arrival of mysterious visitors who reassure her about her missing husband.

Mrs. Murry talks to Meg as a loving mother would, letting her know that she understands Meg's problems, but letting Meg know that time will solve most of Meg's unhappiness.

## **Mr. Murry**

Mr. Murry is the head of the Murry household, a tall, thin man with long hair and glasses. He loves his wife, who he works with on experiments. He also adores his





family, especially Meg. A world-famous scientist, Mr. Murry discovered the tesseract, a way to travel through space. While trying to tesser to Mars, Mr. Murry traveled off-course and ended up in Camazotz, an evil planet. He was taken prisoner by IT and has resisted IT for over a year. He was almost ready to give up when Meg and Calvin rescued him.

## **Sandy and Dennys**

Sandy and Dennys are Meg's 10-year-old twin brothers. They are the "normal" members of the family, who are good at sports and popular at school. They feel that they are the "men" of the family now that their father is gone. They take care of a vegetable garden in the back of the house.

## **The Happy Medium**

The Happy Medium lives in a cave on a planet in the Orion belt. She is a woman who dresses in a turban and a long flowing purple gown. She uses her crystal ball to see what is happening throughout the universe. She is not able to see the future, just the present. The Happy Medium enjoys seeing happy images, but gets depressed and unhappy when she has to view disturbing things. She shows Meg, Charles and Calvin Earth, their families and a star defeating the Black Thing.

## **Aunt Beast**

Aunt Beast lives on the planet Ixchel, a dull, primitive planet with no color but wonderful smells and food. Meg thinks of her as a monster, a large beast, with soft fur but no face. She communicates through her mind and uses her tentacles to feel and give comfort. At first, Meg is frightened of the monster she perceives Aunt Beast to be, but Aunt Beast is a motherly figure, who misses her children and takes care of Meg when the Black Thing paralyzes her. Aunt Beast loves Meg, and her gentleness and kindness make Meg love her back. Aunt Beast communicates on a higher level with all creatures in the universe, and she feels sorry for Meg for being limited by words, sight, and a lonely home planet.

## **The Man with the Red Eyes**

The man with red eyes is seated in a room in the CENTRAL Central Intelligence Building. The man is controlled by IT and calls himself the Prime Coordinator. The man is not able to move, but he is able to hypnotize people to do ITs bidding. The man doesn't think on his own, but he is a conduit for ITs thoughts. He describes himself as a jolly, old man, but the red eyes are so compelling that no one can see his face to determine whether he is kind or cruel.

## IT

IT is a giant brain that controls the man with the red eyes and the citizens of Camazotz. Because there is only a brain, IT needs other people to do things. IT is part of the evil that is the Black Thing, and IT is very old. Because of IT's strength and age, IT is not used to anyone resisting, which is how Mr. Murry was able to resist for so long. IT is also not capable of recognizing love, only hate and fear.



## Objects/Places

### The Murry House

Meg lives in a typical New England house with her three brothers, mother and father. The house has an attic, three bedrooms, a kitchen and a vegetable garden in the back. The garden is where Meg leaves the house and where she finally returns. Meg's mother conducts some of her experiments in the house, and waits for her missing husband. Mrs. Whatsit makes an appearance here.

### Meg's School

Meg goes to a typical high school. She irritates her teachers and the principal, Mr. Jenkins. She gets into fights because of remarks people make about her and her brother Charles. Her new friend Calvin also goes to school with her, although he is a few grades above her.

### The Haunted House

Mrs. Which, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Whatsit have added all the trappings of a haunted house to the old abandoned one in the woods. That way, they can wait without too many people discovering them. Meg and Calvin meet Mrs. Who here.

### Uriel

Uriel is a beautiful planet that contains oxygen flowers, butterflies and gorgeous scenery. The animals on this planet are half human/half horse, with rainbow wings. The music they sing is beautiful and brings peace.

### The Happy Medium's Planet - Orion's Belt

The Happy Medium lives on a smoggy, gray planet that is perpetually cold and dark. She lives in a cave, and makes a bonfire for the children.

### Camazotz

This planet at first seems normal. There are trees, buildings and people that look like those of Earth. Meg, Charles Wallace and Calvin at first see nothing wrong with the people who live here. A closer look reveals that the children are playing in rhythm and that the mothers are doing the exact same things at the same time. There is a sense of



fear and paranoia from the people, as well as a warped sense of pride. Everyone is the same here, as if they are being controlled by one mind to think alike.

