

Setting/Time and Place: Where in the World Are We?



"Oh, no! We can't stop here! This is a two-dimensional planet and the children can't manage here!"

—*A Wrinkle in Time*

At the beginning of *A Wrinkle in Time*, the reader might think they're going to stay in Meg's town for the entire story. But there are many different settings in the book, mostly alien.

When the story opens, Meg Murry is awake in her attic bedroom listening to a storm. The Murry family lives in a big old house, which the author describes as Meg goes down to the kitchen for some warm milk to help her sleep. Her room in the attic is small. The rest of the attic is much larger and has a Ping-Pong table, a rocking horse, an old dolls' house, and an electric train set. On the second floor there are three bedrooms for her parents and brothers. A big old-fashioned kitchen is on the first floor. Off this kitchen are a pantry, a garage, and an old stone dairy that Mrs. Murry uses as her scientific lab.

The kitchen is cheerful, with curtains, flowers blooming on the windowsills, and a bouquet of flowers on the table. Though the windows were rattling in the attic and the wind was howling

through the chimneys, Meg feels safe and warm in the kitchen. Even though Meg is sometimes upset and unhappy, her family's home gives her comfort and security.

The house used to be the Murrays' vacation home. But now, since Meg's father has disappeared, they live there permanently. The house is about four miles away from the village where the children go to school.

This comfortable and very quiet community, never named, could be almost anywhere in America. It's the kind of town where the biggest excitement is that someone has taken sheets from a neighbor's clothesline. It is also a gossipy town where people say that Mr. Murry has deserted the family and is never coming back.

Life begins to get strange when three very odd ladies—Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Who—quietly move into the abandoned house in the pine woods behind the Murry property. Soon after meeting the ladies, Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace find themselves in a very different setting. The three Mrs. Ws have taken them to Uriel, the third planet of the star Malak in the spiral nebula Messier 101.

They land in a field filled with flowers and sunlight. It is enough like Earth for Calvin to wonder if they are still on their own planet. But as the travelers explore, it's clear that this isn't Earth. They travel across a plain filled with large granite monoliths set in rhythmic patterns. They continue on, passing over a garden that is "more beautiful than anything in a dream."

By a crystal-clear river, they find many white horselike creatures with rainbow wings—like Mrs. Whatsit. These magical creatures make music that fills the children with awe and joy. These alien beings and their music show us that this is another place, definitely not planet Earth.

The children each receive a flower that has hundreds of tiny blossoms. With these flowers, they can breathe when Mrs. Whatsit takes them up into the thinning atmosphere. As one of Uriel's moons is setting, the children see a huge black cloud in space. It is a shadow that hides the stars and allows no light to shine through. Looking at it, the children know it is evil, dark, and dreadful.

When they return to the flowery field, Uriel's smaller moon is rising, bathing everything in a lovely, golden glow. Seeing a moon that reminds the children of Earth is a comfort after the dread of the Dark Thing.

The next location in the book is a two-dimensional planet where they can't breathe. Meg "felt a pressure she had never imagined, as though she were being completely flattened out by an enormous steam roller."

The next setting is more obviously alien than Uriel. The children land in Orion's Belt to visit the Happy Medium. The atmosphere is foggy and they are standing on a flat gray surface. They can't see anything except one another. As they walk, they realize that there are no trees or bushes, just an occasional rock. The Happy Medium lives in a big stone cave.

Their final stop in the search for Mr. Murry is Camazotz, a planet taken over by the Dark Thing. The odd thing about Camazotz is that it looks just like Earth. It has the same kind of hills and trees and grass. Even the creatures living on Camazotz look like humans. The big difference is that they don't behave the way people do on Earth. The fact that Camazotz is so much like Earth, yet so alien, makes it extremely frightening.

On Camazotz, the children wander through the main city. They stop and look at the houses and the people. They walk to the CENTRAL Central Intelligence Building, where they find Mr. Murry. Eventually, they are taken to a domelike building that houses IT.

In trying to escape from IT, Mr. Murry, who is inexperienced with tessering, accidentally takes them to Ixchel. This place is in the same solar system as Camazotz, but it is very different. Ixchel is the strangest planet by far. It has brown grass and trees and gray flowers. Even the tall creatures that inhabit the planet are gray. There is a wonderful scent in the air.

The author establishes the differences between the inhabitants of Ixchel and humans by having Meg and Aunt Beast talk about how different "seeing" is for each of them.

