



Literature

# A Wrinkle in Time

by Madeleine L'Engle

A Lively Learning Guide  
by Shmoop

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## In a Nutshell/Overview

Despite being the 1963 [Newbery Medal](#) Winner and a best-selling classic, *A Wrinkle in Time* had a rough road to publication. Author [Madeleine L'Engle](#) received rejection after rejection from publishers who couldn't figure out who would want to read this odd mix of science, fantasy, and religion. Finally, after two years of trying, L'Engle found a publisher willing to take a risk on her book - a risk that paid off.

Why did those early publishers have such a hard time seeing the book's appeal? L'Engle herself has offered various reasons in her autobiography [A Circle of Quiet](#) and other statements: 1) that it was too weird, too unlike anything else being published; 2) that its complex content was too hard for kids, but its child protagonists wouldn't appeal to adults (oh, pre-Harry-Potter world, how innocent you were); 3) that its scientific, philosophical, and religious underpinnings were inappropriate for children; 4) and that it was (pull out your fainting couch) a science-fiction-ish book with a female protagonist, and everyone knows only men can be sci-fi heroes. Some of these objections resurfaced after publication according to the [American Library Association's Banned Books website](#), *Wrinkle* was one of the top 25 most-attacked books of the 1990s.

And yet, despite all these objections, the book has remained popular, never going out of print since it was first published. L'Engle followed it up with a series of sequels detailing the further adventures of the Murry family and their friends, many of which have also been successful. Perhaps the oddness of the book, the way it isn't limited by established children fantasy literature formulas, is part of its lasting appeal. *A Wrinkle in Time* is indeed a challenging book for readers young and old, but who doesn't love a good challenge?

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## Why Should I Care?

It's a rare person who has never looked at her peers who seem to fit in effortlessly, who have the right clothes, the right families, the right gadgets, the right talents, and thought: "If only I were like them, I would be happy." It's a basic human need - the desire to belong, to feel part of a community, to identify with a social group.

By this logic, the people on *A Wrinkle in Time's* Camazotz, a planet where everyone is exactly the same, should be perfectly happy. After all, they're part of the largest in-crowd around, where everyone has the same clothes, the same habits, the same activities, even down to the same flowers in their matching yards. With no one better off than anyone else, there's no envy, no cliquish in-fighting, just one big happy family where everyone fits in because everyone is exactly the same.

And yet...those Camazotzians aren't performing synchronized dances of joy in the streets, nor are they singing out songs of bliss in perfect harmony. It turns out that being a walking Gap ad isn't the recipe for utter contentment. Why not? Well, for one thing, it's kind of boring. And then there's the threat of being violently forced to conform for anyone who puts a foot wrong. *A Wrinkle in Time's* villain, IT, the biggest bully in the universe, targeting the weak and either making them submit or destroying them.

At the same time, the protests from Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace that they *like* being different are also not quite convincing. Perhaps the trick is to perform a balancing act: to recognize that the lure of group belonging has a strong pull, but to try not to let that stop you from striking out in your own direction, whatever that may be. What do you think?

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## What's Up With the Title?

A wrinkle in time is not what happens when you forgot that you were doing your metaphysical laundry and you leave Time in the dryer for too long. But, what, in fact, is it? Mrs. Whatsit uses the image of a wrinkle to explain the idea of the tesseract: making a connection between two faraway things in a way that bypasses the distance between them. (See "Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory" for our attempt to make more sense of the tesseract.) The difficulty of understanding how this works is a feature, not a bug. By bringing in this concept that most adults, let alone kids, can't make heads or tails of, the novel forces its readers to grapple with the knowledge that there are some things they just don't understand. The handy-dandy illustrated explanation that Mrs. Whatsit gives puts the reader in the same position as Meg, of getting a vague sense of what's going on without really being able to pin it down. Winged centaurs and disembodied mind-controlling brains are all very well, but it takes a tantalizingly-close-to-being-understood-but-not-quite-making-sense physics concept to make us truly feel that there's more out there than we'll ever understand.

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## What's Up With the Ending?