## The Glass Column

This column is in the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, the headquarters of Camazotz. The man with red eyes and IT are holding Meg's father prisoner in this glass prison. When Meg goes in to rescue him, she realizes that it is too dark to see anything. Mr. Murry has survived more than a year in this dark chamber.

## Ixchel

This planet is reddish-gray and dull. Everything looks the same. But the wind is full of wonderful fragrances. There are beasts that live on this planet, tall creatures with tentacles but no faces. They aren't able to see, but they use their other senses to make wonderful food, sing beautiful songs and heal Meg from the coldness of the Black Thing.

## The Black Thing

The Black Thing is a cloud that swallows up the goodness and light of stars, planets, and the people on them. It is not random, but an intelligent mass of pure evil. It can be fought, but often the fighter loses his, her, or its life. The Black Thing has shadowed the Earth for a long time, which is why the Earth has so many problems. But many great men throughout history have fought the shadow, and Mr. Murry, Meg, Charles and Calvin join in the fight.

## Tesseract

To tesseract is to travel through the fifth dimension, through time and space. It is a wrinkle in time that allows travel to distant planets in a short time. When tessering, Meg feels like she is in a void without sight, sound or feeling. Coming out of a tesser brings a tingling feeling into the body. When Meg tesser through the Black Thing, in addition to the dark, she feels a sense of coldness and despair that tries to grab her. Mrs. Which is an expert at tessering. Meg's father can tesser, but he cannot control where he goes.

## Setting

The story opens at the Murrays' New England farm. The children's physicist father disappeared without a trace some time ago, and their mother, also a scientist, is waiting patiently for him to return. The setting soon leaves earth; five-year-old Charles Wallace has met three very odd old ladies, who take the children on a journey across space and time. Eventually they reach the planet Camazotz. It is here that the Murrays' father has been imprisoned in a glass column, frozen in a state of suspended animation. Camazotz is remarkably similar to an ordinary world gone terribly wrong; everyone acts in exactly the same way, ruled by the evil force of IT.

## Social Sensitivity

Although L'Engle is a Christian author, *A Wrinkle in Time* is never didactic and is largely free of explicit references to Christianity. Jesus is mentioned as one of Earth's greatest "fighters" against the evil represented by IT, but so too are Buddha, Gandhi, Einstein, and Michelangelo. L'Engle stresses that the most important virtue is the unselfish love of others—a basic tenet of nearly every world religion. Her characters are often faced with the choice between self-interest and the well-being of others; the most admirable learn to see the wisdom—and the joy—of thinking of others first.

In *A Wrinkle in Time*, L'Engle juxtaposes views of two different planets to explicate her themes and examine the nature of evil: Camazotz is a planet of darkness where IT rules; Earth, which is only "shadowed," still struggles against destruction. L'Engle is concerned with salvation on a universal scale, but she is equally interested in exploring the individual battles that must be fought every day in order to prevent darkness from conquering even more territory. *A Wrinkle In Time* allows her to explore this notion and to show readers that the choices that each person makes have a direct impact on the destiny of every other creature.

## Literary Qualities

A Wrinkle in Time is a fast-paced adventure tale enlivened by a memorable cast of characters. A masterful writer who infuses the novel with suspense and emotion, L'Engle is also a devout Christian whose own search for a workable system of beliefs underpins this story. She makes use of symbols and allusions that clearly indicate that she is telling a story of the struggle between absolute good and absolute evil. L'Engle draws on a rich literary heritage, including the Bible, John Milton's Paradise Lost, and the fantasy works of J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis. The universe of A Wrinkle in Time is an imaginative one, populated by unconventional beings; L'Engle's use of characters drawn from myth and fairy tales reflects her interest in finding new ways to express traditional Christian concerns.

Not only does L'Engle deal sensitively with religious philosophy, she also has a wonderful ability to create believable human characters, particularly children. The anxieties experienced by Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin are neither overexaggerated nor undervalued.

L'Engle shows the reader children who, by virtue of their very weaknesses and uncertainties, are persons with whom young readers instantly sympathize.

Calvin and the Murry children realistically demonstrate such familiar apprehensions as fear of ridicule and rejection; a sense of injustice at the arbitrariness of adult rules and regulations; and a notion of inadequacy and uncertainty. Throughout, L'Engle's treatment of her characters' inner problems is both sensitive and thoughtprovoking.



