

Crispin: The Cross of Lead Study Guide

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Contents

Crispin: The Cross of Lead Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1-5.....	5
Chapters 6-10.....	7
Chapters 11-15.....	9
Chapters 16-20.....	11
Chapters 21-25.....	13
Chapters 26-30.....	15
Chapters 31-35.....	17
Chapters 36-40.....	19
Chapters 41-45.....	21
Chapters 46-50.....	23
Chapters 51-55.....	25
Chapters 56-58.....	27
Characters.....	29
Objects/Places.....	33
Themes.....	37
Style.....	41
Quotes.....	43
Topics for Discussion.....	45



Plot Summary

This story is set in England in the Middle Ages in the year 1377. It is about a young boy called Crispin, who is declared a fugitive by the steward of his village. He runs away and is hunted by the steward and his men. He meets a friend called Bear and travels with him to the city, where he learns the truth about himself and manages to win his freedom.

Crispin is a thirteen-year-old boy who lives with his mother in the small village of Stromford, which is part of Lord Furnival's land. He has no father and is known simply as "Asta's son." When his mother dies, he is so upset that he runs into the woods. There he accidentally overhears a stranger and John Aycliffe the village steward discussing "a great danger." They see Crispin and attempt to kill him, but he runs away. Crispin goes to the village priest and finds out that he has been declared a "wolf's head", which means that anyone can kill him as if he is a wild animal. The priest gives Crispin a cross of lead that his mother owned. He tells Crispin that his mother could read and write, and that she wrote the words on the cross. He then tells Crispin that he must flee the village and head for a city. He will meet Crispin that night and give him more information about his father and mother. Crispin takes this advice, but as he flees the village he sees the body of the priest. He has been murdered.

Crispin wanders alone until he comes to an abandoned village. Here he meets a man called Bear, who makes Crispin his servant. At first Crispin is angry with Bear, but he soon warms to him. As they travel, Bear teaches Crispin how to play music to accompany him while he juggles. Together they can earn a living performing in the villages they pass through. Crispin gains more confidence in himself, and Bear makes him his apprentice rather than his servant. At the village of Lodgecot, they hear that Crispin has been accused of the murder of the priest in Stromford. A one-eyed man takes a dislike to Bear and begins to stare at Crispin too closely.

When they reach the city of Great Wexly, they stay at the Green Man tavern where Bear knows the owner, a woman called Widow Daventry. Bear tells Crispin to stay in their room, but he decides to explore the city instead. In the cathedral, he is seen by the steward, John Aycliffe. He is chased through the city, manages to lose the men, but gets lost in the winding streets. Finally Bear finds him and brings him back to the tavern. There Bear meets a man called John Ball and discusses the possibility of rebellion with him. Crispin knows they are putting themselves in great danger simply by talking about such things.

The next day Bear leaves to attend a secret meeting of rebels led by John Ball. Crispin sees the one-eyed man from Lodgecot follow Bear, so decides to follow too in order to warn Bear. Crispin eavesdrops on the secret meeting, then sees soldiers approaching and runs in to warn the rebels. The others manage to get away, but Bear is captured. He is taken to the Furnival palace by John Aycliffe. Crispin runs back to his room in the Green Man tavern. Soldiers come searching for him, but he hides in the secret hiding place in his room. Widow Daventry then reads the words on his cross and tells him the truth about who he really is. He is actually the son of Lord Furnival, and his mother is



the daughter of Lord Douglas. He has noble blood, and could even try to claim his father's land and fortune now that Lord Furnival is dead. However, Lady Furnival wants to hold on to all her husband's money. John Aycliffe, who is her relative, is trying to kill Crispin so that he cannot claim his right as heir. They captured Bear in order to lure Crispin to them.

That night, Crispin visits John Ball and the rebels to tell them what has happened to Bear. None of them will help him, so he decides to try to rescue Bear on his own. He climbs the wall of the Furnival palace and swings onto the balcony of the second floor. Inside, he finds a dagger and searches for Bear. He comes to a chapel and starts to pray, but John Aycliffe comes in and sees him. Crispin tells John Aycliffe that he will not claim himself heir if John will let Bear go. He shows John his cross of lead and promises to give it to him. John Aycliffe vows that he will let Crispin and Bear leave safely.

Crispin is taken to the dungeon where he helps Bear up. They are led to the city gate, but John Aycliffe breaks his vow and demands that Crispin be killed. John Aycliffe and Bear fight, and Bear manages to throw him onto the soldiers' spears. John is killed. Bear threatens the rest of the guards, who stand back to let them pass. Crispin throws his cross on John Aycliffe's body, rejecting his noble blood and his connection to the Furnivals. He leaves the city with Bear, free and happy.



Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 Summary

This book is set in England in the Middle Ages, in the year 1377. Crispin is a young boy who is declared a "wolf's head" and accused of murder. He is hunted down by the steward of his village, but manages to escape. With the help of a new friend called Bear, he reaches the city of Great Wexly and finds out the secrets surrounding his father and his birth. He rescues Bear from the steward and finally manages to win his freedom.

A boy known simply as Asta's son comes from a very poor family. He lives in a small village called Stromford, and his mother has just died. The priest, who is called Father Quinel, helps the boy to bury his mother. They are then met by the steward of the manor, John Aycliffe. The steward tells the boy that he must give his ox to the manor as a death tax. The boy is worried that he will not be able to work in the fields and earn a living without the ox. Father Quinel tries to comfort the boy, but he is upset and runs into the forest. He accidentally falls over and hits his head.

When he wakes up, he is still in the forest, but it is now night-time. He hears voices and goes to see who is there. In a clearing the steward, John Aycliffe, is talking to a man the boy does not know. They seem worried, and John Aycliffe says something about a great danger. Then John Aycliffe sees the boy and shouts out. The strange man strides towards the boy with his sword drawn. The boy runs away in fear and spends the rest of the night in the forest.

The next day he sees the bailiff pull down and burn his cottage, but does not know why. He sees the village gather to attend church, but is too frightened to join them. He realizes that he is no longer safe in the village and prays to God for help.

Chapters 1-5 Analysis

The main character of this book is a boy living in England in the year 1377. At this time things were very different from how they are today. There were some cities, but many people lived in the countryside in small towns and villages. They would work the land to produce crops in order to make a living. Each town would have a manor house where the rich lord lived. All the land that the peasants lived and worked on was owned by him, and they would pay him taxes for the use of the land and for his protection against bandits and invaders. In this book the main character works in the fields. He is very poor and can barely afford to survive. He does not go to school, but works all day instead. Many poor children would have been in a similar position at the time.

The boy tells the reader that he and his mother are serfs. This means that they are attached to the land and must work on it for the lord of the manor. If the land were to be passed or sold to a new lord, he would also get the serfs that work on it. The serfs are not supposed to leave and have no rights over the land they work on. All their



possessions, even their food and clothes, strictly belong to the lord of the manor. They are not quite slaves, but they are also not really free.

In the Middle Ages, serfs were considered the lowest and most unimportant people in the land. This is why Asta and her son are not given much kindness or respect in the story. The most important person in the town would have been the lord of the manor. He would appoint a steward to look after the town and manage his land for him. The steward would be a free man from a respectable family, not a serf. This is why John Aycliffe, the steward in this story, looks down on Asta's son and treats him rudely. The lord would have been granted his land by an even more important man, such as a baron or duke. The barons and dukes were given their land by the king, who was the most important person in the country. In this society, everyone was supposed to know their place and was expected to pay proper respect and taxes to anyone more important than them. This is called feudal society.

During the Middle Ages, men were considered much more important than women. Money and property were passed down from fathers to sons. In the story, the main character is known only as Asta's son, because he does not know who his father is. He is treated badly by others because he has no father and so is seen as less important. He is not even given a proper name. He feels sad about this and cannot help thinking badly of himself, even though his situation is not his fault. Now that the boy's mother is dead, he has been left all alone. He does not have a sense of who he is, and he feels frightened and worthless. He runs into the forest because he wants to run away from his sadness and from other people's cruelty. When he sees his house pulled down and burned, he realizes that he does not even have the protection of the village anymore. He is completely alone, has nobody to help him, and he is very frightened.

The main character mentions God many times. This is because religion was very important at that time. Christianity (Catholicism) was a very big part of life for everyone in England. Attending church and saying prayers were very important duties that everyone was expected to do. People believed very strongly in God and Jesus. They believed that they should behave as good Christians, and that if they sinned, they would be punished. They believed that if they were good they would be allowed to go to Heaven when the day of the Final Judgment arrived. When the main character buries his mother, he makes sure she is facing Jerusalem, a very important and sacred city. This is because he believes she will rise up and live again when the Final Judgment comes. Whenever the main character is feeling upset, frightened or alone, he thinks of God or prays. This is because he believes that God is always with him, watching over him, and hopes that he will give him strength.



Chapters 6-10

Chapters 6-10 Summary

Asta's son hides out for the rest of the day. At one point he overhears two men discussing him. They say that he has been accused of breaking into the manor house and stealing money. The two men then talk about the steward, saying that he is a corrupt and bad man. The boy is not surprised to hear this talk, as he knows the whole village resents the steward.