The kids are back on Earth with Mr. Murry. Group hug in the garden. Everything's hunky-dory, right? Well, not so fast. Mr. Murry and Calvin Wallace both escaped from IT, but the giant brain dude is still pulsating out there on Camazotz, and most of the people of that planet probably didn't even know that the Murrays were poking at their collective brain. The ending of the novel is definitely happy. But from another perspective, the more universal perspective that the novel itself cultivates, that happiness is very limited. There's also the little matter of Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which, carried off in midsentence: something tells us those weird ladies will be back, and not just because we saw the page at the beginning of the book listing the sequels.

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## Writing Style

### **Straightforward, Spoken**

The text straight-up describes what's going on from Meg's perspective, without much in the way of literary flourishes. The heavy use of dialogue adds to this sense that we're right there with Meg as she undergoes her adventures. Here's an example that combines those stylistic approaches, from Meg's return to consciousness on Ixchel:

*The first sign of returning consciousness was cold. Then sound. She was aware of voices that seemed to be traveling through her across an arctic waste. Slowly the icy sounds cleared and she realized that the voices belonged to her father and Calvin. She did not hear Charles Wallace. She tried to open her eyes but the lids would not move. She tried to sit up, but she could not stir. She struggled to turn over to move her hands, her feet, but nothing happened. She knew that she had a body, but it was as lifeless as marble.*

*She heard Calvin's frozen voice: "Her heart is beating so slowly-"*

*[...]*

*His words no longer sounded to her quite as frozen. Was it his words that were ice, or her ears? (10.2, 19)*

By focusing on Meg's basic sensations from the inside, without explaining their cause or how she appears to others, the text places us inside her body, straining as she is to try to figure out what's going on. Calvin's voice is described as "frozen," but we learn, as Meg does, that she's the one who's frozen. By simply ticking off Meg's sensations and giving no more information than what is available to her at that moment, the text places the reader in the same position as Meg, dealing with her sense of confusion.



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## Tone

### **Sympathetic**

Most of the text is either from Meg's point of view or dialogue between the characters, so the narrative voice isn't really a strong perspective. But in the detailed narration of Meg's experience, we get the sense that the author cares deeply about these characters, and wants us to care too, and so does her best to make us feel along with them (see "Narrative Point of View" for more on this).

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## Narrator Point of View

### Third Person (Limited Omniscient)

*A Wrinkle in Time* has a third-person narrator, but one that's hovering over Meg's head most of the time. When the kids tesser for the first time, we see it through Meg's eyes, and throughout the novel we rarely get commentary on what's happening beyond what Meg is aware of. One of the few instances of such commentary happens on Ixchel, the planet of the beasts:

*[Meg] teetered on the see-saw of love and hate, and the Black Thing pushed her down into hate. "You don't even know where we are!" she cried out at her father. "Well never see Mother or the twins again. We don't know where earth is! Or even where Camazotz is! We're lost out in space! What are you going to do!" She did not realize that she was as much in the power of the Black Thing as Charles Wallace. (10.67)*

Here the third-person narrator steps out of Meg's perspective for a moment to give us additional information about why Meg is acting the way she is. While on the one hand this distances from Meg, it also creates sympathy for her at a time when she's being annoying...which works to bring the reader closer to Meg in the end. Most of the time, however, the narrator stays within Meg's limitations, which means that we, as readers, learn about what's going on and why at the same time she does.

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## Symbols, Imagery, Allegory

### Tesseract

What the heck is a tesseract? We'll let Charles Wallace explain:

*"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. In other words, to put it into Euclid, or old-fashioned plane geometry, a straight line is not the shortest distance between two points."* (5.36)

Technically the tesseract is four-dimensional, not five, but that's a quibble. (Still confused about what a tesseract is? See the "Best of the Web" section for more attempts to explain the tesseract in a way that makes sense, with pictures and animations even.) The point of bringing the tesseract into the book isn't to offer a course in Hypercubes for Dummies, but rather to suggest that the novel's fantasy is grounded in science.