# Themes

## Good versus Evil

The overriding theme of this book is the struggle between good and evil.

The Dark Thing has swallowed up part of the galaxy. The Dark Thing swallows up light and goodness, and leaves darkness, pain, and sickness. The epitome of the Dark Thing is the planet Camazotz. On Camazotz, the people are ruled by a giant brain named IT, which saps their individuality and independence. The people live in fear, and the planet is full of menace.

Goodness is personified by light and music and love. Uriel and Ixchel, although they are different looking planets, personify the good. Both planets are full of beautiful sounds and smells and tastes. The creatures on these planets are accepting of others, and understand that appearances matter less than behavior and spirit.

Goodness is not without pain, as the reader sees when a star gives up its life to fight evil. The star had the choice to fight and die, and that makes all the difference. On Camazotz, IT expects complete submission, and choice is not an option.

Love is the ultimate good, and there are many forms of love throughout this story. There is the love Meg's family has for her and she for them. There is the love that Meg has for Aunt Beast and for the ladies. Meg also comes to love Calvin during the story. But the love of humans is only part of the story. The children realize that everyone who fights evil does so out of love. Love is something that can be felt by all good creatures. IT is powerful, but is defeated because IT doesn't understand love (or any feeling) and therefore loses Charles Wallace.

## Appearance (Sight) and What Is (Spirit)

Throughout the book, Meg relies on her sight to identify characters. She comes to realize, however, that vision is only one sense, and usually not the most important one.

Mrs. Whatsit appears to be an eccentric old woman at first. Then, she changes into a winged creature, half god/ half horse. Finally, Meg discovers that she was once a star. All of these iterations of Mrs. Whatsit are part of who she is, but not the whole part.

Aunt Beast is also a contradiction between what is seen and what is actually true. Aunt Beast looks frightening because she is large, covered in fur and has no face, just tentacles. Meg is initially frightened of her. After Aunt Beast cares for Meg, sings to her, and loves her, Meg sees beyond her physical presence to the loving spirit.

Appearance can also be used in a sinister way, as evidenced by a number of things on Camazotz. The people of Camazotz seem orderly and go about their business efficiently





and quickly. At first, Meg thinks that they are a perfect world. But she comes to realize that they are like robots, and are incapable of feeling. The only reaction the children receive on the planet is fear and suspicion for not knowing the rules and being different.

The children come to see the facade of normality is a cover for a sinister evil.

Also on Camazotz, Meg and Calvin enjoy a wonderful turkey dinner that smells and tastes delicious to them. Charles Wallace realizes that the dinner is a synthetic substitute, but IT has made it appear appetizing to tempt the children.

And finally, and most heartbreakingly to Meg, when her brother Charles Wallace is taken over by IT, he still looks the same. His body hasn't changed, but the spirit and love that made him Meg's little brother have been changed into indifference and cruelty.

## Different and Alike

At the beginning of the story, Meg bemoans her faults and the fact that she and her family are different from everyone else in her town. She wants to be the same, so that she can be less unhappy. Although her family accepts her differences and celebrates her uniqueness, Meg is not confident and wants to fit in.

Throughout her adventures, Meg is told that her faults are actually her greatest strengths. Her family and the ladies are patient with her faults, accepting her regardless of them. Her determination, stubbornness, anger and love are what keep her going and keep her strong throughout the book.

On Camazotz, Meg comes face to face with a society where everyone is alike. Differences are aberrations, and are punished by painful re-education. The people of Camazotz are not happy. They are suspicious, fearful, and quick to become defensive to avoid being punished. Meg realizes that, although her faults have caused her to be unhappy in the past, that unhappiness has made her appreciate her joyful times more.

Meg finally understands that her differences make her unique, and that everyone is different in some way. Everyone on her adventure has faults and problems, but the good beings she meets accept those faults and love each other in spite of them. Meg's family, Calvin, the ladies, and Aunt Beast are not perfect, but she loves them and they love Meg. The only creatures that don't accept Meg are the evil ones that want her to change to fit their idea of right. Meg's teachers, Mr. Jenkins, and IT are lumped together as figures of authority without understanding.

## Communicating with Words or with Other Senses

Throughout the book there is a back-and-forth in terms of communication. The Murrays and Calvin all use words to describe what they are feeling and thinking. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which also use words in order to make the children feel more at ease. At one point, Charles Wallace tells the man with red eyes that, "The spoken word



is one of the triumphs of man, and I intend to continue using it, particularly with people I don't trust."