That night the boy goes to the church to see Father Quinel. He tells him that he did not steal the money, and Father Quinel is relieved. Father Quinel tells the boy that his real name is Crispin, and that his mother could read and write but kept it secret. He gives Crispin a lead cross that his mother owned. He will not tell Crispin who his father is, and Crispin assumes that this means his father was a criminal. Father Quinel tells Crispin that he has been declared a wolf's head, which means that anyone has the right to kill him as if he were a wild animal. Crispin is shocked and cannot understand why the steward would do this. Father Quinel tells him that he must run away and go to a city. If he can stay in a city for a year and a day, he will become free. Finally, Father Quinel instructs him to hide in the forest for another day, and then go to Goodwife Peregrine's house. He will meet Crispin there, give him some food and set him on his way.

Crispin does as Father Quinel said, but when he goes to meet him that night, a boy called Cerdic tells him that Father Quinel cannot meet him after all. Crispin goes to Peregrine's house. She gives him food and tells him to head south. Cerdic, however, tells him to go west instead, as it will be what the steward least expects. Crispin goes west but his way is blocked by a group of armed men, and he realizes that he has been led into a trap.

Chapters 6-10 Analysis

Asta's son is very frightened and alone. He decides to turn to the one person who has always been kind to him and who he feels that he can trust. That person is Father Quinel, the village priest. The boy will have known him all his life, as he will have been baptized by him and attended mass every Sunday. He sees Father Quinel as a friend, but also as a father figure, as his own father is unknown to him. He also considers Father Quinel trustworthy, as he is a priest and so a servant of God. Asta's son suddenly finds himself having to cope with very difficult problems alone. He has no mother to care for him anymore, so he quickly tries to find a grown-up who can fulfill the parent role for him.

Father Quinel reveals some things that are shocking to Asta's son. He tells him that his real name is Crispin and that his mother could read and write. Crispin is surprised by this because his mother never told him. At this time, being able to read and write were



special skills that most people did not possess. The average person was too poor to attend school, and would not really need to read or write while working in the fields all day. It was only the richer members of society and the priests who ever learned to read and write. It seems strange to Crispin that his mother could read and write because she was a poor serf who worked the land. Father Quinel does not explain any more about this mystery and also does not tell Crispin who his father was. It is suggested that these mysteries might have something to do with why Crispin has now been declared an outlaw.

Crispin has now been given something that he has never had before; a sense of identity. He never even knew his name, or thought much about himself. Now he has been reminded that he did have a father at one point, and has been told his real name. Suddenly Crispin begins to feel like a real person, rather than the nobody that people had always treated him as. He thinks about his new name, finding it strange but also exciting and pleasing. He compares it to trying on a new garment, which is desirable but not yet comfortable. He is happy to have an identity, but it will take some time to get used to it. He will also have to try to learn a little more about who he really is. The thirteen-year-old Crispin is beginning to put his childhood behind him and learn to grow up.

Crispin is now a "wolf's head", which means that any person has the right to kill him as if he were a wild animal. He is now considered lower even than a serf, and he cannot rely on anyone to help or protect him. When Crispin is led into a trap, he understands that he was betrayed by Cerdic. Although he had not quite trusted Cerdic, he still did not expect this betrayal. Now that Crispin is an outlaw, he will have to be very careful who he trusts. He will soon learn that the world is not safe and that people are not always who they seem to be. He will have to learn to rely on himself rather than others. There will no longer always be a grown-up there to protect him.



Chapters 11-15

Chapters 11-15 Summary

Crispin runs away from the group of men and the steward. He manages to lose them near the mill, but sees them waiting for him at the river crossing. He goes back to the mill and crosses in the mill stream, then runs south through the village. At the south road he sees a figure on the ground and is shocked to discover that it is Father Quinel lying there dead. The priest has obviously been murdered, and Crispin thinks that it must be to do with him. He runs away but becomes very frightened in the darkness. He lies beside the road and prays to God.

The next morning Crispin sees the bailiff ride past to the south, but he presses himself to the ground and is not discovered. He continues along the road for two days, but sees no one and finds no food. On the second day, he is relieved to see the bailiff ride past on his way back to Stromford. Crispin decides to continue on until he finds a city, as Father Quinel had told him to do, but he is tired and frightened. Just when he is about to give up hope he sees a dead man swinging from the gallows and is reminded of how much he wants to live. He thinks this must be a sign from God that he is meant to continue on.

He carries on and comes to a small hamlet. It is deserted and ruined, and Crispin realizes that everyone who lived there must have died from the Plague. He is scared, but he goes into the village to look for food. Inside a house he sees a skeleton and decides to get quickly away from the village. However, just as he is about to run away, he hears singing coming from the church.

Chapters 11-15 Analysis

Crispin manages to escape the men trying to kill him, but he is still completely alone with no one to help him. Now he finds the dead body of Father Quinel, who has obviously been murdered because of Crispin. He feels guilty, as he thinks that trying to help him is what got the priest killed. He also wonders if Father Quinel was planning on telling Crispin more about his parents. Crispin now realizes just how much danger he is in. The men and the steward had tried to kill him and are still searching for him, and Father Quinel was murdered. Whoever killed Father Quinel is especially dangerous because he has no respect for God. The fact that he would dare to kill a priest shows that he will do whatever it takes to stop Crispin. Crispin will have to be very careful in future.

Crispin is extremely upset about the death of Father Quinel. Father Quinel was his friend, a man he felt he could turn to for help in a desperate situation. Father Quinel was going to help Crispin, and hopefully explain more about what is going on. Now he cannot do anything to help and Crispin is more alone than ever. He has lost the final



parent figure in his life. This has come very soon after his mother's death, and Crispin finds it very hard to cope with this situation. As he grows more tired and hungry, he begins to lose hope. He even begins to wish that he was dead, thinking that his suffering would be over and he could see his mother again. When he sees the dead man on the gallows, however, his mind is instantly changed. He comes face to face with the horror of death and realizes how much he actually wants to be alive. He realizes that his feelings were brought on by deep sadness and fear, and that he does not really want to die at all. He forces himself to take on a goal, deciding that he must seek out a city as Father Quinel told him to do. He finds a new determination and can continue on. Crispin proves how strong and brave he is here, as he manages to carry on despite everything that has happened.

On the fourth day Crispin comes to a hamlet, which is a very small village. The whole place is ruined and abandoned, and Crispin realizes that it must be because of the plague. The Great Plague, also known as the Great Mortality, or the Black Death, was a terrible disease that swept through Europe in the mid-fourteenth century. The disease was carried by fleas on rats and was quickly passed to humans. It was very contagious and spread very quickly. It killed a huge amount of the population, and people were terrified of it at the time. Crispin is brave but a little foolish for going into the village, as there is still a chance he could catch the disease even though all the people there are dead. He is driven by hunger, and at first thinks it is worth the risk. When he sees the skeleton he is reminded of how horrible the disease and death are, and decides not to risk it any further. He decides to leave, but is curious about the singing coming from the church. He feels terribly alone and longs to speak to another person again. He is also desperate for food. However, this unknown person could be extremely dangerous. They might try to kill him or take him back to the village.



Chapters 16-20

Chapters 16-20 Summary

Crispin peeks inside the church to see who is singing and sees a large man with a bushy red beard. The man sees Crispin too, and stops singing. He asks Crispin who he is and where he has come from. Crispin tries to lie, but the man sees through it, grabs hold of him and demands the truth. Crispin tells him everything. The big man releases hold of him but blocks his way, not allowing him to escape the church. He tells Crispin that he is his new lord now. Crispin must serve him, and if Crispin refuses, the man will drag him back to Stromford. The man tells Crispin that the punishment for theft is hanging, and that this is what will happen to Crispin if he does go back. Crispin has no choice but to agree to serve the man. The big man makes Crispin swear an oath to serve him and not run away.

The big man tells Crispin that his name is Orson, but that he goes by the name Bear. He is a juggler, and he travels around performing in order to earn money. He visits a lot of cities and is on his way to Great Wexly now to meet a man about something important. Bear mocks Crispin and treats him as if he is stupid and unimportant. Crispin is resentful of this behavior, and is angry that he has been forced to serve a new master so soon after escaping the old one.

The two leave the church and head for Great Wexly. The houses they pass are mainly abandoned, as the plague has killed a lot of people in this area. After walking for awhile, Bear decides that they will stop to rest.

Chapters 16-20 Analysis

When Crispin meets a strange man called Bear he hopes for kindness, but is once again treated as if he is unimportant and a nobody. He is upset and angered by this, as he had hoped that by escaping his village he had also escaped the troubles he had faced there. However, now he finds himself in a very similar position to the one he had been in at the village. He is once again forced to serve a master and is treated without any kindness or respect. Bear is hard and unfriendly, but in some ways is also a little like Crispin. He is traveling, without any real home, and seems to have no friends or family. He does not seem to be loved by anyone or have anyone to love or care for. Like Crispin, he is completely alone. Like Crispin, he also learned quickly that other people will not be kind to him. He deals with this by hardening himself and treating everyone gruffly. He does not trust anyone, and tells Crispin so. This is why he is so rude to Crispin.

Bear introduces Crispin to new ideas. He shows him juggling and tells him about places he has never heard of and things he has never seen. Crispin is amazed by the juggling, and shocked at the amount of people that live in cities. Crispin has led a very sheltered



life in the village, despite the hard work he has always had to do. He does not know much about the world and so comes across as ignorant. Bear is rude to him because he thinks he is stupid, but Crispin is learning quickly. His eyes are being opened to a whole world he could not have imagined.

