



Book Study: *The Green Ember* – Syllabus

Course Description: S.D. Smith's *The Green Ember* presents many ideas worthy of discussion, far too many to cover each one in-depth in just eight weeks. For this class, we have chosen to focus on the theme of purpose, that of finding one's place in the story of life. Students will see how main characters Heather and Picket discover their places in the fight against evil and the preservation of good, whilst learning how to spot hindrances to our individual purposes.

Students will read the complete text of *The Green Ember* and complete weekly written responses. Optional weekly vocabulary lists will be supplied, which can be further expanded at home as daily spelling practice.

Students must have a copy of *The Green Ember* to read. *Prerequisite: Essay Basics or equivalent five-paragraph essay experience highly recommended.*

Course Outline:

Week One: *Starting Place*

- Meeting S.D. Smith
- Read Chapter 1-5
- Discussing Identity: Family Roots
- How Fear Can Define Us

Week Two: *First Impressions*

- Read Chapters 6-11
- First Impressions: Heather, Picket, & Smalls
- Character Compare: Picket vs. Smalls

Week Three: *The Story Isn't Over*

- Read Chapters 12-17
- Character Compare II: Picket vs. Smalls
- Danger, Evil, and Anger
- Folly, Pride, & Apologies

Week Four: *The Truth*

- Read Chapters 18-22
- Learning More: Heather & Picket
- Seeking the Truth

Week Five: *Where We Belong*

- Read Chapters 23-28
- Perspective through a Metaphor
- Heralds of the Mended Wood – Connection & Theme

Week Six: *The Green Ember*

- Read Chapters 29-34
- Forget or Face?
- Perspective in Purpose

Week Seven: *A Song of Hope*

- Read Chapters 35-39
- Conspire Against Gloom – Finding Hope in the Face of Evil
- Too Much Focus on 'Our Place' – What Can Destroy our Purpose
- We Must Make Choices

Week Eight: *The End*

- Read Chapters 40-44
- The Changes of Picket & Heather
- Final Responses

Grading Information: All assignments will be graded using *The Growing Writer Rubric* and averaged to receive a final course grade.



Book Study: *The Green Ember*

Lesson One: Starting Place

SAMPLE LESSON

The Green Ember is not classic literature. In fact, this book was just released in 2014; the fourth and final book of the series was released in April 2020. So, this story is rather new – yet, it captures just what author S.D. Smith had in mind: “new stories with an old soul.” As you read *The Green Ember*, you may see connections between it and other popular series such as *The Lord of the Rings*, *Redwall*, or *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Regardless, we guarantee that you will not want to put this book down. And when you are done, you will want to read Book II, III, and IV. *The Green Ember* is packed with adventure, suspense, and emotion. This is a book that is capable of captivating young and old audiences alike. We are so excited that *The Green Ember* came across our desk not so long ago, because we believe this is a book that many people can enjoy and benefit from, even if it is not part of a list of classic literature.

We encourage you to begin this week by getting to know S.D. Smith.

Assignment 1A: Visit S.D. Smith's personal website and read his biography page:

<https://sdsmith.com/about-sam/>. If you wish and you have your parents' permission, you may also follow the additional links below to the author's social media accounts.

After you have read a little bit about S.D. Smith, **please write and submit** at least one thing that you enjoyed learning about him and/or the ideas behind his stories.

1. Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/sdsmithereens/?hl=en>
2. Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SDSmithAuthor>
3. Goodreads: https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/12570705.S_D_Smith

Assignment 1B: Read Chapters 1-5 of *The Green Ember*.

USING TEXTUAL EVIDENCE –

Before we get started on this week's responses, we want to briefly review the proper way to use evidence from the text itself. In many response assignments, we may ask you to quote directly from *The Green Ember*, or you may simply want to refer to the location of something in the book. When referencing or quoting from a book, follow these formatting rules:

- Capitalize references to specific chapters: *in Chapter 20*, we see that . . .
- Use numerals for chapter references: *Chapter 20*, not *Chapter Twenty* . . .
- All direct quotations should be followed by the page number: “Picket flung the star, and it sailed, red ribbon against blue sky, far into the meadow” (p. 58).
- Notice how the period goes on the outside of the closing parenthesis, not at the end of the quotation.
- Use the abbreviation p. for a direct quotation located on a single page; if you use a direct quotation that spans two pages, just pp. For example: (p. 17) (pp. 17-18).

FAMILY ROOTS –

In Chapter 1, we read the following:

They crossed to the meadow's edge quickly, an eye on the approaching storm. Heather looked up at the tangled mess of the maple tree. Its limbs stretched out like the brittle arms of a lanky monster; its hollow middle was a crevice of decay.

It was a young tree, nowhere near as big as the wide elm the rabbits made their home in. But the monster maple was dying. This seemed wrong to Heather, but Father had confirmed it.

“Yes, it's a very young tree. But it won't last two more winters. It's doomed,” he had said while walking with them last year in the spring, “just like everything in the east. It used to be alive and beautiful. But now it's bent, dangerous, and dying.”