But why does it matter whether there's a scientific basis for the crazy stuff that goes down in the book or not? Throwing in a few words that you'll find long complex explanations for on Wikipedia doesn't make you any more likely to believe that somewhere in space there's a planet full of winged centaurs with an impossibly beautiful list of Top 40 hits, so why bother? Perhaps L'Engle is trying to balance fantasy with fact, so that even her weirdest creations seem more believable. Or perhaps she's pointing out that even fact can be fantastical: if the real world has such bizarre concepts in it, perhaps we don't need winged centaurs to see reality as wondrous and awe-inspiring.

So if you don't understand the tesseract, never fear: it's all part of the mysterious grandeur of the universe.

### The Black Thing

The Black Thing is the like Sauron, Darth Vader, and Voldemort all rolled into one, and it's coming to a planet near you. But what, exactly, is it? Calvin has the same question:

*"But what is it?" Calvin demanded. "We know that it's evil, but what is it?"*

*"Yyouu hhave ssaid it!" Mrs. Which's voice rang out. "Itt iss Eevill. Itt iss thee Ppowers of Ddarrknesss!"* (5.108-109)

Thanks, Mrs. Which, that really clears things up. So we know the Black Thing is Eevill, but beyond that, zilch. We don't know where it came from, we don't know what it wants (other than to take over the universe, naturally), and we're not even quite sure what its relationship to IT is.

Why is *A Wrinkle in Time* so vague about the Black Thing? Well, part of it may have to do with the book's theme of there being more to the universe than what is seen: just as Mrs. Whatsit & Co. are beyond the power of Meg's puny human brain to comprehend, so too might be the Black Thing. Another reason might be a rule well-known to horror-movie fans: a danger is scarier the less of it you

see. Give away the monster in its entirety, and you say goodbye to the chances of *Cloverfield: The Sequel*.

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On top of all this, having the Black Thing simply be pure, unadulterated evil gets rid of any pesky moral quandaries in fighting it. As with the Nazis in the Indiana Jones movies, you can root for the good guy with full confidence that the villains he's destroying deserve to be destroyed. Presenting the Black Thing as Evil, full stop, makes the good guys look all the better by comparison, and makes the quest an inarguably righteous one.

But why then does the novel want to make the side of right so absolutely unquestionable? We'll leave that as an exercise for the reader.

## **Camazotz and IT**

IT, speaking through its various mouthpieces, portrays Camazotz as giving Disneyland a run for its money as the Happiest Place in the Universe. Here's what the IT-possessed Charles Wallace has to say about Camazotz:

*"Why do you think we have wars at home [on Earth]? Why do you think people get confused and unhappy? Because they all live their own, separate, individual lives. I've been trying to explain to you in the simplest possible way that on Camazotz individuals have been done away with. Camazotz is ONE mind. It's IT. And that's why everybody's so happy and efficient."* (8.80)

So Camazotz may look like it has a large population, but really it's like a Sims game where one higher power controls everyone. Free will is an illusion: anyone who deviates from the norm is considered a mistake, and either forcibly brought back into conformity or destroyed. It's utopia...or hell, depending on your perspective. IT says its various offshoots are happy, but does happiness have any meaning in such a tightly controlled system? Can people be forced to be fit one model of happiness? Camazotz forces Meg to confront her own assumptions that she'd be happy if she could just be more like everyone else.

It's common to think about fantasy novels as happening in a world only lightly connected to our own, in a time and place untethered to human history, but it's interesting to think about Camazotz in light of the historical moment in which *A Wrinkle in Time* originally appeared. The book was published in 1962, at the height of the [Cold War](#), when the greatest threat to American freedom was Soviet Communism. What could rampant fears of a totalitarian social system, run by a single all-powerful dictator, preaching conformity to a single way of being, and symbolized by the color red, possibly have to do with Camazotz, IT, and the man with the red eyes? We'll let you answer that one.

While Camazotz may be colored, in more ways than one, by the specter of communism, it also takes up broader questions of freedom, responsibility, and happiness that stretch far beyond the Cold War. The question of how to balance individual freedom with group coherence, and of whether it's better to fit in or to buck the system, continue to be subject to debate, and have no easy answers.