Crispin is also being introduced to new ways of thinking about things. In the village, he has always been taught to believe and do what he is told. He has never questioned anything before. Now he meets Bear, a man who seems to have an opinion about everything. Bear seems dissatisfied with how the country is being run, which Crispin thinks is treasonous. Crispin has always been taught not to question authority and is shocked that Bear could say such things. Bear also seems disapproving of religion, another thing that Crispin has never thought to question. Bear is beginning to open Crispin's mind as well as his eyes, showing him that he can think for himself and does not always have to believe everything that he is told.

Bear recites the lines "when Adam plowed and Eve spun, who was then the gentleman?" (p. 84). This was a real speech given by John Ball, one of the leaders of the Peasant Revolution in 1381. The phrase is meant to ask why poor people should have to work so hard to pay their taxes to the rich, when the rich do no work at all. It also questions why people who have to work should be considered less important than the rich who do not have to work. Adam was the first man created by God, according to Christianity. Eve was the first woman. When they were cast out of paradise for eating the forbidden fruit, they had to work in order to survive. Adam had to plow the earth for food, and Eve had to spin to make clothes for warmth. In the early days after creation all people had to work; there was no upper class who were rich enough not to work. This proves that all people were created equally, and that those who have to work should not be considered less important. These kinds of messages were very effective among the poor people who resented the unfair rules that the rich had created.



Chapters 21-25

Chapters 21-25 Summary

While they rest, Bear tells Crispin about his childhood. He was given to the church by his father at a young age. He thinks this was in exchange for some profitable trade deal, and he is hurt that his own father abandoned him so easily. Shortly before he took his final vows to become a priest, he saw some performers in the town square and was attracted by their tricks and laughter. He ran away to join them. Later they all disbanded, and he became a soldier. He explains that because he learned to read and write at the abbey, he now cannot be hanged. This is because people who can read and write take on the same status as a priest. Bear begins to teach Crispin to juggle and tries to make him sing.

In the evening, Bear finds a place to stop and ties Crispin to a tree. He then goes off to find food. Crispin is extremely angry, but Bear returns with a rabbit for them to eat. He explains that killing the rabbit is poaching, which is against the law. He makes it clear that he resents this rule. Bear tells Crispin more about his time as a soldier. Crispin tells him that Lord Furnival, who owns the manor in Stromford, is currently at war. Bear tells him that he knew Lord Furnival while he was a soldier and that Lord Furnival is a cruel, greedy and arrogant man.

Bear then asks Crispin to tell him more about himself. Crispin tells him everything. Bear is surprised that Crispin does not want to know more about himself and why he was declared a wolf's head. He tells Crispin that a life in which a person asks no questions is not really a life at all. Crispin thinks about this as he falls asleep.

The next morning Bear tries to make Crispin take more pride in himself. He makes him wash in the stream, then cut his hair. Crispin is pleased with his new look. He worries that he might be recognized in the city, but Bear is sure that he will not be. Bear then begins teaching Crispin to play an instrument.

Chapters 21-25 Analysis

As Crispin and Bear continue their journey, the two begin to get to know each other a little better. Bear likes to talk and often strikes up conversations. At first Crispin is reluctant, but he soon joins in and finds himself telling Bear everything. He is secretly relieved and happy to have someone to confide in. Bear also seems happy to have someone to talk to. What both really want is a friend, but neither quite know how to make one. Although Bear claims to prefer being alone, it is obvious that he is lonely. He made Crispin come along with him, and even forced him to make a vow that he would not leave. He does not seem to really want a servant, and tells Crispin not to call him "sir" because it is servile to do so. He would rather Crispin were an equal, but at the same time treats him like a prisoner, such as when he ties him to the tree. This is



because Bear is scared of being abandoned again. His own father sent him away and his juggling companions left him. He does not seem to have any friends who have stayed with him. This is why he has made Crispin his servant. He wants Crispin to be his companion, but he is afraid that Crispin will leave if he does not force him to stay.

As Crispin talks to Bear more, he begins to like him better. He realizes that Bear knows a lot more about the world than he does, and appreciates having someone to help him. He enjoys he is willing to give Bear the chance to be one.

Now that Crispin is with Bear, he is learning about many new things. He is introduced to music, which he has never tried before. At first he has no confidence, and is sure that he cannot do it. Bear will not let him give up, however, as he sees that Crispin is simply scared to try something new. Bear also introduces Crispin to new ideas. He tells him that a life lived on other people's answers is no life at all, and that in order to properly live he must ask questions. This means that a person who goes through life blindly accepting everything he is told will never think for himself or experience new things. He will never enjoy life. A person who constantly questions things will learn to think for himself. It is important for him to ask questions to be able to understand the world and to form his own opinions about it. This will also make life more enjoyable and less scary. Crispin thinks about this and realizes that there are questions he would like to find the answers to. With Bear's help, Crispin is growing up and realizing that he is a person, not a nobody. Bear also helps him transform physically by making him wash and by cutting his hair. Crispin now looks like a more respectable person, which gives him more confidence. Bear is helping him to take pride in who he is.

Bear has opinions about nobility and religion that shock Crispin. Bear explains that rich and important people like Lord Furnival are sometimes very bad people. Lord Furnival is greedy and cruel, and so he does not deserve the respect he is given because of his title. Crispin has always been told that lords behave nobly, but Bear does not agree. He thinks that a person's actions are more important than his title or money. Lord Furnival may be a lord, but he is not noble because he does not act nobly. He explains to Crispin that how a person behaves is more important than who a person is. He especially believes this to be true in terms of religion. A good man is one who holds faith in his heart and acts well. He does not need objects such as the lead cross, or priests and churches, in order to prove that he is a good Christian. Objects are not holy and hold no kind of power. Simply going to church or following rituals is meaningless; God cares who a person is inside. Bear tries to teach Crispin that his intentions are what make him a good or bad person.



Chapters 26-30

Chapters 26-30 Summary

Bear pushes Crispin to learn to play the recorder, and eventually Crispin is able to play a tune. Crispin is amazed and proud. Bear pushes him more, and he learns to play even better. Now Bear reveals that he would like Crispin to play while he performs. Crispin is pleased that Bear needs his help.

The next day they are walking down the road when they see pigeons disturbed in the distance. They hide and peek over a hill. Further down the road there are armed men waiting at the bridge. One of them is John Aycliffe, the steward of Stromford. Bear is shocked that the men are still following Crispin and thinks that there must be more to it than simply chasing a thief. They leave the road and avoid the men. That night they camp and Bear shows Crispin how to set traps. Crispin mentions that his mother wrote words on his cross of lead, and Bear demands to see it. He reads what is on it, but pretends not to be able to see in the light from the campfire. Crispin is sure he did read it, however, and is keeping something from him.

As they head towards a village, Bear tells Crispin that he is part of a secret brotherhood who want to help the country. They want to bring more liberty and freedom to the people. He gathers information about the land for them, and is going to see a man in Great Wexly about it. He does not explain any more than this.

When they reach the village of Lodgecot, they go to the church and tell the priest who they are. Bear claims that Crispin is his son and that they are traveling to Canterbury. The priest is pleased with their show of devotion and lets them play. They play music and a crowd gathers. Some of the crowd give them money and bread. A one-eyed man in the crowd looks at them with hatred, and is not pleased when Bear takes his mazer to use in the juggling. When they have finished performing, they go into the church and pray. The priest then tells them to beware of a murderer who is on the loose, a young boy who killed a priest in Stromford. Crispin realizes that they mean him, and looks down quickly. As he looks down he sees the one-eyed man staring at him. Bear then mingles with the townspeople. Crispin is anxious to talk to him, but does not want to draw suspicion.

Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Bear manages to make Crispin feel proud of himself for being able to play the recorder. Crispin is pleased at having achieved something he never thought he would be able to do. Bear pushes him, and seems hard on him at first, but Crispin realizes it is actually a rough form of kindness. Bear is pushing him because he knows it will make Crispin happier in the end. Bear is correct, as Crispin smiles for the first time in ages. Now Crispin has a friend, a new talent and a way to earn money. This gives him hope for the



future, which is something he has not had since running away from his village. He is amazed that someone else could want him or need him, and he is pleased to be able to be useful to another person on this level. He is beginning to feel less like a nobody. He realizes that he can do new or difficult things after all, as long as he tries hard enough. He just has to learn not to give up so easily.

When Bear and Crispin see the armed men gathered on the bridge, Bear proves that he is a good man, and a good friend to Crispin. He does not betray Crispin or refuse to travel with him any further, but helps him instead. Together they managed to avoid the men and get past them. Crispin realizes that he would have been caught if it were not for Bear, and is grateful for his help. Later, Bear tells Crispin that if there is ever trouble, he should run away and not think about Bear. He should then head north and try to hide from the men who are chasing him. This shows how much he really does care about Crispin. He does not want Crispin to get hurt, and fears for his safety in Great Wexly. He would not want Crispin to risk himself even to save Bear. He also does not abandon Crispin, despite the fact that Crispin is causing him quite a lot of trouble. He will now have to try to avoid the men who are following them, which he would not have to do if it were not for Crispin. Despite this, he does not leave. Bear is a brave man and a good friend.

Crispin sees that he needs to learn some of Bear's skills in order to survive. He does not have the same defeatist attitude, and will no longer give up when things look hard. He has proven to himself that he can learn to play music, and if he can do that then he can learn other things too. He realizes that if he tries hard enough and puts his mind to it, he can succeed and learn new things. He is now eager to know more, to ask more questions and to be able to take care of himself. By pushing him to learn music, Bear has helped him to be a stronger person.