After Meg's brief return to Camazotz to rescue Charles Wallace, the children are back on Earth with Mr. Murry within minutes of having left. Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin return from their adventures in time and space without anyone else noticing they

were gone. The familiar smells and sounds of Earth and the fall season are all there to welcome them home.

Thinking about the setting

- How do the different planets and places the children visit add to the story?
- If you could pick another world for the children to travel to, what would it be like? And why?
- Which of the settings did you like the most? If you had the opportunity to move there, would you? Why or why not?

Themes/Layers of Meaning: Is That What It *Really* Means?



"The light spread out and where it touched the Darkness the Darkness disappeared. The light spread until the patch of Dark Thing had vanished, and there was only a gentle shining, and through the shining came the stars, clear and pure."

—*A Wrinkle in Time*

There are many themes in *A Wrinkle in Time*, but the major theme is the struggle of good versus evil. This struggle takes place not only on the planet Earth, but throughout the universe. Love is the strongest weapon in the fight against evil. And this is the other most prominent theme—the power of love, in families and among friends, to fight evil. Two other themes are faith and trust—Meg's faith that her father will return to the family and that everything will work out; and trust between the children and the three ladies. The children trust the three ladies to help them and guide them and keep them safe in the same way they rely on their parents.

Daring to be different is another theme. In their own ways, Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin are very different from the other kids they know. Those differences make life harder for each of them, but they still have to be true to themselves. To be able to do this takes courage, another theme of the book. The children show courage when they fight against evil even though they're afraid. In fighting against evil, they use everything—including their own faults. Using our faults is another theme. Understanding how to use their faults to accomplish good helps the children in their struggle against evil.

Good versus evil and love versus hate

The primary theme of the book is about the battle between good and evil. According to the author, the forces of darkness and those of light have been fighting each other since time began. Darkness is the absence of light. When a person is “in the dark” about something, it’s a way of saying that they don’t know what’s going on. Without light, nothing can be seen and nothing can grow. The evil in Camazotz blocks out all love, and as a result, the people are frightened and unhappy.

The three ladies tell the children that their planet, Earth, has always had some of the very best fighters against evil and the powers of darkness. Jesus is named as well as Gandhi and Buddha, Einstein, Bach, and Pasteur, among others.

Madeleine L'Engle believes that the way to fight darkness and evil is through light and love. For L'Engle and her characters in *A Wrinkle in Time*, love saves the day.

Love

How is love shown in *A Wrinkle in Time*? There is the love between Mr. and Mrs. Murry and their children. This is the love that draws Calvin to Meg and her family. There is the special love Meg and her little brother Charles Wallace feel for each other. There is also the love between Calvin and Meg.

Love is a very powerful force in this book. Meg and Charles Wallace undertake the dangerous journey to rescue their father because their love for him is so strong. The love between Aunt Beast and Meg is what allows Meg to heal from passing through the Black Thing. Meg's love for Charles Wallace sends her back alone to Camazotz to rescue him. It is the love of Aunt Beast and the three ladies, as well as her parents, that helps Meg rescue Charles Wallace. And it is Charles Wallace's love for Meg that brings him out of his trance so he can escape IT. The story ends on a positive note because love triumphs over every obstacle or problem.

Faith

Faith is accepting things without understanding them completely. It's not always possible to understand everything; some things just have to be taken on faith. *A Wrinkle in Time* is a novel with many examples of practicing faith.

Meg struggles to believe her father is coming home, yet she's afraid that he never will. Mrs. Murry, Meg's mother, believes that

her husband will return. It is Mrs. Murry's faith that keeps Meg's faith alive.

There are other examples of having faith. Each time the children "tesser"—that is, travel through time and space—they are putting their faith in the three ladies who are their guides. They believe their guides will keep them safe as they travel. The children also believe that they can find and rescue Mr. Murry. If they didn't have faith that they could do that, they wouldn't have tried.

The three "guardian angels"—Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which—also have faith. Their faith is that the children can succeed against the Black Thing and save Mr. Murry.

All of the characters on the side of good in *A Wrinkle in Time* have faith that love will triumph over evil.

Trust

Trust is having confidence in someone because of their strength or knowledge or ability. Calvin and Meg trust Charles Wallace, who is barely five. They trust his judgment because he knows and understands things they don't. Meg and Calvin trust Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which even though they are strangers because Charles Wallace has confidence in them.

Calvin and Meg and Charles Wallace also have to trust one another and have faith in one another's abilities as they journey through time and space.