## **Religion**

*A Wrinkle in Time* is no *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but religious language and imagery does keep popping up. Is it coincidence that Charles Wallace asks Calvin to read him the Book of Genesis as a bedtime story, followed by Calvin and Meg taking a walk in the garden, where they both snack on apples? Perhaps...or perhaps these religious allusions are there to create the sense that these characters are about to gain a greater knowledge of good and evil.

Then there's Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which, who were once stars, but also, when Calvin is trying to explain them to the beasts, are best represented as "guardian angels" and "messengers of God" (11.113). The first fighter of darkness that Mrs. Who prompts the kids to name is none other than Jesus, and she quotes from First Corinthians when she's sending Meg off to extract Charles Wallace from the clutches of IT. And when Mrs. Whatsit translates the song of Uriel (which shares its name with an angel), it's a hymn singing the praises of God that quotes from the Book of Isaiah in the Bible (4.94).

Even Mr. Murry gets into the act, after he tesses Meg and Calvin off of Camazotz:

*"We were sent here for something. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."* (10.68)

So why all the religious-talk? Well, this is, after all, a battle between good and evil, and since its inception Christianity has claimed a large stake in that conflict. The novel makes much of the limitations of one civilization's language: perhaps the characters are just making use of the language they have for talking about good vs. evil. Or perhaps it's the specter of communism again (see the above discussion of Camazotz and IT), since that conflict was often portrayed as Christian democracy vs. godless communism. The novel never makes the role of religion in its world entirely clear, so in the end it's up to the reader to decide how literally to take the text's Biblical allusions.

### ***The Tempest* by William Shakespeare**

[\*The Tempest\*](#) first pops up in the text among Mrs. Who's plethora of quotations:

*"We are such stuff as dreams are made on." She smiled broadly. "Prospero in The Tempest. I do like that play."* (5.55)

But what sets this allusion apart from everything else Mrs. Who says is that it keeps coming back. When Mrs. Who leaves the children on Camazotz, she gives Calvin another passage from *The Tempest* as "a hint": ". . . *For that he was a spirit too delicate*

*To act their earthy and abhorr'd commands,*

*Refusing their grand hests, they did confine him*

*By help of their most potent ministers,*

*And in their most unmitigable rage,*

*Into a cloven pine; within which rift*

*Imprisoned, he didst painfully remain. . . ."* (6.87)

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Besides being good stuff, what significance does *The Tempest* have for our heroes? You should really go read the whole thing (or at least check out the [Shmoop guide](#)), but here's a quick summary of the plot: a group of sailors are shipwrecked on an island inhabited by the powerful magician and banished duke Prospero, his daughter Miranda, and his servant, the spirit Ariel (he's the one in the lines above; he was trapped in a tree by a witch, and Prospero released him from that imprisonment but also enslaved him at the same time). Prospero uses his powers to manipulate the sailors according to his whims, and hilarity ensues.

What does all this mean for *A Wrinkle in Time*? Well, for one thing, the island in *The Tempest* is a place full of illusions, just as the world of the novel is. It's run by an all-powerful sorcerer, Prospero, whose intentions are somewhat better than IT's, but who still has a tendency to meddle with the free will of others. And of course it has Ariel, imprisoned in the cloven pine, who, as even Meg recognizes, bears a striking resemblance to her father, locked inside a glass column on Camazotz for not doing what IT wants him to do.

OK, so there are a bunch of parallels, but so what? Why bother? Perhaps the Shakespearean underpinning is there to show that Mrs. Who's language of allusions is a feature, not a bug. Or perhaps it's there to show how the list of members of the Anti-Darkness Justice League that Calvin, Charles Wallace, and Meg come up with are still contributing to the good fight even after their death. Or perhaps it's there to say, "Hey, this may be a kids' book, but we can quote Shakespeare with the best of them, so take us seriously, OK?" Whatever the purpose, the book's conversation with Shakespeare provides an interesting undercurrent to its own unique story.