Things have suddenly got a lot more dangerous for Crispin in these chapters. He finds out that he is still being chased by the men of Stromford and that he has now been declared a murderer as well as a thief. He still does not know why the men are so desperate to catch him. It is a mystery why he is so important to them. It seems that it has something to do with the writing on the cross. Bear has read what it said, but he then pretended not to have been able to read it. He saw something that he does not want to tell Crispin yet. These chapters remind the reader that there are still many questions one needs to ask about Crispin, but the reader isn't given any of the answers yet.



Chapters 31-35

Chapters 31-35 Summary

As they leave the village, Crispin tells Bear that the one-eyed man was staring at him. Crispin is concerned because Bear revealed where they are heading, but Bear tells him not to worry. As they travel on towards Great Wexly, Bear continues teaching Crispin to play and juggle. Crispin helps perform in the villages they pass, and they earn more money and food. Crispin enjoys this way of life. One night Bear offers to make Crispin his apprentice, rather than his servant, and Crispin is overjoyed.

As they get nearer to Great Wexly, Crispin is amazed at the different kinds of people they see on the road to the city. When they reach the gate, however, it is guarded by armed men who seem to be looking for someone. Bear tells Crispin to play music as they pass through, and not to be afraid. The guards seem pleased to hear the music and do not stop Crispin or Bear. When they are inside Great Wexly, Crispin is overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and smells of the city. Everywhere they go they see black cloth with blue and gold ribbons. Bear tells Crispin that this means someone important has died.

Bear heads to the Green Man tavern. Inside he greets a woman called Widow Daventry, who is extremely pleased to see him. He introduces Crispin to her, and she asks him about himself. They tell her that he is an orphan who had to flee his village, but do not tell her why. She tells them that Lord Furnival has died, and Bear explains that this is why they have seen the black cloth all over the city. Widow Daventry explains that Lord Furnival's wife will now get all his money and property because he has no legitimate heir. Widow Daventry thinks that Lord Furnival's wife will not re-marry, as she will not want to lose her right to the money.

Chapters 31-35 Analysis

By the end of these chapters, Crispin has managed to reach a city, the goal he started out with when he left his village. He has got further than he ever thought he could, and done things he never thought he could do. He started his journey as a frightened child who was ready to give up and who thought he was a nobody. Now he has gained many new skills, including playing music, juggling, mending clothes, setting traps, and some fighting skills. He has also learned how to gain respect from others by having more confidence and pride in himself. He has realized how much he wants to live and is no longer ready to give up. He has also learned to value himself and his abilities. He does not think of himself as a nobody anymore, but as a boy who can learn new things, overcome challenges and be useful to another person. When Bear suggests that Crispin become his apprentice, Crispin is thrilled and accepts. This shows that he now thinks of himself as someone who is worthy to be an equal with Bear, and someone who can succeed at new things. He has come so far and grown up so much in just a few



weeks. This is largely due to Bear's friendship. Bear has pushed him when he wanted to give up, shown him new things, taught him new skills, and persuaded him to take pride in himself. Bear has taken on the role of a father or big brother to Crispin. He can sometimes seem hard, but this is only because he cares about Crispin and wants to see him become a more successful and happier person.

Crispin has only succeeded at the first and easiest stage of his plan. He still needs to remain hidden from John Aycliffe and his men for a whole year and a day inside the city if he wishes to be free. He will have to earn money and survive in the city during that time. With Bear's help, it seems that he could succeed, but things will still be very difficult. There is still a lot of danger for both characters. This danger is increased by Bear's mysterious mission, which he has admitted is risky. Bear will need to trust Crispin and take him into his confidence if the two are going to succeed. The armed guards around the city, and the memory of the one-eyed man, remind the reader that the danger is far from over.

When they arrive at the Green Man tavern, they find out that Lord Furnival is dead. It seems like too much of a coincidence that he would die at the same time that Crispin is being chased from the village by Lord Furnival's steward. Earlier in the story the reader hears that the steward, John Aycliffe, is Lady Furnival's kin. Now Widow Daventry explains that Lady Furnival will inherit all her husband's money and land because he has no heir. If John Aycliffe is related to Lady Furnival, he will want to ensure that she can keep all that money. It seems likely that the reason he wants Crispin dead has something to do with this. If Crispin can unravel this mystery and the connection between these events, perhaps he can get closer to finding out what is going on. Perhaps he will even find out more about who he really is in the process.



Chapters 36-40

Chapters 36-40 Summary

Crispin and Bear are given a room on the second floor. Bear tells Crispin to stay there until he returns, but Crispin feels restless and resents being told what to do. He decides to explore the city on his own for awhile, and sneaks out the back door of the tavern. In the city, he is amazed by the things he sees. While walking down one street, he passes a very rich lady on a horse. He asks a nearby boy who she is, and he tells him that she is Lady Furnival.

After a while Crispin comes to the town square. He is impressed by the beautiful cathedral and decides to look inside. Inside, he sees a man praying, who seems familiar. When the man turns around, he realizes that it is John Aycliffe, the steward of Stromford. Before Crispin can move, John sees him and shouts for his armed men to get him. Crispin runs out of the cathedral and dashes into the crowds. He thinks that he has managed to lose the men, but as he runs through an alley he is cornered by two men, one with a stick and one with a knife. Crispin gets out his own knife but it is knocked out of his hand. He charges into one of the men and knocks him down, then manages to get away. He runs until he is out of breath.

Now he decides that he should leave the city, as it will not be safe for him here. He needs to find the city gate but he is lost in the warren of streets. He decides to walk in a straight line until he reaches the city walls, and then follow them until he finds the gate. He does this, and eventually comes to the same street that he and Bear entered the city on. As he approaches the gate, however, the city guards close it. They tell him that it will not be opened again until morning. Now it is curfew, which means that Crispin will be fined if he stays out on the streets. He wanders around trying to find the Green Man tavern, avoiding the guards as he does.

Suddenly, he is stopped by a large man with a lantern, who calls his name. He is frightened at first, then realizes that it is Bear. Bear takes him back to the tavern. Widow Daventry tells Bear that John Ball has arrived and is waiting for him. Bear leaves Crispin in their room while he goes to talk to John Ball.

Chapters 36-40 Analysis

Crispin's new-found bravery and confidence now get him into trouble. He feels like he can accomplish things and experience new things on his own. He has learned so much from Bear that he now feels he can explore the city without his help. He has also gained enough self-importance to be able to disregard Bear's orders to do what he wants to do instead. The old Crispin would never have done this. He would have been too scared to go into the city on his own, and would have never even thought of disobeying Bear. While it is a good thing that Crispin has gained confidence in himself, he is acting



foolishly here. He does not need to act like Bear's servant, but at the same time he should respect Bear's wisdom and experience. Bear knows more about the city than Crispin, and is older and wiser than him. Crispin needs to learn when to listen to others and when to do things for himself. Bear is just trying to protect him, and in this case Crispin should have trusted him.

However, trust works both ways. Crispin feels resentful that Bear is telling him what to do, because Bear will not confide in Crispin. Bear refuses to tell Crispin what he is really doing in the city, and this irritates Crispin. Crispin does not like being lied to or held in the dark. There is enough mystery in his life already without Bear being secretive too. Bear is trying to protect Crispin, but he should put more trust in him and tell him the truth. If Bear had explained to Crispin why it is too dangerous to go out into the city, then Crispin would probably have listened to him. The two of them need to learn to communicate better and to trust each other more.

Crispin feels a false sense of security from being in the city. It is so huge and crowded that it must seem like the perfect place to hide. He soon learns that the city can be a very dangerous place too though. As he is chased through the streets, he realizes how easy it is to be trapped in the narrow alleys. Anyone who knows the city better than him can easily corner him or ambush him. The city is also full of dangerous people. The two men who attacked him might have been working for John Aycliffe, or they might have simply been robbers who saw Crispin as an easy target. The city is also like a maze to Crispin, and so it is very easy for him to become lost. Crispin does not even think about this danger as he sets out, enjoying the feeling of wandering in any direction he likes. It is only later that he realizes how difficult it will be to even find the gate again, never mind finding a specific building such as the Green Man tavern. Now that Crispin has a better idea of how dangerous the city really is, he will have to be much more careful in future.

Crispin manages to survive these dangers thanks to all the good lessons that Bear taught him. When cornered in a narrow street, he does not give up but fights back instead. When his knife is knocked away he charges into the man and manages to slip past him. He takes Bear's advice to run, and decides that he must get outside the city. When he realizes he is lost, he manages to keep a clear head and think of a solution. He remembers Bear telling him that the city wall runs all around the city. He realizes that if he can get to the wall, he can follow it and will eventually come to a gate. This is very smart thinking, and though it does not go as smoothly as he thought it would, it does eventually help him find the gate. Although Crispin acted foolishly by going into the city on his own, he shows good sense, bravery and capability in tough situations. He shows that he has come a long way in learning how to take care of himself.



Chapters 41-45

Chapters 41-45 Summary

Crispin cannot sleep; he is too worried and curious about Bear's meeting. He slips down the stairs and eavesdrops on the two men talking. They discuss how apprentices want better wages and less tax, and that the people will soon be ready for rebellion. Bear tells John Ball that King Edward will die soon and that that will be a better time for a rebellion. John Ball believes that the people are ready for an uprising in this area because Lord Furnival is dead and has left no heir. Bear tells him that on the subject of an heir he has found something very important. He leans in to tell John Ball, and Crispin can no longer hear what they are saying. Crispin heads back to his room and opens the window for some air. He is disturbed to see a figure watching the room from the street.