However, throughout the book, the author also identifies the problems and limitations of words. Charles Wallace and Calvin are gifted in that they can communicate on a level that is beyond Meg's language skills. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who and Mrs. Which sometimes have problems communicating with language. Aunt Beast and her fellow creatures say that the spoken word is so simple it is complicated.

Instead of language, other creatures in the book communicate with their minds, through music, through touch, and through feelings. Music is central to Uriel, and on Ixchel, Aunt Beast sings Meg a song of indescribable beauty. Meg, Charles and Calvin hold hands and comfort each other with hugs throughout the story, and Aunt Beast comforts Meg through holding her. Meg ultimately defeats IT not by words, but by the feelings she communicates to Charles Wallace.

There is a sense that the non-human creatures of the universe communicate through their souls and are able to interact with both the smallest being and with the largest star. As one of the creatures on Ixchel noted, the humans on Earth must be lonely because they can't communicate with other planets. So, words seem to be a limiting factor in the ability to communicate with other creatures in the universe.



## Themes/Characters

A Wrinkle in Time tells the story of a battle between absolute good and evil for control of the universe. If Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin lose, everyone loses.

The characters in A Wrinkle in Time range in type from "ordinary" humans to good witches to disembodied entities referred to only as Thing or IT. But even the human characters are extraordinary in the talents they possess and in the courageous behavior that they exhibit when put to the test.

The Murry children—Meg, her twin brothers Sandy and Dennys, and Charles Wallace—are all intelligent, Charles Wallace especially so. In the small New England town where they live, Meg and Charles Wallace are misfits; Sandy and Dennys are more social and thus fit in at school. The Murry parents are both highly intelligent and well-educated; Mr. Murry is a physicist, Mrs. Murry a biologist. Mr. Murry has been missing, however, for more than a year, and the gossip around town is increasing.

Despite the strain of Mr. Murry's absence, the Murry household remains a warm, supportive place. L'Engle stresses that the Murry children are wise and loving because their parents allow them to express themselves and to explore the world in whatever directions their curiosity leads them. Love makes the difference in Meg's final battle.

Meg Murry sees herself as an outcast at school, a homely nobody who will never fit in. She constantly challenges authority and is often sent to the principal's office for insubordination. In truth, Meg is a special young woman who eventually discovers her inner strength and the importance of loyalty and love. Meg is the only person able to conquer the powers of blackness represented by IT, the grotesque disembodied brain that tyrannizes Camazotz.

Charles Wallace is a different sort of child. Wise far beyond his years, he talks more like an adult than a five-year-old child. His understanding of science and mathematics is perhaps as great as his parents', and he absorbs new information voraciously. His intellect, however, proves his downfall on Camazotz. Like many people, Charles Wallace is blind to his own limitations; he incorrectly believes that he can match wits with IT.

He lacks the humility that would allow him to make wise judgments, and his arrogance causes him to become a robot-like slave to IT.

Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Whatsit—the three old women who function as the children's guides—are also fighting against the forces of darkness. First introduced as a ragtag trio that has occupied an abandoned house near the Murry farm, these three old women take on various forms as the adventure progresses. They lead the children to Camazotz by means of a "tesseract," a bending of time and space that allows a person to jump from place to place in the universe.



Yet Mrs. Who, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Whatsit cannot fight the children's battles for them, nor will they give Meg, Charles Wallace, or Calvin answers to all of their questions. The children must make choices and find answers for themselves, and must learn to choose the path of love and fellowship on their own. The most that the three old women will do is offer advice. They tell Charles Wallace that he doesn't know all of the answers (and he forgets to heed their advice), and they give Meg a pair of glasses and advice that she eventually uses to save her father and brother.

L'Engle teaches that love will make anyone strong, and that unselfish love for others can enable a person to overcome temptation and wickedness.



# Style

## Point of View

The story is told in the semi-omniscient third person, from a thirteen-year-old girl's point of view. While Meg Murry is not the narrator, the narrator follows her experience and focuses on her thoughts and feelings. She is a confused girl who feels angry and hurt that she is "odd" and doesn't fit in at school. She is also worried about her father, who has disappeared.

Throughout the story, we see Meg interact with her family and friends, as well as with some fantastic creatures in space. Through it all, Meg's thoughts and reactions remain true to that of a young girl trying to make sense of her world.