Growing up, Meg thought that her father could fix everything, and she had complete trust in him. Toward the end of the story, Meg realizes that her father makes mistakes and doesn't always make decisions that she agrees with. Realizing that he isn't perfect destroys her trust in him for a while. When she finally understands that no one can fix everything, she learns a valuable lesson. She understands that what she can trust about her father is his love for her.

Daring to be different

All three main characters—Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace—are kids who don't quite fit in because they are different in some way. These differences make Calvin and Meg unhappy. Meg doesn't fit in at school but has a great family life. Calvin fits in well at school but not at home.

Meg doesn't fit in because, though she loves math, she doesn't do it the way her teachers do. This makes her unhappy at school because it means she's not like everybody else. Calvin fits in at school; his athletic ability makes him popular and accepted by other students. But at home, he doesn't fit in because he's not like the rest of his family.

Charles Wallace, who hasn't started school, understands that to be different can mean being unhappy. He pretends not to be smart so he will be accepted by the other kids when he gets to school.

Being different can be lonely. But would it be any better if everyone were the same? The problem on Camazotz is that everyone has to be exactly alike. They must conform. Conforming to what other people expect of you means changing yourself to fit in. It means being like everybody else.

“Differences create problems,” says IT through the hypnotized Charles Wallace. And so on Camazotz, IT makes everyone exactly the same. IT robs people of their choices, their ability to be different.

When faced with IT on Camazotz, Meg says: “I am willing to assume all the pain, all the responsibility, all the burdens of thought and decision. . . .” Because even though Meg doesn’t like being different, “I don’t want to be like everybody else, either.”

Even if it makes them unhappy sometimes, Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace have to be themselves.

Courage

Courage is having the strength to resist and endure fear, danger, and difficulty. It takes a lot of courage for Calvin, Meg, and Charles Wallace to travel to other worlds by themselves. They must face a lot of terrible beings—the Black Thing, the man with red eyes, the evil brain known as IT. But that doesn’t mean they are not afraid. Don’t be afraid to be afraid because “only a fool is not afraid,” Mrs. Whatsit tells them. There is great danger in going behind the Black Thing, but the children still go, which takes great courage.

There are many examples of courage in *A Wrinkle in Time*. Mrs. Whatsit was once a star who was not afraid to battle the Black Thing. She won the battle, but she paid a terrible price—she is no longer a star. Mrs. Murry has courage, too. She resists the fear that her husband won't return. Her courage inspires her children to believe that Mr. Murry will return—and to search for him when they have the chance. Meg shows amazing courage when she agrees to go back to Camazotz for Charles Wallace—even after suffering terrible pain as a result of her first encounter with IT.

Using our faults

This book is also about faults—character flaws such as anger and impatience in Meg and pride and arrogance in Charles Wallace. But instead of completely condemning faults, Mrs. Whatsit tells Meg, “I give you your faults”—which she says might help Meg on Camazotz. Meg doesn't understand this. “But I'm always trying to get rid of my faults,” she protests.

So are faults helpful or not? Are they things we should get rid of? Try to control? Or are they things we have to understand about ourselves and use in more positive ways? Meg's anger is a good example. It's not good to be angry, but Meg's anger helps her to fight her fear. When she's angry, she doesn't feel so afraid.

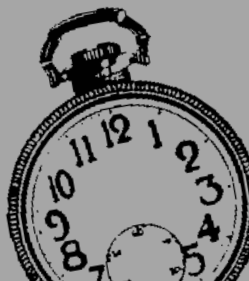
In Chapter 6, Mrs. Whatsit says that the danger is greatest for Charles Wallace because he's the most vulnerable. “Beware of pride and arrogance, Charles, for they may betray you.” And in fact, they do; his overconfidence in his abilities allows IT to take

over his mind and body. But Charles Wallace's pride in his abilities is also an important tool for him. It allows him to try things that he might not otherwise have the courage to do.

Thinking about the themes

- How are Mr. Murry's actions examples of the themes in the book?
- How important do you think love is in the world? Is it more important to love or be loved?
- How does love save Charles Wallace?
- What is so evil about IT?

Characters: Who Are These People, Anyway?



"What have I got that IT hasn't got?"

—Meg, *A Wrinkle in Time*

Though this is primarily a story about Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin, there are many other characters in the book. Some make only brief appearances while others come and go throughout the story.

Here is a list of the major characters, followed by descriptions of each one.