The next day Crispin goes downstairs and watches the people in the inn. He is shocked to see the one-eyed man from the town they visited on the way to the city, but he soon leaves. Then Widow Daventry sees Crispin sitting on the stairs and puts him to work in the kitchens so that he will stay out of sight. Bear comes down for breakfast and is pleased to see Crispin working. He says he is heading out to do some errands and that Crispin should stay there.

As Bear leaves, Crispin sees the one-eyed man follow him. He decides to follow and warn Bear. He follows Bear to a shoe shop, which Bear enters. Crispin sees a narrow passage next to the building. He goes down it, climbs a wall and jumps down into a garden. The back door of the shop is open, so Crispin listens to the meeting. He hears a voice talking about rebellion and freedom and realizes that this is very dangerous. He is about to go back to the tavern when he sees armed guards approaching. John Aycliffe and the one-eyed man are with them.

Chapters 41-45 Analysis

In these chapters, Bear meets with a man called John Ball to discuss matters in the kingdom and the possibilities of rebellion. He also attends a secret meeting concerned with rebellion. It is clear that Bear is getting involved in some very dangerous things. Widow Daventry reveals that she is worried about him and asks Crispin to try to keep him away from dangerous things and focused on his juggling instead. It seems that Crispin is not the only person who is in great danger. Just as Bear has been helping Crispin, Crispin now wants to make sure that Bear remains safe.

The rebels discuss the importance of freedom. They do not like the oppressive rule of lords over the poorer people. They want fairer taxes and better wages. They want less corrupt lords, government and priests. In other words, they want to create a fairer and happier society. At this time in history, society was very corrupt and a lot of people were very poor and miserable. Many people were unhappy and wanted change, but to seek it



was to commit treason. Criticizing important people was very dangerous, and even talk of rebellion would be enough to get a person killed. This is why Bear and the other rebels are in such danger. They are taking a very big risk. Bear is doing so because he believes that the world can be a better place. He is idealistic, and wants to stick to his values rather than ignore the suffering of others. Just as he helped Crispin, he feels the urge to help others and try to improve things. He is willing to see a revolution happen in order to bring this about, despite the fact that he will be breaking the law and putting himself in a lot of danger. Bear believes that sometimes people have to fight for what they believe is right, even if it means standing up against people who are in a higher position than them.

John Ball is a real historical person. He was one of the leaders of the Peasant Revolution of 1381. He was a priest who preached new and dangerous ideas such as the end of serfdom. He was cast out of the church (excommunicated) and put in prison for life. During the revolution, he was freed and made one of the leaders of the rebels. The revolt was very violent, and attracted a lot of poor and dissatisfied peasants to its cause. They demanded the end of serfdom and more equality. The revolution failed, however, and John Ball was executed. The lines that Bear recited earlier are taken from one of John Ball's sermons: "when Adam plowed and Eve spun, who was then the gentleman?" (p. 84).



Chapters 46-50

Chapters 46-50 Summary

Crispin runs in through the back door and warns the rebels that there are soldiers outside. They all run out into the garden where Bear helps them over the wall. Just as he helps Crispin over, the soldiers come into the garden. He tells Crispin to run. Crispin drops down from the wall and hears the sounds of Bear being seized and arrested on the other side of the wall. At first he does not know what to do, then decides to follow the soldiers to see where they take Bear. He follows them to the town square, where Bear is led to the Furnival's palace.

Crispin then returns to his room in the Green Man tavern. He is playing the recorder and thinking of Bear when he hears a crash downstairs and men shouting. He quickly hides in the secret hiding place Bear showed him. When the men come to his room, they cannot find him, and soon leave. When he comes out of the hiding place, he hears weeping and goes downstairs. The whole tavern has been wrecked and Widow Daventry has been beaten. She tells him that the men came here looking for him. He tells her about Bear. She says that Bear will be tortured and killed and that Crispin must leave the city that night after curfew. He goes back to his room to hide and wait for night.

Widow Daventry brings him some food and he asks if she can read what it says on his cross. She tells him that it says "Crispin - son of Furnival". She explains that he is the son of Lord Furnival and that his mother was probably Lord Douglas' daughter, who Lord Furnival was obsessed with. Lord Douglas' daughter was reported to have died, but it seems that she lived. Lord Furnival must have forced her to stay in the village to hide the illegitimate pregnancy. Crispin is a possible heir to Lord Furnival's fortune, which is why Lady Furnival and John Aycliffe are trying to kill him. That day in the forest when Crispin saw John Aycliffe talking to a courier, the courier must have brought news of Lord Furnival's death. At that point, Crispin and his mother were no longer protected. Widow Daventry tells Crispin that Bear knew he is Lord Furnival's son, but never guessed who his mother really was. Crispin thinks about everything she has told him and realizes that it makes sense. He also realizes that Bear was captured because of him, not because of the rebel meeting. He wonders what he can do to help him.

Chapters 46-50 Analysis

Bear shows what a heroic man he is when he helps all the other rebels to escape before him. He makes sure everyone gets out safely before thinking about himself. When the soldiers burst in, he tells Crispin to run. He does not want Crispin to risk himself to try to save Bear. Even though he is about to be arrested and probably killed, it is Crispin that he is worrying about. He loves Crispin and does not want him to get hurt.



Crispin and the rebels assume that the soldiers burst in and took Bear because their meeting was treasonous. John Ball thinks that they have been betrayed. However, they are all wrong. Bear was taken as bait to lure Crispin to the Furnivals. It is Crispin that they have been after all along. When Crispin realizes this he feels terribly guilty, as he sees Bear's abduction as somehow his fault. He immediately begins to think about how to get Bear back. He ran at first because Bear had told him to, but now that he has had time to think he knows he cannot leave Bear all alone. Just as Bear now loves Crispin, Crispin also loves Bear.

When Crispin is told the truth about his parents he is amazed, but everything he is told makes perfect sense. It is like pieces of a puzzle falling into place. He now understands why John Aycliffe has been trying to kill him. John Aycliffe is Lady Furnival's kin, so will share in her fortune now that she has inherited all Lord Furnival's money and property. Lady Furnival can only keep this money because Lord Furnival has no heir. If Crispin claimed his right as heir, he might be able to take all the money. Widow Daventry explains that Crispin alone is not a threat, but that they are afraid he will find people to back him. They are particularly worried about Crispin because his mother was the daughter of a lord. If Lord Douglas found out about Crispin, he could use him to claim all the Furnival land and money. Lord Douglas would be a powerful enemy and they would stand a good chance of losing everything.

Crispin now knows this is the reason he has been declared a wolf's head and hunted down. John Aycliffe was willing to kill Father Quinel and Crispin, a priest and a young boy, because of money. Lord Furnival had made Crispin and his mother prisoners in the village, forcing them to toil and live a miserable life, simply because he wanted to hide his mistake. All these things happened because the lords and ladies involved only think about themselves. This proves how corrupt many of the important people in the land have become. This is exactly what John Ball and the rest of the rebels want to change.

Crispin now knows the truth about himself, and all the mysteries surrounding him have been answered. All the answers he wanted were summed up on the message on the cross of lead he carries. Though he did not know it, Crispin has been holding the answer all this time. The cross of lead symbolizes the truth, the real person that Crispin is. However, it is also just a name: Crispin, son of Lord Furnival. Crispin will have to decide whether finding out who he really is, and who his parents were, changes him in any way. Is being Lord Furnival's son who he really is, deep down inside, or is he someone else? John Aycliffe only wants to kill Crispin because of who his father was, not because he cares about Crispin one way or the other. Crispin has been anxious to make himself into a real person, and not be a nobody anymore. Now he will have to decide which is more important to him - his life with Bear, or the life he could live as Lord Furnival's heir.



Chapters 51-55

Chapters 51-55 Summary

Crispin thinks about what a father means to him and decides he must try to rescue Bear. After curfew a man comes to help Crispin get out of the city. Crispin pretends that he intends to leave, but when they are away from the inn, he asks the man to take him to the White Stag inn instead. There he finds John Ball and the other rebels and tells them that Bear has been taken. The rebels refuse to help rescue Bear, but one of them at least agrees to take Crispin to the town square.

At the palace Crispin sees that there is a slight gap between the palace and the building next to it. He slips through the gap and manages to climb up the walls to the palace balcony. He swings onto the balcony and enters the palace. Inside, he finds an armory and grabs a dagger. He comes to a huge hall, and then finds a richly decorated chapel where he sees an image of his father as a pious knight. He thinks how he and his father are nothing alike, then kneels at the shrine to pray that God will judge Lord Furnival truly. Just then, John Aycliffe comes in and sees Crispin.

Chapters 51-55 Analysis

Crispin now knows the truth about who his real father is. He sits up in the hiding place in his room at the inn and tries to come to terms with what he has just been told. He wonders if the truth somehow makes him different, and if he has changed. He realizes that he is different, and that he has changed a great deal from the frightened boy who left the village. The old Crispin was scared and ready to give up, and thought of himself as an unimportant nobody. Now he has found new bravery, learned new skills and has gained a lot more confidence in himself. He does not think of himself as a nobody, but rather as a person who has the right to be happy and free. These changes did not come from finding out who his father really is, but happened earlier. They were brought on with Bear's help, and by learning to believe in himself. Lord Furnival means nothing, and his relationship to Crispin has only brought him trouble and pain. Widow Daventry calls the Furnival blood in him poison, as it can only hurt him and turn others against him. Crispin agrees with this. He thinks of himself as two different people: Lord Furnival's son and Crispin. This shows that he is separating the truth of who his father is from the new person that he has become. He knows he owes nothing to Lord Furnival. He realizes that being a father is about more than being related to someone. A true father loves and cares for his son and helps him to become a better and happier person. In this sense, Bear is his true father. Crispin realizes that he cannot abandon Bear now.