## Setting

The book begins on Earth, during the fall. The garden is where Meg leaves the earth and where she finally returns. There is also school to attend and woods to explore.

The children then travel to two interim planets. The first is Uriel, a beautiful place where the air is pure, the sun is shining and fantastic creatures fly through the air. This planet is where Meg first sees the dark shadow. Then, the children are taken to the Happy Medium's planet. It is a dark place, but not a scary one. These settings are just preliminary to the main setting, which is the planet on which Meg's father is being held captive.

Camazotz is behind an evil dark cloud. This planet looks like Earth, but the people on Camazotz act like robots, and are fearful of not conforming to the rules. The planet also contains the CENTRAL Central Intelligence building, where the man with red eyes and IT can be found. At first, Meg thinks this planet is fine, but she grows increasingly frightened of what it entails. Meg finds her father on this planet, and battles for him and her brother against evil.

While recovering from her first battle, Meg is taken to Ixchel, a planet where the inhabitants are beasts with tentacles and no faces. The beasts can't see, but they feel more than Meg has ever experienced. Although at first Meg is frightened on this planet, she eventually comes to realize that the beasts are good and she is safe there.

Much of the book is also taken up with the concept of the tesseract, and describing how it feels to tesser from one location to another. It is almost as if the void that Meg, Charles and Calvin go through is a place as well, at first full of fear and danger, then of familiarity.



## Language and Meaning

This book is written for young adults, although some of the themes are universal and can be appreciated by adults. The book starts out in a normal setting, and features a girl with seemingly normal problems. The hints of mystery that are revealed in the first chapter lead to more and more bizarre settings. This is expected, since the book is science fiction. Since the reader sees all of these places and events through the eyes of a normal teenager, the events, however fantastic, seem grounded in her reality.

The author uses a made-up scientific term "tesseract" to describe how the characters can travel from place to place in an instant. The author deviates from traditional novels when explaining what a tesseract is. She uses pictures to help illustrate what traveling through space and time would entail. Even if the reader can't grasp the scientific explanation, the illustrations help to make the concept real to younger readers.

Although this book is written as a young-adult, science-fiction story, the author does tackle some large themes and issues. She talks about showing love and fighting evil, being different and alike, appearance versus reality, and many others. She also quotes the Bible and mentions religion on more than one occasion. Making Meg the heroine of the story makes these bigger themes accessible to a teenage reader, and makes them think of what they would do in similar situations.

## Structure

This 190-page book is divided into twelve short chapters. Most of these introduce a new character, and are named for that character. The book is set in the present day.

It is difficult to determine the timeline for this book. Meg talks to Calvin about the past year and how hard it has been on her and her mother. But the main events in the book seem to take place during one or two days at the most. Meg only sleeps once, towards the end of the story, and then only for one night. The other events in the book seem to happen during the same day.



## Quotes

"Speaking of ways, pet, by the way, there *is* such a thing as a tesseract." (Chapter 1, p. 26)

"*Nothing deters a good man from doing what is honorable.* And he's a very good man, Charles, darling, but right now he needs our help." (Chapter 2, p. 40)

"I've never even seen your house, and I have the funniest feeling that for the first time in my life I'm going home." (Chapter 2, p. 40)

"'Maybe we weren't meant to meet before this,' Calvin said. 'I mean, I knew who you were in school and everything, but I didn't know you. But I'm glad we've met now, Meg. We're going to be friends, you know.'" (Chapter 3, p. 41)

"There hasn't been anybody, anybody in the world I could talk to. Sure, I can function on the same level as everybody else, I can hold myself down, but it isn't me." (Chapter 3, p. 46)

"Charles Wallace is what he is. Different. New. People are more than just the way they look. Charles Wallace's difference isn't physical. It's in his essence." (Chapter 3, p. 48)

"But Meg felt as each moment passed that [Charles Wallace] was growing farther and farther away, that he was becoming less and less her adored baby brother and more and more one with whatever kind of being Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which in actuality were." (Chapter 4, p. 67)

"What could there be about a shadow that was so horrible that she knew that there had never been before or ever would be again, anything that would chill her with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort?" (Chapter 4, p. 69-70)

"Well, the fifth dimension's a tesseract. You add that to the other four dimensions and you can travel through space without having to go the long way around." (Chapter 5, p. 75)