Main characters

In order of appearance:

Meg Murry	a twelve-year-old girl
Charles Wallace Murry	Meg's five-year-old brother
Mrs. Murry	Meg's mother
Mrs. Whatsit	a strange neighbor
Sandy and Dennys Murry	Meg's ten-year-old twin brothers
Calvin O'Keefe	a fourteen-year-old boy
Mrs. Who	a strange neighbor
Mrs. Which	a strange neighbor
the man with red eyes	man possessed by IT

Mr. Murry	Meg's father
IT	an evil alien being, the Boss
Aunt Beast	a good alien being

Meg Murry: Meg is a twelve-year-old girl who is fiercely loyal and protective of her family and is especially attached to her little brother, Charles Wallace. When Meg is feeling sad or lonely, she tells herself, "Charles loves me at any rate." She worries about Charles Wallace not being able to fit in when he goes to school next year. Both of them are very, very smart and that sets them apart from other kids. Meg wears glasses and loves math.

Meg has heard people talking about her family: "The two boys seem to be nice, regular children, but that unattractive girl and the baby boy certainly aren't all there." Comments like this make her angry.

Meg is very familiar with her faults—impatience and anger are high on the list. She's also very stubborn. She tries hard to control her emotions, but she often doesn't succeed.

Meg's father, Mr. Murray, has been missing for quite some time and she's angry and upset about it. Meg misses him terribly. She doesn't know what has happened to him, and there seems to be nothing she can do.

Meg doesn't fit in at school, where she can't seem to do anything right. She is lonely and unhappy until Calvin comes along. Calvin seems to understand and like her, and she likes him, too. Once she and Calvin and Charles Wallace go off with Mrs. Whatsit,

Mrs. Who, and Mrs. Which, Meg matures a great deal. She discovers that finally there is something she can do for her father.

Meg is very focused on helping her father. More than Calvin and Charles Wallace, Meg never forgets that he's the reason behind their journey. Her impatience shows in her eagerness to find him and her anger at anything that delays them. "Meg was in such an agony of impatience that her voice grated irritably. '... But what about Father? Please, what about Father,' she pleads with the Mrs. Ws."

Throughout the journey, Meg remains a loyal friend to Calvin and a loving sister to Charles Wallace.

Charles Wallace: Meg's five-year-old brother is a very special little boy. He knows things without being told, and he understands things that most five-year-olds wouldn't. Charles Wallace is always adding words to his vocabulary. He enunciates clearly, like a much older child. It becomes clear early in the story that Charles Wallace is a genius. Yet people think he's a moron because he doesn't speak often. He's also a realist: "I think it will be better," Charles Wallace tells Meg, "if people go on thinking I'm not very bright. They won't hate me quite so much."

When Meg asks Charles Wallace if he can read minds, he lets her know that he understands things that other people cannot. He says he's "able to understand a sort of language, like sometimes if I concentrate very hard I can understand the wind talking with the trees."

Charles Wallace can even understand Mrs. Whatsit, Mrs. Which, and Mrs. Who. It's Charles Wallace who first makes friends with them. And it is Charles Wallace who persuades Meg and Calvin to trust the three ladies and go with them to find Mr. Murry.

Charles Wallace loves his older sister Meg and tries to take care of her. He makes sure she knows that he loves her. He understands Meg in a way that no one else can—or could until Calvin comes along.

Despite being so intelligent, Charles Wallace does have faults. Mrs. Whatsit warns him to beware of pride and arrogance. For example, he is convinced he can protect Meg no matter what. When Mrs. Whatsit tells Calvin to take care of her, Charles Wallace says rather sharply, "I can take care of Meg. I always have."

Sometimes he puts too much trust in his own abilities. Mrs. Who says to him, "Remember that you do not know everything." Charles Wallace doesn't remember and he ends up under IT's control.

Mrs. Murry: Meg's mother is a beautiful woman with doctoral degrees in biology and bacteriology. Mrs. Murry hasn't given up hope that her husband will return. She tells Calvin that she's been working on an experiment "so I won't be too far behind my husband when he gets back."

When she is with her children, Mrs. Murry seems calm and capable. But she's also honest with Meg about how upset she is

about her husband's disappearance. She's clearly a great mother because she defends her children. She lets Meg know that she loves her no matter what. Mrs. Murry is confident that Meg will grow up to be as beautiful as she is even though Meg doesn't believe it herself.

Mrs. Murry is smart about all of her children. She knows that Charles Wallace is different, but she also knows that while she can help Meg and Charles Wallace with practical things, in the end they have to make their own way in the world. She believes they are smart enough to do it.