Crispin also thinks about what freedom means. He realizes that he has never been free in his life, until he met Bear. He enjoys his freedom and does not want to give it up. He thinks it is terrible that Bear should have his freedom taken away simply because Lady Furnival does not want to lose her money. He looks back on his past and realizes that



nobody in his village was truly free. Everybody worked constantly to make enough money to pay their lord and to pay their taxes. They were no better than slaves, attached to the land, not allowed to leave, and ruled over harshly by Lord Furnival. In contrast, the Furnivals have so much more than others. They have vast amounts of land and huge riches. It does not seem right that people with so much should exploit people who have barely anything. Now Crispin understands what it is that John Ball, Bear and the rebels are fighting against. He understands the meaning and value of freedom and agrees that it is worth fighting for. He knows that he must fight for Bear's freedom.

However, when Crispin tries to get the other rebels to help him rescue Bear, they will not go. The risk is too great, and they do not want to get hurt. They have high ideals and are willing to break laws and fight for what they believe in, but are not willing to fight for one of their own group when he is caught. This disappoints Crispin, who had expected such men to be brave and honorable. He expected people with such high values to care about every individual. He learns that people who follow a good cause might not always be very good people themselves. He does not let their arguments stop him, however, as he is determined to help Bear. He proves himself braver and a more loyal friend than any of the rebels.

Crispin puts all his bravery and skills to the test when he attempts to rescue Bear. Whereas the Crispin at the beginning of the book would probably have just given up, this Crispin will not let anything stop him. He finds a way around difficulties, managing to climb up the wall and sneak in on the second story of the building. He shows that he is very resourceful and quick thinking. He is also sensible enough to pick up a dagger. Crispin has finally grown up and learned to take care of himself. It was Bear who helped him reach this stage, and now it is his turn to help Bear.

In the chapel Crispin sees an image of his father as a pious knight. He thinks about his father's true nature, which is not pious at all. His father is greedy, mean and cruel. Crispin now realizes that titles and image do not necessarily mean anything. His father can pay to be represented as a good man in a statue, but it cannot hide who he truly is. In the same way, a poor peasant might not be considered important, but he could be a much better man than Lord Furnival. Crispin prays to God, asking that he judge Lord Furnival according to who he really was, rather than his title or the pretend images that he created.



Chapters 56-58

Chapters 56-58 Summary

John Aycliffe is about to call the guards when Crispin reveals that he knows who he really is. Crispin says he has come for Bear, and that if he lets them both go then Crispin will promise never to declare himself Lord Furnival's heir. John Aycliffe says he is a wolf's head and that nobody will believe him, and prepares to call the guards. Crispin jumps on him and threatens him with his dagger. He shows him the cross of lead that claims he is Furnival's son. John Aycliffe agrees to swear an oath that Crispin and Bear can leave the city unharmed. In return, Crispin swears an oath to give him the cross and never claim himself Furnival's heir.

John Aycliffe takes him down to the dungeon to get Bear. Bear has been tortured and is very weak. Crispin demands water and a cloak, and he manages to get Bear out of the palace. John Aycliffe tries to stop him, but Crispin reminds him of his oath and threatens to read what it says on the cross. John Aycliffe and his soldiers escort them to the city gate. Once there, however, John Aycliffe breaks his oath and demands that Crispin be killed. John Aycliffe attacks Bear, who uses Crispin's dagger to fight back. The dagger is knocked away and things are not going well for Crispin and Bear. Crispin reaches for the dagger and shouts to Bear. While John Aycliffe is distracted, Bear manages to get a grip on him and throws him onto his soldiers' spears. John Aycliffe is killed.

Bear threatens the soldiers with the same fate, and they move back to let Bear and Crispin pass. Crispin puts his cross on John Aycliffe's body as he leaves. As they walk away from the city, Bear declares Crispin free, and the two begin to play and sing happily together.

Chapters 56-58 Analysis

Crispin uses his bravery and intelligence to negotiate for Bear's release. He is willing to give up any claims he has as Furnival's heir in order to get Bear back and be granted safe passage from the city. Bear, as a friend and father figure, is more important to Crispin than any amount of money, land or power he could get from being Furnival's heir. This is a clever idea as John Aycliffe and Lady Furnival do not care about Crispin at all. If he were not Furnival's heir, then they would happily leave him alone. If they believe that he will relinquish all rights as Furnival's heir, then they will stop trying to kill him, and will have no reason to keep Bear prisoner. Not only will Bear be released, but Crispin will have his longed-for freedom.

However, for this to work, John Aycliffe has to truly believe that Crispin will give up his claim. John Aycliffe cannot imagine that anyone would give up power and money for their friend, so he thinks that Crispin must be lying. He does not want to even take the chance that Crispin will change his mind in the future. Crispin presents too much of a



risk, which is why John Aycliffe decides he must die. John Aycliffe proves how despicable he really is when he breaks a solemn oath. He swore that he would let Crispin and Bear leave safely, but instead he traps and betrays them at the gate. John Aycliffe is too greedy and dishonest to ever be able to understand why Crispin would give up his chance to claim money and power.

When John Aycliffe breaks his vow, Crispin's oath no longer holds. He is not obliged to give up his claim, as John Aycliffe did not let them pass safely. He also does not have to give John Aycliffe his cross, but he does. When Crispin gives up his cross, he is giving up any claim that he might have to Furnival's money. Crispin could have won his and Bear's freedom and still left with his cross. He could even have tried to claim himself as Furnival's heir. John Aycliffe no longer has any hold on Crispin, so Crispin could do whatever he likes. However, Crispin does not want money and power. All he wants is to live a life of freedom with Bear. He has enjoyed his life with Bear and loves Bear as a father. He has gained confidence and learned to take care of himself. Bear has helped him grow up and become a better person. Finally, he has won his freedom. This is all that matters to Crispin. He is not greedy and corrupt like many of the lords and other people he has met. He wants nothing to do with that way of life because he would rather be happy than rich. To be able to resist the possibility of a great fortune shows that Crispin is a good and honest person.

Giving up the cross also symbolizes Crispin letting go of his old life. He has left his village and his life of hardship and misery behind him. He no longer thinks of himself as a nobody. He is not the scared, pathetic child that he was at the beginning of his adventure, but a confident young man. He is no longer a serf attached to his lord's land, but has won his freedom. He does not live a life of doing what others tell him anymore. He does not have to look to other people to tell him what to do, but can ask his own questions and form his own opinions. He has found out the truth about himself and decided what is really important to him. When he drops the cross he says goodbye to his mother, rejects his noble father, and embraces a new and better father - Bear. He will now start a new and happier life with Bear, and no longer needs to rely on others to tell him what to do. He is finally free.



Characters

Asta's Son/Crispin

Crispin is a thirteen-year-old boy from the village of Stromford. He is extremely poor, and now that his mother is dead he wonders how he will survive on his own. He is known simply as "Asta's son" until the priest, Father Quinel, tells him his real name. He is forced to flee from his village when the steward declares him a "wolf's head", which means that anyone can kill him as if he is a wild animal. He does not know why the steward wants him dead, and knows very little about his own family. He has no idea who his father was. Father Quinel hints that there is something important about his father and mother that he needs to find out. Later, he learns that he is the son of Lord Furnival, and that his mother was probably Lord Douglas' daughter. This means that Crispin is actually of noble blood and could try to claim Lord Furnival's money and land as his own.

At first, Crispin is a very scared young boy. He does not know how to look after himself and is very naive about the world. He has lived in a tiny village all his life and always done what others told him. He has always believed everything he was told. Now he is forced to think for himself. He is upset about the death of his mother and his friend Father Quinel, and feels that he has been left with no one. He thinks about giving up. However, when he sees a man hanging from the gallows, he is reminded of how much he wants to live. He finds the strength to carry on.

In a small village where everyone has died from plague, Crispin meets Bear. At first Bear is harsh to Crispin and does not treat him in a very friendly way. Crispin is angry and upset, but accepts the fact that he is now someone else's servant. He treats Bear as a master and tells him that he thinks of himself as a nobody. Crispin has a very low opinion of himself, and imagines that he must somehow deserve all the horrible things that have happened to him. When Bear begins to say things that sound traitorous, Crispin is shocked. He has always done what he is told and has never thought to question the people in charge.

With Bear's help, Crispin begins to change. He learns to play a recorder and is pleased to feel useful. When he realizes that he and Bear can actually earn a living this way, he is overjoyed. This is a much better life than his miserable work in the fields of Stromford. He begins to warm to Bear, and Bear likes him much better too. Bear teaches him new skills, such as juggling, singing, mending clothes and setting traps. He makes Crispin clean up and cut his hair, which makes Crispin take a little more pride in himself. He helps Crispin to gain new confidence in himself, which makes him a happier and braver person. Crispin also begins to think about the world in a different way. Bear shows him that things do not always have to be the way that people tell him they should be. He should not always believe other people, but should ask questions and form his own opinions. With Bear's help, Crispin begins to think of himself as somebody who is important after all. He is not a nobody anymore.