"You know perfectly well why. You've shut your mind entirely to me. The other two can't. I can get in through the chinks. Not all the way in, but enough to give them a turkey dinner. You see, I'm really just a kind, jolly old gentleman." (Chapter 7, p. 119)

"Charles continued his lecture. 'Here on Camazotz, everyone is happy because they are all alike. Differences create problems. You know that don't you, dear sister?' "'No,' Meg said. 'Maybe I don't like being different,' Meg said, 'but maybe I don't want to be like everyone else either.'" (Chapter 8, p. 127-128)



"'Nobody ever suffers here,' Charles intoned. 'Nobody is ever unhappy.' "'But nobody's ever happy, either,' Meg said earnestly. 'Maybe if you aren't unhappy sometimes you don't know how to be happy.'" (Chapter 8, p. 129)

"Whatever the Black Thing was to which Camazotz had submitted, it was within as well as without the planet." (Chapter 9, p. 139)

"Then she realized that Charles Wallace was speaking, or being spoken through by IT. 'But that's exactly what we have on Camazotz. Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike.' "'No!' she cried triumphantly. '*Like* and *equal* are not the same thing at all.'" (Chapter 10, p. 146)

"She had found her father and he had not made everything all right. Everything kept getting worse and worse. If the long search for her father was ended, and he wasn't able to overcome all their difficulties, there was nothing to guarantee that it would all come out right in the end. There was nothing left to hope for. She teetered on the seesaw of love and hate, and the Black Thing pushed her down into hate." (Chapter 11, p. 156)

"We are called according to His purpose, and whom He calls, them He also justifies. Of course we have help, and without help it would be much more difficult." "'Who helps you?' Meg asked. "'Good helps us, the stars help us, perhaps what you would call light helps us, love helps us.'" (Chapter 11, p. 168-169)

"I wanted you to do it all for me. I wanted everything to be all easy and simple... So I tried to pretend that it was all your fault... because I was scared, and I didn't want to have to do anything myself - " (Chapter 12, p. 180)

*"The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called, but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are."* (Chapter 12, p. 182)

"'You mean you're comparing our lives to a sonnet? A strict form, but freedom within it?' "'Yes,' Mrs. Whatsit said. 'You're given the form, but you have to write the sonnet yourself. What you say is completely up to you.'" (Chapter 12, p. 179)

"She knew! Love. That was what she had that IT did not have. She had Mrs. Whatsit's love, and her father's, and her mother's, and the real Charles Wallace's love, and the twins', and Aunt Beast's. And she had her love for them." (Chapter 12, p. 187)





## Topics for Discussion

1. Although Charles Wallace seems to be the "smartest" of the Murry children, it is Meg who frees her father and ultimately conquers IT. Why do you think this is so?
2. Why does L'Engle seem to believe that the uniformity of the people on the planet Camazotz is such a bad thing?
3. Why does Charles Wallace start reciting nursery rhymes when the man with red eyes starts to interrogate the children?
4. What does Aunt Beast mean when she tells Meg that "We are all called according to His purpose, and whom He calls, them He also justifies. Of course we have help, and without help it would be much more difficult"? Who is doing the "calling," what is the help, and where does it come from?
5. Meg realizes an important lesson at the conclusion of the book when she rescues her brother, Charles Wallace, from the clutches of IT. IT knew everything about hate, but Meg knows about love. How is love able to help her to save her brother?
6. What does Charles Wallace mean when he describes himself as a "sport" in chapter 2?  
He trusted too much in his own strength"?
8. In what ways does the town on Camazotz differ from a typical American suburb? What is L'Engle criticizing in her depiction of this town?
9. What is it about the Murrys that makes the other townspeople look on them with suspicion? How does the family differ from the other families in town?



## Essay Topics

Meg, Calvin and Charles are told that there have been fighters of the Dark Shadow throughout history on Earth. They name religious figures, artists and scientists. Name two other people, either in the present or the past, who could be considered fighters for good. Explain why you chose them.

Throughout the book, Meg is angry that she is different and that her family is odd. Explain how her visit to Camazotz changes her attitude about being like everyone else.

In chapter 12, Mrs. Who quotes a passage to Meg: "*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty. And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to naught things that are.*" Why would this quote be relevant to Meg and IT or to good and evil?

Compare Meg's village and school with Camazotz. How are they similar and different? How does Meg react to both places?

Meg says that "Like and equal are not the same." What does she mean by this?