Mrs. Whatsit: Mrs. Whatsit is a strange neighbor who appears at the Murry house looking like a smallish tramp completely bundled up in clothes, including a shocking pink stole knotted around an overcoat, and black rubber boots. She has several scarves of assorted colors tied around her head with a man's felt hat perched on top and "a voice like an unoiled gate."

But even this decidedly odd person finds hospitality in the Murry household. Meg makes her a sandwich and Mrs. Murry helps Mrs. Whatsit take off her wet boots. Mrs. Whatsit praises Mrs. Murry for letting Charles Wallace be himself. She upsets Mrs. Murry as she's leaving by mentioning tesseract.

Mrs. Whatsit is the youngest of the three ladies whom Calvin calls the "guardian angels." She is the one with the most human qualities. She is also the one closest to the children. We see Mrs. Whatsit in her real form—as a strange and beautiful white horselike creature—on the planet Uriel. We learn that she used

to be a real light-emitting star before the Black Thing took over. Despite all she has suffered, she still has hope that the Black Thing can be overcome.

Sandy and Dennys Murry: Meg's ten-year-old twin brothers are fiercely independent and self-sufficient. The twins don't feature prominently in this book, but they serve a purpose: They are ordinary kids and contrast with Meg and Charles Wallace, each of whom is unusual.

The twins clearly don't have problems fitting in, and they're critical of Meg for not doing better in school.

"I wish you wouldn't be such a *dope*, Meg," says Sandy. "Use a happy *medium*, for heaven's sake. You just goof around in school and look out the window and don't pay any attention."

"You just make things harder for yourself," says Dennys.

They also worry that Charles Wallace is going to be just like Meg when he gets to school. But the twins are also very protective of their siblings and offer to defend Meg and Charles Wallace at any time.

Calvin O'Keefe: Calvin is a poorly dressed fourteen-year-old boy from a large family. "Tall he certainly was, and skinny. His bony wrists stuck out of the sleeves of his blue sweater; his worn corduroy trousers were three inches too short. He had orange hair that needed cutting and the appropriate freckles to go with it. His eyes were an oddly bright blue."

Calvin is athletic and popular at school. Like Meg, Calvin is unhappy, but his unhappiness comes from his home life, not his school life. When he first meets Meg and Charles Wallace in the woods, Calvin tells them that he's there to get away from his family. He is the third of eleven children. He feels different from the rest of his family. His mother and his siblings don't really care about him. He tells Meg, "You don't know how lucky you are to be loved."

Like Charles Wallace, who understands things without being told, Calvin has special talents, too. Calvin confesses that he gets "compulsions" and that he always does what his strange feelings tell him to do.

Calvin feels close to Meg and Charles Wallace right away. When Charles Wallace invites him to dinner, Calvin says, "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!" Calvin gets along very well with Mrs. Murry, too, and even impresses the twins because he's a sports star at school. But it's Meg he cares about.

In Chapter 3, Calvin really wants to know about Meg, so he asks her a lot of questions about her father and what has happened to him. He repeats the only story he knows about Mr. Murry—"he's supposed to have left your mother and gone off with some dame." Meg jumps up, ready for a fight, but Calvin calms her down. "*You* know it isn't true, *I* know it isn't true."

He also asks her these questions because he wants Meg to be able to talk about all of her doubts and fears. Calvin isn't afraid

of her anger or her tears. He lets her cry and encourages her to be herself.

Throughout the book, Calvin frequently takes Meg's hand or puts his arm protectively around her. He's always worried about Meg and looks out for her.

Mrs. Who: Mrs. Who is a plump little woman with enormous eyeglasses "twice as thick and twice as large as Meg's." She is one of the three "guardian angels" in the book. She loves to use quotes to make her point. As Mrs. Whatsit explains: "She finds it so difficult to verbalize. . . . It helps her if she can quote instead of working out words of her own."

And she stands up for Calvin, saying to Charles Wallace, "He wasn't my idea, Charlsie, but I think he's a good one."

Mrs. Who gives Meg her eyeglasses to help rescue Mr. Murry from IT. She also gives advice to each of the children before they go to Camazotz. At the end of the book, she recites a long quote to inspire Meg and guide her on her mission to rescue Charles Wallace on Camazotz.

Mrs. Which: She is the eldest and the leader of the trio of ladies who escort the children into the unknown. Mrs. Which is a shadow, hardly seen, but very much there.