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## Setting

### The Universe

Could we possibly get vaguer? To be more specific, several different planets within the universe: Earth, Uriel, the Happy Medium planet (it's not named), Camazotz, and Ixchel. Each planet has its own quirks: Earth is the place we know, except for the black shadow hanging over it; the Happy Medium's planet is a medium shade of taupe and that's about it; Camazotz is a conformist utopia, or is it dystopia? (see "Symbolism, Imagery, Allegory" for more on that); and Ixchel is Camazotz's good twin. There's also the space that our heroes tesser through to travel from planet to planet, and the two-dimensional planet they briefly stop on by mistake.

By stopping by so many different planets, the novel gives us a tantalizing taste of a universe full of more beauty, and horror, than we can imagine. The setting also suggests that familiarity is not necessarily a good thing: of all the planets visited, Camazotz is the most Earth-like, but it's also the most terrifying. Juxtaposing so many different planets brings about a shift in perspective. While there are more people on Earth than any one individual could meet in a lifetime, we still kind of get it when one of the beasts on Ixchel, after hearing that Earth has no contact with other planets, asks if humans are lonely. The varied settings underscore the limitations of normal human experience, and offer a glimpse of what else might be out there.

### (4) Base Camp

*A Wrinkle in Time* is a kids' book, but it's a kids' book that is heavily sprinkled with literary allusions and that takes its title from a concept in higher-level physics. Fortunately, understanding just who Mrs. Who is quoting, or just what the heck a tesseract is, isn't necessary to enjoy the book. In fact, a healthy sense of ignorance is what the book aims to produce in its readers.



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## Genre

### Children's Literature, Fantasy, Quest

*A Wrinkle in Time* is published as a children's or young adult book, and like much children's literature it features young protagonists who go off on a quest in the absence of their parents. In *A Wrinkle in Time* this quest takes them to other planets, where they meet strange and fantastical beings. At the end of the quest the object of their quest is achieved, though in not quite the way they expected, and they return to the normal, every-day world.

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## Book Summary/Plot Overview

Meg Murry sits in her attic bedroom, freaking out - partly because there's a storm, but more because she feels all wrong. Her teachers think her stupid, her friends think she's a baby, and she beat up a boy for talking smack about her younger brother. It doesn't help that her father has disappeared. Meg hates herself for being unable to hold in her feelings and act normal like everyone else. She goes downstairs to make some cocoa, and finds her younger brother Charles Wallace is expecting her, and already has some cocoa going. Charles Wallace is the sibling Meg feels closest to - not only does it seem like he can read her mind sometimes, but he's also an oddball like her. Everyone thinks he's slow, but really he's smarter than most people.

Mrs. Murry joins them in the kitchen, and among the cocoa and sandwiches Meg feels much better, though still depressed that her mother is both gorgeous and brilliant while Meg thinks she hasn't inherited either of those qualities. Charles Wallace tells them about his new friend Mrs. Whatsit, and soon afterward Mrs. Whatsit herself arrives, looking like a tramp in a mismatched assortment of scarves. Mrs. Whatsit seems to know more than she should about the Murry household. After downing a sandwich and emptying out the water from her galoshes, Mrs. Whatsit leaves - but not before dropping a bomb on Mrs. Murry by mentioning something called a "tesseract."

The next morning Meg awakens thinking the strange events of the night before were all a dream, but her mother assures her that they really happened. At school that day Meg is tired and cranky. She ends up getting sent to the principal's office and giving him bad attitude, especially when he mentions her missing father. After school Charles Wallace takes Meg to see Mrs. Whatsit. Along the way they run into Calvin O'Keefe, a popular boy who's a few grades above Meg in school. Calvin and Charles click, and Calvin tells them that he had a feeling that he needed to come to this place, so he did.

The trio meet Mrs. Whatsit's friend, Mrs. Who, who is fond of quoting other people. Meg and Charles Wallace take Calvin home for dinner. Calvin tells Meg about his home life, and how he cares about his family but they don't care about him. Meg tells Calvin about her missing father, and helps him with his math homework despite being in a couple of years behind him in school. After dinner Meg and Calvin go for a walk in the moonlight, and their tender moment is interrupted by Charles Wallace telling them that it's time to go. They are soon joined by Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which.