One of the book's themes is communication, specifically words and other forms of communication. How does the author feel about words as a means of communication? In what other ways do the creatures in the story communicate?

Why is Meg so angry with her father on the planet Ixchel? By the end of the story, what realization does she come to concerning her parents?

Uriel and Ixchel are two very different planets in the story, but they are also similar in many ways. Compare and contrast them.

There are many mentions of a "Happy Medium" throughout the book. What are the two ways the phrase is defined in the book?

What does Mrs. Whatsit mean when she says that life is like a sonnet?

# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. L'Engle has said that she believes all things to be inter-connected; thus, if something happens to one person, it has an effect on everything in the universe.

How does this attitude shape *A Wrinkle in Time*? Does this idea resemble the Hindu and Buddhist concept of karma in any way? How?

2. When Calvin visits the Murrays for the first time, he says that he feels that he is going home. What is lacking in his own family life that makes him react in this way? What does the Murry family have that his own family does not? Why is Calvin attracted to Meg, who sees herself as a social outcast? What special qualities does she possess that Calvin sees but she cannot yet see herself?

3. L'Engle would characterize herself as a Christian writer, yet her book doesn't talk about the Bible or the teachings of Christianity. What values does *A Wrinkle in Time* say are important? How do these values correspond to those taught in the Old and New Testament? In what ways?

4. Meg has trouble bowing to authority, particularly when it seems that the rules are silly or pointless. This is especially true with regard to her problems at school. What is it about Mr. Jenkins, the school principal, that rubs her the wrong way? Why does he think that Meg is a problem?

5. Even Charles Wallace's high I.Q. does not prevent him from falling victim to his major weakness, pride. How does IT exploit this weakness? What does IT want with Charles Wallace? How close does IT come to succeeding, and why does IT fail?

6. Read one of the sequels to *A Wrinkle in Time*: *A Wind in the Door*, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, or *Many Waters*. Focus on one of the characters, and examine how this character changes or develops in the later book.

7. Pick several "unreal characters" (like Mrs. Whatsit or Aunt Beast) and an "unreal" location (like Camazotz) and discuss how L'Engle makes her more fantastic fictional creations believable.

## Further Study

Kingman, Lee, ed. *Newbery and Caldecott Medal Books, 1956-1965*. Boston: Horn Book, 1965. The article on L'Engle includes an excerpt from *A Wrinkle in Time*, her acceptance speech for the Newbery Medal, and a delightful biographical article by her husband, Hugh Franklin.

L'Engle, Madeleine. *Trailing Clouds of Glory: Spiritual Values in Children's Literature*. Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975. A discussion of the need for children's literature to provide spiritual touchstones, with excerpts from many classic children's books that L'Engle sees as fulfilling this need.

Newquist, Roy. *Conversations*. Skokie, IL: Rand McNally, 1967. A more compact discussion of many of the issues L'Engle touches on in her autobiographical work *A Circle of Quiet*.

Townsend, John Rowe. *A Sense of Story: Essays on Contemporary Writers for Children*. London: Longman, 1971.

The essay on L'Engle is a thematic discussion of the Austin and Murry books and includes an extract from a paper she gave in 1964.



## Related Titles

*A Wrinkle in Time* is the first in a series of books—which also includes *A Wind in the Door* and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*—often referred to as the Time Trilogy.

L'Engle added a fourth book, *Many Waters*, to the series in 1986. Each of these books focuses on different members of the Murry family as they continue to wage battle against the powers of darkness that threaten to dominate the universe.

In *A Wind in the Door*, Meg must help Charles Wallace stop a threatened rip in the galaxy that will destroy earth. Instead of traveling to distant planets, Meg, Calvin, and Mr. Jenkins—the school principal who has caused Meg so much grief—travel within Charles Wallace's cells to battle a virus. They are helped on their quest by a cherubim, Proginoskes, who gives his life for his friends. Many critics judge this second book the least satisfying of the series.

The third book, *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, follows Charles Wallace and a unicorn named Gaudior on a journey through time and space as they try to solve a puzzle that will avert nuclear war. Meg, now married to Calvin and pregnant, stays at home and sends her brother information through a form of telepathy called "kything." The puzzle is finally solved by Mrs. O'Keefe, who played only a minor role in the previous books.

The final book in the series, *Many Waters*, chronicles the adventures of the twins, Sandy and Dennys, who learn the meaning of love and self-sacrifice while living with Noah and his family in the last days before the great flood.



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