It is Mrs. Which who says, "I ddo nott thinkk I willl matterrialize commpletely. I ffindd itt verry ttirinngg, andd wee hhave mmuch ttoo ddo." "

Mrs. Which is the wisest and the most powerful of the three “guardian angels,” and not as friendly as Mrs. Whatsit and Mrs. Who. She knows more than the other two ladies. Mrs. Whatsit says that Mrs. Which hardly ever makes a mistake. Mrs. Which worries that the children will be frightened and warns Mrs. Whatsit about telling them too much.

Mrs. Which doesn't want to waste time letting the Happy Medium show the children scenes from home. She knows it will upset them—and she is right.

It is Mrs. Which who gives the children the command to go into the town on Camazotz and not to become separated no matter what. She is also the one who takes Meg back, alone, to rescue Charles Wallace.

The man with red eyes: The man with red eyes lives on Camazotz. He has been taken over by IT. He speaks for IT, just as Charles Wallace does when he is taken over. The man with red eyes also calls himself the Prime Coordinator.

His voice is kind and gentle, but his eyes are a horrible fiery red. He doesn't need to speak out loud because the children can hear him anyway. He tries to hypnotize Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin and take over their minds. He tries to persuade them to give in, telling them that he doesn't have to use violence, that there are other ways to take them over. He even threatens the children with starvation.

The man with red eyes is not trustworthy. He lies and he threatens until he finally persuades Charles Wallace to look deep into his eyes. Once he has taken over Charles Wallace, he uses the boy to take Calvin and Meg to Mr. Murry. He has to use Charles Wallace because the man with red eyes can never leave the room he is in.

Mr. Murry: When the story begins, Meg's father has been missing for a long time. He is a physicist who had been working for the government. No one knows for sure where he is, but his family believes that he is on a dangerous and secret mission.

When we finally meet Mr. Murry, he is trapped in a transparent column on Camazotz, trying to resist IT. His first thought is for Meg. He wants her to save herself, not him. When he realizes that Mrs. Who's glasses can free them both, he takes Meg into his arms and escapes from the column with her.

Mr. Murry tries to help Meg resist IT by telling her to think of the periodic table of elements and the square roots of numbers. Finally, he tesseracts Calvin and Meg away from Camazotz. He knows that Meg is upset and unhappy about leaving Charles Wallace behind on Camazotz, but it is the best he can do.

He tries to be patient with Meg. He tells her, "I am a human being, and a very fallible one. But I agree with Calvin. 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."

Mr. Murry is very protective of Meg, yet he allows her to make her own decisions. He doesn't let the creatures on Ixchel take his daughter away until he's convinced that they are going to help her. Later, when everyone understands that only Meg can save Charles Wallace, Mr. Murry doesn't want her to go back to Camazotz. He realizes that even though he wants to do everything for Meg, he can't fix all the hurts or right all the wrongs or bear her pain for her.

When Mr. Murry finally accepts that Meg must go back to Camazotz alone to rescue Charles Wallace, he lets her go.

"You are going to allow Meg the privilege of accepting this danger. You are a wise man, Mr. Murry," says Mrs. Whatsit.

IT: IT is a disembodied alien brain. "An oversized brain, just enough larger than normal to be completely revolting and terrifying . . . a brain that pulsed and quivered, that seized and commanded." This is the power behind the man with red eyes. This is the Black Thing, the evil shadow that takes over planets and people and deadens whatever it touches.

Aunt Beast: Aunt Beast is a very, very tall gray being with four arms and lots of long waving tentacles at the end of each one. She first meets Meg when she and two friends greet the newcomers to their planet, Ixchel. These creatures have only indentations where a human would have features like a nose, mouth, and eyes. Their entire bodies are covered with the softest fur imaginable, and they give off a beautiful smell.

Aunt Beast heals Meg from the effects of IT. She doesn't communicate the way we do; instead, she talks through the tentacles in her fingers. She doesn't "see" like humans do, either. Nonetheless, Meg and Aunt Beast understand each other as if they were mother and child. Aunt Beast takes care of the helpless Meg as though she were a baby. She bathes her, feeds her, and clothes her.

Aunt Beast talks to Meg, trying to reassure her at first, and then trying to explain her world to Meg and to understand Meg's own world.

Thinking about the characters

- How does Charles Wallace get trapped by IT?
- How are the beings different on each of the planets that the children visit? How would you describe them? How are they different from people on Earth?
- What do Mrs. Who's quotations tell us about her? Do the quotations give you any clues about what is going to happen next? Can you think of an example?