When they reach the city, Crispin is amazed by everything he sees. He has never experienced anything like it before and is anxious to see everything he can. He lets his curiosity get the better of him and wanders out into the city. He realizes too late that he has made a mistake and put himself in danger. However, with his new skills and with clever thinking, he manages to take care of himself. When Bear finds him, he is grateful and sorry for having caused trouble. He still acts naively at times, but has certainly grown up a lot since the beginning of the story.

When Bear is captured, Crispin shows how brave he really is. He will not leave the city to save himself and abandon Bear. He is determined to save the man that he now loves as his father. When the rebels refuse to help him, he goes on his own. He is resourceful and clever, and manages to negotiate Bear's release. To do so he has to give up his claim to Lord Furnival's fortune. He is happy to do this because Bear means so much more to him than money and power. Even though he is related to a corrupt lord, Crispin is not corrupt himself.

As Crispin and Bear leave the city at the end of the story, Crispin drops his lead cross on the body of John Aycliffe. This is Crispin's way of rejecting his link to his biological father, Lord Furnival. The cross would have allowed Crispin to try to claim money and power, but Crispin does not want these things. He wants an honest and happy life with Bear. He is not greedy or corrupted by power. He proves himself to be a good person who does not give in to temptation. What Crispin wants more than anything else is simply to be free. At the end of the story he has gained his freedom, is more confident and happy, and does not think of himself as a nobody anymore. He embraces his name and his identity, but does not think of himself as anything like Lord Furnival. He realizes that the person he has become is separate from his identity as Lord Furnival's son. He considers Bear a better and truer father, and is happy to begin his new life with him.

Bear/Orson Hrothgar

Bear is a wandering juggler who performs in villages and towns he passes to earn money. He is a huge man with a bushy red beard. He attracts a lot of attention wherever he goes. When he meets Crispin in a plague-ruined village, he decides to make Crispin his servant. Although he likes to pretend that he prefers to be alone, he is obviously lonely. He forces Crispin to swear an oath to stay with him because he wants company. He needs a friend, but does not quite seem to know how to make one. He finds it hard to trust people, as he has been abandoned by his father and friends. He sees a lot of corruption and misery in the places he passes through, and so is quite bitter towards the world. He is afraid Crispin will leave if he does not force him to stay. Despite this, he seems like he has a good heart and does not treat Crispin cruelly. He makes sure he has enough food, and even provides meat for him to eat, which is a privilege he does not normally get. Bear describes himself as being like a real bear; he is sweet and gentle until irritated, but can be vicious when angered.

At first Bear does not entirely trust Crispin, but he soon warms to him. He starts to feel responsible for Crispin, and realizes that Crispin needs help to stay safe. He begins to



see how much Crispin needs his help to gain self confidence and be happy. He teaches Crispin many new skills, some to make him feel useful and more important, and some to help him survive. He fills a fatherly role for Crispin, and soon begins to really care about him. Widow Daventry reveals later that he has grown to think of Crispin as his son.

Bear is a man who is not afraid to disagree with people and form his own opinions. He refuses to believe everything that he is told, or to accept the world for the way it is. He believes that he can help change things for the better. He has a good heart and does not like to stand by and see people suffer. He is also very brave. He becomes involved in a rebel group that wants to bring about a revolution. This is very dangerous, but Bear is determined to do what he believes is right, no matter what the danger is. When he is caught, he sacrifices himself to let the others and Crispin get away. He is kind-hearted but can also be strong and angry when pushed. When John Aycliffe tries to kill Crispin, Bear fights him and kills him. Like a real bear, Bear will do anything to protect the ones he loves.

John Aycliffe

John Aycliffe is the steward of Stromford. He is the man appointed by Lord Furnival to look after his land and house in this area. He is Lady Furnival's kin, and so always has her interests in mind. He declares Crispin a "wolf's head" because he wants Crispin to be killed. When framing him for theft is not enough, he accuses him of murdering Father Quinel. He is ruthless and cruel and will do whatever it takes to get rid of Crispin.

John Aycliffe is doing all this because Crispin could claim himself Lord Furnival's heir and so get his hands on the money and power that now belong to Lady Furnival. John Aycliffe is greedy and corrupt, and willing to kill innocent people because of money. He murders Father Quinel, who knows too much, and kidnaps and tortures Bear in order to draw Crispin to him. He also shows that he is dishonest and untrustworthy when he breaks a solemn vow. John Aycliffe is a despicable man and the main villain of the book. He is killed at the end of the story by Bear.

Lord Furnival

Lord Furnival owns Stromford, Lodgecot and other villages, and all the land around. He is a very wealthy and powerful man. He has a manor house in Stromford, and a palace in the city of Great Wexly. When the story starts he has been away at war for a long time. At Great Wexly, Crispin and Bear find out that he is actually dead. Bear has met Lord Furnival before, when he was a soldier. He tells Crispin that Lord Furnival was a greedy and cruel man. Crispin sees that this is true when he thinks about the low pay and bad treatment of the people on his land, and how none of the villagers have any freedom.

Crispin finds out that he is the son of Lord Furnival. Lord Furnival was obsessed with Lord Douglas' daughter, and when he got her pregnant he kept her prisoner in his village in order to hide the pregnancy and the illegitimate child. He was only concerned



with himself and did not care how she or her child might feel. Crispin and his mother have lived a miserable life and it is all Lord Furnival's fault. Crispin realizes that he is nothing like his father, and does not want to be connected with him. He thinks of his noble blood as being like poison and rejects his right to claim himself as heir.

Lady Furnival

Lady Furnival is Lord Furnival's widow. She is only seen once in the story, when she rides through the streets of Great Wexly on her fine horse with rich clothes and decorations. The reader does not know if she is behind the plan to kill Crispin, but she is certainly anxious to hold on to her money and seems just as greedy and corrupt as her husband was.

Widow Daventry

Widow Daventry is the owner of the Green Man tavern in Great Wexly, where Crispin and Bear stay. She seems quite a lonely woman, who has lost two husbands and seven children. She likes to have company, and is pleased to see Bear and Crispin. She is old friends with Bear, and gives him the same room when he comes to stay. She obviously has a soft spot for Bear, as she tells Crispin to look after him and try to keep him out of trouble. She does not approve of his rebel meetings as she thinks they are too dangerous. She treats Crispin as a friend because he is Bear's friend, but cannot help being angry with him when John Aycliffe's men wreck her inn to search for him. However, she softens when she sees how upset Crispin is and tells him the truth about who he is. She is kind and concerned and tries to help him escape.

John Ball

John Ball is a real historical person. He was one of the leaders of the Peasant Revolution in 1381 and was executed when it failed. In this story, he is one of the rebels who wants to change the country and bring about revolution. The Peasant Revolution has not started yet, and he is still gathering more people to his cause. He believes strongly that all people should be free and that taxes and wages should be fairer. He believes that the lords and the Church are corrupt and that things should change. He arranges secret meetings in order to discuss this with other rebels, such as Bear. However, despite his ideals, he is not willing to risk himself to save Bear when he is captured.

Father Quinel

Father Quinel is the priest of Stromford. He is a good and honest man who cares about everyone in his village. He befriends Crispin and tries to help him. He arranges for Crispin to leave the village and is prepared to tell him the truth about himself. He is killed by John Aycliffe because he knows too much.



Objects/Places

The Lead Cross

Crispin's cross is made of lead and is worn around his neck. It belonged to his mother, who wrote words on it that Crispin cannot read. Father Quinel, the priest of Stromford, gives Crispin the cross and tells him to flee the village. What is written on the cross is a complete mystery to Crispin throughout most of the story. Later, Crispin finds out that the words written on the cross are "Crispin - son of Furnival". He uses the cross as a bargaining device to ensure Bear's release from the Furnival palace. At the end of the book he drops the cross on John Aycliffe's body as he leaves the city.

Stromford

Stromford is Crispin's village, where he was born and grew up. It is a small village with a church, situated near a manor house which belongs to Lord Furnival. Stromford and the surrounding land also belong to Lord Furnival. The peasants who work on the land are in a form of bondage called serfdom. This means that they are attached to the land and are not supposed to leave. Crispin's mother was held prisoner in Stromford by Lord Furnival, who made her pregnant and wanted to hide this. When Crispin is declared a wolf's head he escapes the village at night.

Great Wexly

Great Wexly is a city near Stromford. It is where Bear is heading to in order to attend an important meeting. When Bear makes Crispin his servant, he insists that Crispin also comes to Great Wexly. Crispin is amazed at the sights, smells and sounds of the city. He has never seen so many people and such a variety of different things before.

The city is surrounded by a wall, with gates for passing in and out which are guarded by armed men. The gates are closed at night and a curfew enforced, which means that everyone must go inside their houses. There are many streets in Great Wexly and it is easy to get lost. The main streets are paved and have a channel running down the middle for sewage, which is just poured out of people's windows directly into the street. There are animals wandering freely all over the city, and many rats. In the center of the city is the town square, with a huge cathedral and the Furnival palace. Crispin and Bear stay at a tavern called the Green Man while they are in Great Wexly.

Lodgecot

Lodgecot is a small village that Bear and Crispin pass through on their way to Great Wexly. It is where they find out from the priest that Crispin has been accused of the



murder of Father Quinel. It is also where they meet the one-eyed man who takes a dislike to them. Lodgecot is also owned by Lord Furnival.