Suddenly Meg feels that she's in nothingness, and that her body itself has disappeared. Slowly she returns to herself, and finds that she, Charles Wallace, Calvin, and the three Mrs. Ws are in a sunlit field. Mrs. Whatsit tells them that they're on a different planet, and they're going to find Mr. Murry, Meg and Charles Wallace's missing dad. Mrs. Whatsit changes into an unspeakably beautiful winged centaur and takes them on a ride to the top of a huge mountain, stopping along the way to pick up some oxygen-producing flowers so they won't suffocate from the thin atmosphere. From the top of the mountain they see a dark shadow blotting out the stars that gives them a feeling of great evil.

Mrs. Which tells them that Mr. Murry is behind the shadow, and that that's where they must go to find him. Mrs. Whatsit explains how they travel through time and space so quickly: it's a tesseract, a wrinkle in time, that takes them through the fifth dimension. The group tesseracts again, stopping briefly on a two-dimensional planet that doesn't work very well for the human members of the party, and

arrives on a grey, foggy planet that is the home of the Happy Medium.

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The Medium shows them Earth, and they see that the same Black Thing that was blotting out the stars is also wreathing their own planet. The Medium shows them the Black Thing in a different part of the universe, and they watch as a star sacrifices itself to destroy the Black Thing. They realize that Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which were all once stars, and gave up their starry lives in battle with the Black Thing. Now the Medium wants to show them something happy, so she shows them their mothers, but Mrs. O'Keefe is screaming like a banshee and Mrs. Murry is crying alone. That didn't work so well as a cheering-up strategy. It does at least make Meg mad, which drives away her fear.

They tesser again and land on the planet Camazotz, which is where Mr. Murry is, and which has succumbed to the Black Thing. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which leave, but not before giving each of the humans a gift to help them on their way. The kids head through the suburbs into town, and notice something odd: all the children in front of the houses are bouncing balls and jumping rope in the exact same rhythm. There's one boy who's off-beat; they talk to his mother, and she seems very scared. They arrive in the city and see a newspaper delivery boy throwing newspapers with impossible accuracy. They ask him some questions, and he tells them that this is the capital city of Camazotz, which is home to CENTRAL Central Intelligence and IT. Charles Wallace thinks that's where they should go, Meg isn't so sure. Calvin agrees with Charles but also has a feeling that they're going into great danger.

They enter the giant CENTRAL Central Intelligence building and talk to a man who decides to report them for not conforming. He sends them off to a man with red eyes who speaks directly into their brains without moving his lips. He tries to take over their brains in other ways, but the children resist by reciting nursery rhymes. Charles Wallace looks into the man's eyes in an attempt to figure out who he is, and almost gets hypnotized before Meg brings him back to himself by tackling him. Meg complains to the man with red eyes that if they're going to be mind-controlled, he could at least have the decency to feed them first. The man summons a turkey dinner. It tastes fine to Meg and Calvin, but not to Charles, whose mind is stronger than either of the others: the taste of the food is a mental suggestion from the man, not from the food itself. Charles Wallace thinks that the only way to find their father is for him to mindmeld with the man and hope he can get back to himself afterwards. Charles Wallace submits to the man's control and turns into an obnoxious brat who's nothing like the real Charles Wallace. (We'll call this annoying version of Charles Wallace Chucky).

Chucky takes Meg and Calvin to their father. On the way, Meg reminds Calvin that Mrs. Whatsit said he has the gift of communication, and tells him to unwrap that gift on Chucky. Calvin tries but doesn't quite succeed. Chucky drones on about the glories of the planet of Camazotz, and how it's a perfect place because everyone is exactly the same, without the troubles caused by free will. They pass a room where they see the off-beat boy from earlier, screaming in pain as he gets shock therapy to make him bounce his ball in time with the rhythm.