Heather had felt a chill as he said this, a rare display of sadness by their father. But, come to think of it, Heather thought she could see this more and more in him. Was Father getting sadder, or was she just getting old enough to see it? She hadn't asked him then, or since, the questions that continued to bubble up in her mind: *Where are we from? Why did we come*

here?

Whether we realize it or not, our family roots shape who we are. As we focus on the idea of **purpose** throughout the reading of *The Green Ember* and our corresponding responses, we want to begin with the idea of how family history shapes our purposes as individuals.

Perhaps you know much of your family history and understand how the legacy of one of your relatives or the impact of a certain family event has shaped who you are today. Perhaps you know little of your family history and feel that the lack of knowledge leaves you with questions, like Heather's questions in Chapter 1. Perhaps you find yourself somewhere in the middle, knowing some of your family history but having never connected any of it to who you yourself are.

Let us explore some of that this week in our writing; because our past shapes our present. At the start of *The Green Ember*, Heather and Picket know very little of their past. At first, this does not seem to matter. But as the events of Chapters 4 and 5 unfold, it becomes apparent that Heather, Picket, Father, Mother, and Jacks are not just your average, happy rabbit family. Something in their past leads them to a very dangerous present – one that requires Heather and Picket to gain a whole new understanding of their purpose and place in the story.

We will learn more about Heather and Picket's family history as we continue to read *The Green Ember*; as we go, we will also continue to make personal connections to our own roots to learn how it shapes who we are and who we will be.

Assignment 1C: Write about a family member or family event that has shaped who you are in some way. If writing about a person, describe this person's character and influence, using specific examples to highlight this person's effect on your own life. If writing about an event, summarize the event clearly and describe the impact of this event on your own life. **(Minimum 250 words)**

FEAR –

Next, let's talk about fear. This is an important theme seen throughout *The Green Ember* and something that directly relates to our purpose in life. Throughout these opening chapters, we discover that Heather is afraid of telling the stories she has in her mind; Picket is afraid of heights and, in general, faints easily in situations of distress. As the story begins, these fears define them and form a part of their identities. In Chapter 2, we read the following:

“Heather?” Father asked. “Would you like to tell us a little tale?”

She looked down, blushed, coughed, and stammered. “Well, I don't know.” She did know. *Not now. Not Yet.* “Maybe next time?”

Father looked at her with a hint of disappointment and seemed about to say something; then he just looked into the fire. After a while, he spoke.

“Heather, I think you are very brave. What you did today, out there in the storm, took courage. All of life is a battle against fear. We fight it on one front, and it sneaks around to our flank.” He paused, looked kindly at her.

“Yes, Father. I understand.”

“I regret many things I've done,” he said, “but most of all I regret those moments when I said to Fear, 'You are my master.'” He suddenly looked terribly sad.

“What is it, Father?” Picket asked as Mother tenderly took Jacks from him.

“It's only that, when you're older, you hand out wisdom to your children like you know everything, but it is sometimes hard to follow your own advice.”

“I don't think you're afraid of anything,” Picket said. “You wouldn't ever faint.”

“Well,” Father said, looking down, “I'm sorry to say that's not true. I'm not proud of everything I've done, son.”

Mother's soothing noises could be heard from across the room where she quieted Baby Jacks for bed.

“What about that story, Father?” Heather said. “A story about bravery?”

“A story to make us brave,” Father said . . .

When we look at other people, we often see the brave things they do, but assume that they can accomplish these things because they are fearless. In the above excerpt, we see that Picket assumes his Father is never fearful. And yet Father dispels this myth. He tells his children that “all of life is a battle against fear.” Then he says something truly powerful about fear: “. . . most of all I regret those moments when I said to Fear, 'You are my master.'”

Assignment 1D: What does Father mean by this? What does it mean to say to Fear, “You are my master”? And why would this cause regret? Have you ever experienced this in your own life? Use specific examples to explain the meaning of Father's statement. **(Minimum 250 words)**

The reality is that fear has the opportunity to control us and define us. But we do not have to allow it to do so. People do not accomplish courageous things because they are fearless. They accomplish these courageous things because they look Fear in the face and say instead, “You do not own me.”

As we continue to follow along with Heather and Picket's journey, you will see them do the same. And as you watch each of them stare down their own personal fears, we hope that you too will be encouraged to stand up to some of your own fears, not allowing them to define your identity any longer.

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Lesson One – Vocabulary List

SAMPLE

(Note: weekly vocabulary lists are optional and do not need to be submitted with the homework.)

Definitions – Using a dictionary, look up each of the following words from Chapters 1-5. After reading the definition, write it down *in your own words*.

Spelling – You may also use this list for spelling practice. Copy each word on the list for three or four days. On the final day of your school week, write each word without looking at the list or have a parent quiz you in oral spelling. Can you spell each word correctly?

Vocabulary Words –

1. agile
2. aloft
3. calamitous
4. crevice
5. diplomacy
6. enticement
7. foreboding
8. forge
9. heedless
10. idyllic
11. incredulous
12. invariably
13. ominous
14. uncanny
15. vigilantly