They arrive at a room in which Mr. Murry is imprisoned in a kind of glass column. Meg puts on her gift from Mrs. Who - a pair of glasses - which take her through walls into the room and into the cylinder where her father is held prisoner. Meg is ecstatic to be finally back with her father, and tries to explain to him everything that's happened. She gives him Mrs. Who's spectacles so he can see, and they leave the cylinder, into the room where Chucky is waiting.

Chucky takes them all to see IT, which turns out to be a giant pulsing brain. Their very lungs and hearts are forced to follow IT's rhythm. Meg tries to resist by reciting the opening lines of the Declaration of Independence, and Chucky tells her that on Camazotz they have absolute equality because everyone is exactly alike. Meg has a moment of clarity: being like and being equal are not the same thing. Mr. Murry grabs Calvin and Meg and tesser the heck out of there.

Meg slowly regains consciousness, feeling like she's been flash frozen. She hears her father and Calvin talking, but not Charles Wallace. Her father tells Calvin that he had been on a top-secret government experiment and had tried to tesser to Mars, but ended up on Camazotz instead. He hopes to return to tell his colleagues how little they understand about the forces they were playing with. Meg revives enough to ask where Charles Wallace is. She's seriously mad that they just left him there, even though her father tries to explain that it was the only thing they could do. Meg is also disappointed that finding her father didn't just fix everything.

Some strange-looking inhabitants of the planet they landed on, furry beasts with tentacles and no eyes arrive and carry off Meg to take care of her. Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which arrive, and tell Mr. Murry and Calvin that for various reasons they can't return to Camazotz. On the subject of Meg they are silent, and eventually Meg realizes that she's the only one who can return and save Charles Wallace. The Mrs. Ws take her back to Camazotz, each giving her a gift: Mrs. Whatsit gives Meg her love, Mrs. Who gives her a quotation, and Mrs. Which gives her the knowledge that she has something IT doesn't.

Meg returns to IT's chamber, and finds Chucky there with the giant brain. Chucky messes with her, eventually telling her that Mrs. Whatsit hates her. Meg says no she doesn't, Mrs. Whatsit loves me. At that moment Meg realizes what she's got that IT hasn't got: love. She stands there and loves Charles Wallace with all her heart, and Chucky becomes the real Charles Wallace again. Mrs. Whatsit sweeps them away, and they find themselves at home with Mr. Murry and Calvin. Mr. and Mrs. Murry have a happy reunion, and there is much group hugging.

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# Chapter 1

## Characters Involved

Meg Murry, Sandy Murry, Dennys Murry, Charles Wallace Murry, Mrs. Murry, Fortinbras, Mrs. Buncombe, Mrs. Whatsit

## Summary

### Mrs. Whatsit

- Meg sits alone in her attic bedroom on a dark and stormy night, terrified that the roof's going to blow off.
- She thinks about all the things that happened that day to confirm her loser status: her teacher threatened to make her stay back a grade because she's so dumb, her so-called friends made fun of her for being a baby, and she got in a fight after a boy talked smack about her little brother.
- Underlying it all is her grief about her father, who is missing and has been for some time.
- Another source of worry: she heard at the post office that there's been a tramp (a homeless wanderer) nosing around the neighborhood, who stole some sheets.
- Meg goes downstairs to make herself some cocoa, passing the door of the bedroom belonging to her twin brothers Sandy and Dennys. The twins are obnoxiously normal in comparison to her own oddball identity.
- Meg arrives in the kitchen to find her youngest brother, Charles Wallace, already there with the family dog, Fortinbras.
- Charles Wallace had already put a pot of milk on the stove for Meg, and she reflects on her brother's uncanny ability to read her mind and her mother's.
- Charles Wallace and Meg are both considered by the townspeople to be a little slow, but their parents think they're just developing at their own pace, and are really very intelligent.
- Part of the reason for the poor opinion of Charles Wallace is that he doesn't talk much around strangers, but in the family he talks like someone much older than his five years.
- Mrs. Murry, the kids' mom, joins them in the kitchen, and Charles Wallace makes everyone sandwiches, including a tasty liverwurst-and-cream-cheese one for his mother.
- Meg feels much better in the light and comfort of the kitchen.
- Mrs. Murry talks about an unsatisfying conversation she had with the mother of the boy Meg had fought earlier that day. She wishes Meg wouldn't be so extreme about everything, but instead would find a happy medium.
- Meg is both impressed and depressed by the fact that her mom is not just a brilliant scientist, but also gorgeous to boot.
- Mrs. Murry, at Charles Wallace's prompting, assures Meg that she was awful-looking when she was Meg's age.
- Charles Wallace says that he would like to talk to his new friend Mrs. Whatsit about Meg.
- Upon questioning from his family, he elaborates: Mrs. Whatsit lives with two friends in a house in the woods that's rumored to be haunted, and Charles Wallace met them chasing after the dog.

- That very same dog starts acting strangely, growling in the direction of the Mrs. Murry's lab, ~~which leads to the outdoors.~~
- Mrs. Murry goes out to investigate and comes back with a strange little person wrapped in scarves: Mrs. Whatsit.
- Mrs. Whatsit unwraps herself and, with help from Mrs. Murry, empties out the water from her boots. All the while Mrs. Whatsit is saying things that make it sound like she knows more than she should about the Murrys.
- Meg thinks that Mrs. Whatsit is probably the tramp she heard about, and Charles Wallace gets the strange woman to admit to being the sheet thief.
- Mrs. Whatsit gets ready to leave, but drops a mysterious bombshell on Mrs. Murry before she leaves, saying that there is such a thing as a tesseract.
- Mrs. Murry is blown away by this cryptic pronouncement, and Mrs. Whatsit blows out the door.

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## Chapter 2

### Characters Involved

Meg Murry, Mrs. Murry, Sandy Murry, Dennys Murry, Miss Porter, Mr. Jenkins, Charles Wallace Murry, Fortinbras, Calvin O'Keefe, Mrs. Who

### Summary

#### Mrs. Who

- Meg wakes up the next morning wondering if Mrs. Whatsit was all a dream, but her mother reminds her at breakfast that no, Mrs. Whatsit really did show up last night.
- Mrs. Murry tells Meg that she and Meg's father used to have a joke about a tesseract, which is why Mrs. Whatsit's mentioning it freaked her out.
- Sandy and Dennys, the twins, say that Mrs. Murry should have woken them up, since they're the only ones in the family with any sense.
- Meg gets a little bitter about this, and Sandy tells her to lighten up and find a happy medium.
- At school, Meg's sleepiness from being up late last night gets in the way of her remembering important things like the imports and exports of Nicaragua. She ends up storming out of class in a huff.
- Meg ends up in the principal's office. The principal tries to suggest that Meg's father, who we find out is a physicist and hasn't been heard from in ages, is not going to come home, but Meg is having none of it.
- Meg comes home to find Charles Wallace waiting for her with plans to take her to see Mrs. Whatsit.
- Meg, Charles Wallace, and Fortinbras (their dog) go off into the woods. Charles Wallace explains that he wants to warn the women not to be so careless as they were about the sheets, and to beware of people poking around their cabin.
- While they're walking Charles Wallace takes Meg's hand, and Meg feels a little better that at least somebody loves her.
- Charles Wallace tells Meg that he can't read her mind exactly, but that there's a kind of unspoken language he can understand by which she unconsciously tells him things.
- Fortinbras starts barking, and Charles Wallace runs to see who's there.
- It's Calvin O'Keefe, a tall, poorly-dressed, redheaded boy, whom Meg knows from school.
- Charles Wallace grills Calvin about who he is and why he's there. Up until this point Calvin had joined in the town's opinion that the little Murray boy was an idiot.
- Calvin explains that in his family of eleven kids he's a "sport." Charles Wallace says he's a "sport" too, and explains this is term from biology to mean displaying traits that are hidden in the parents but come out in the offspring.
- Calvin explains why he's out in the woods: he had a compulsion to come there, and it's a feeling he gets rarely but always obeys when he does feel it.
- Charles Wallace says that Calvin better come home with them for dinner, and explains that his



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