The Peasants of England

At this point in history most of the people in England are very poor. They work the land in order to make food, but have to give most of what they produce to their lord. They are tied to the land in a form of bondage called serfdom. This means that they are not allowed to leave, and that all their possessions and their homes are really the property of their lord. They are taxed heavily and not given very good wages. Most live hard, unhappy lives and never know proper freedom. Many towns and villages have lost great amounts of people to the Great Plague. Living conditions are cramped and dirty.

The Revolution

There are a group of rebels who do not agree with the way that things are for the poor people of the country. They want to change things for the better so that people can live happier lives. They believe that the lords and the Church are corrupt and that taxes are too high and wages too low. They believe that serfdom should be eradicated so that all people can be free. In order to achieve these things, they want to bring about a revolution. This means that they are plotting against their king and their lords, which is treason. This is very dangerous, as they will be executed if they are discovered.

In 1381, just a few years after this story is set, there was a real revolution called the Peasant Revolution. The poor people rose up against their corrupt lords and demanded for things to be fairer. The revolution was violent and many people died. Unfortunately it was not successful, and the rebel leaders were executed.

The Church (Catholicism in the Middle Ages)

Religion was an extremely important part of life in the Middle Ages. In this story, characters often refer to God, and pray when they need help or are worried about something. It is important for every person to go to church at least once a week to attend mass, the main religious ceremony. They also consider vows to be sacred. They are all Catholic, which was the main religion of Europe at the time.

The Catholic Church was run by a hierarchy of holy men. At the top was the Pope, who was considered the most holy man on earth. Next came archbishops and bishops, who oversaw large areas. At the bottom were priests, who performed religious duties and ceremonies for the people of a particular area, such as Stromford village. There were also monasteries and abbeys where monks lived. Monks dedicated their lives to God. They spent their days praying and worshipping. They were supposed to take a vow of poverty, as a man so dedicated to God does not need worldly possessions. However, in reality, many of the monasteries were very rich and the holy men could be just as corrupt as the lords.



The Green Man Tavern

Crispin and Bear stay at the Green Man tavern while in Great Wexly. Their room is on the second floor and has a secret hiding place in the wall. Bear has stayed here before and is friends with the owner. The tavern is owned and run by a woman called Widow Daventry, whose husbands and children have all died. The tavern is searched and wrecked by John Aycliffe's men when they come looking for Crispin.

The Cathedral

In the town square of Great Wexly is a cathedral. It is a huge church with extravagant decoration. Crispin is amazed by it as he has never seen anything so awe-inspiring before. He goes inside to take a look and to pray but is seen by John Aycliffe.

The Furnival Palace

The Furnival palace is a large house in the town square where the Furnival family live. This is their main home, though they do own other houses such as the manor house in Stromford. Bear is taken to the Furnival palace when he is captured by John Aycliffe. When Crispin decides to rescue Bear, Crispin slips into the gap between the palace and another building and climbs the wall. He swings onto the balcony and slips inside. The Furnival palace is richly decorated inside. Crispin sees an armory, a huge dining hall, and a chapel with an image of his father. In the basement of the palace there are dungeons where prisoners like Bear are held and tortured.

Mazer

A mazer is a wooden drinking bowl. Bear takes the one-eyed man's mazer to juggle with in the village of Lodgecot. The one-eyed man does not take the joke well and instantly takes a dislike to Bear and Crispin. Later, the one-eyed man helps John Aycliffe to capture Bear.

Gallows

The gallows were the wooden frames from which criminals were hung in Middle Age England. Crispin sees a man hanging from the gallows while escaping Stromford. Seeing this reminds him of how much he actually wants to live, giving him new determination to carry on.

The Daily Prayers

In the Middle Ages certain times of the day were set aside for prayer. These were called the canonical hours, and each one had a different name. In the story, Crispin notes what



time of day it is by the different prayer hours. These are a constant reminder of how important religion is in people's daily lives. The different prayer hours are: Matins - the first prayers of the day; Lauds - morning prayers; Terce - midmorning prayers; Sext - midday prayers; None - mid-afternoon prayers; Vespers - the evening prayers; and Compline - the night prayers.



Themes

Family and Friendship

An important theme in this book is family and friendship. Who is a good friend and who is a bad friend? What makes a good father? Both Crispin and Bear are people who are completely alone, with no friends or family to support them. Crispin's mother is dead and he never knew his father. He has no real friends in the village, and the one person who was nice to him, Father Quinel, is also dead. Bear's own father abandoned him and sent him away to an abbey at an early age. He made friends with some travelling performers, but their group did not stay together long. Bear claims that he prefers to be alone, but he is anxious to keep Crispin close and is obviously very lonely. He does not trust people anymore and is sure that Crispin will leave unless he forces him to stay. Crispin does not know how to react to Bear, so he treats him as a master rather than a friend. This annoys Bear, as he does not really want a servant but a friend.

As they travel together, Bear and Crispin begin to warm to each other. Bear helps Crispin have more confidence in himself and learn new skills. Crispin gives Bear company and trust. Bear acts gruffly towards Crispin at first, and forcefully kicks him out of the habit of accepting whatever he is told. He is hard on him in their lessons, pushing him to practice and get better at playing music. His pushing pays off, as Crispin learns how to play and feels pride in himself for doing it. He also gains a sense of importance from being able to help Bear perform. Bear might appear hard, but he is helping Crispin all the time. He is showing himself to be a true friend, one who really cares about Crispin's happiness. When Bear releases Crispin from serving him, it is because he does not want to force him to stay with him anymore. He cares too much about him and wants him to stay of his own desire. Crispin does stay. He has come to see Bear as a protector and a friend.

In the city, Crispin and Bear's relationship deepens. They had pretended to be father and son at Lodgecot; now they begin to actually feel this way. Bear has become a father figure for Crispin. He protects him and cares for him. When he seems to be hard or unfair, it is always for Crispin's own good, such as warning him not to stray out into the city. Bear also comes to think of Crispin as his son. He tells him that he should escape and leave Bear if they are ever in trouble. Bear does not want Crispin to be hurt, and even sacrifices himself to save him. Crispin cannot abandon Bear though. He bravely sets about trying to rescue him, and manages to bargain for his freedom. Both of them are now willing to risk their lives to save the other. They have become as close as family could ever be, despite not being related to each other.

Crispin's relationship to his real father could not be more different. Lord Furnival never cared about him at all, and even made his life miserable to hide him from the world. For him, Crispin only brought shame and never love. He had no interest in being a father to him. When Crispin finds out who he really is, he thinks of his noble blood as poison. It has only brought him pain and danger. He feels no connection to his real father, and



thinks about how different they are. He completely rejects that side of himself, promising not to claim himself Furnival's heir and even giving up his iron cross. When he gives up the cross it is symbolic of him letting go of his old life as well as rejecting his noble blood in favor of a life with Bear. When Crispin thinks about what a father is he realizes it is actions, not blood, that really count. Bear is a much better and truer father than Lord Furnival could ever have been.

Greed and Temptation

Many of the characters in this story are very greedy or corrupt. Lord Furnival is very wealthy, but he still keeps his serfs in miserable conditions and takes almost everything they have. He does not look after his people. Like him, many lords and wealthy families have so much, while the poorer people who work the land have so little. There is a huge social divide between the rich and the poor. According to Bear, the Church is also corrupt, and many priests and monks who are supposed to reject worldly goods are far too rich and greedy.

John Aycliffe and Lady Furnival are so anxious to hold on to their money and power that they are willing to commit terrible acts. John Aycliffe murders a priest and tries to have Crispin killed. He lies about Crispin's crime and pursues him across the country. He does not care anything about Crispin, but only about his possible rights as Furnival's heir. He does not care whose life he ruins because of his greed. He is also very dishonest, breaking a solemn vow when he orders Crispin killed.

The corruption of these important people is hidden behind their title and their image. They pretend to the world that they are noble, good and pious people. John Aycliffe has to pretend that he is hunting down a thief and murderer when he pursues Crispin. Lord Furnival has a statue of himself in his palace, representing him as a pious knight. Crispin knows that these images are not true, and that an important title or position does not guarantee that they are a good person. It is what is on the inside that counts.

In comparison to his father, Crispin is a very good person. He does not desire wealth and power, but only wants to be free and happy. He does not value money and land over other people and is willing to give up everything to free his friend. At the end of the story, Crispin could have walked away with everything. He could have had his freedom and still claimed himself Furnival's heir. For someone who has always been very poor, such riches might be hard to resist. Crispin does not hesitate, however. He sees titles and wealth as a kind of poison, bringing only corruption and pain. He does not want to be one of these people and does not care about being rich. He has learned to value more important things, such as trust, bravery, honesty, freedom, friendship and love.

Identity

Crispin begins the story without a sense of who he really is. He does not know anything about his family, or even know who his father is. He is called "Asta's son" and so is defined by his mother. He is looked down on because he does not have a father. He



feels unimportant, like a nobody. He does not think much of himself, and imagines that all his misfortunes must somehow be his fault. He is used to being in bondage and working the fields all day. He takes orders and believes what he is told.

When he is forced to leave his village, he begins a quest of self discovery. He has been given his real name - Crispin - but does not quite know what to do with it. It doesn't feel like it belongs to him. It seems too special, and he is used to thinking of himself as a nobody. However, when he meets Bear, things begin to change. Bear pushes him to learn music, which gives him a greater sense of importance and pride. Bear makes him clean up and teaches him to speak confidently. Crispin starts to develop a sense of himself as someone who does deserve freedom, and is important after all. Bear also encourages him to think for himself and ask questions. He begins to wonder more about who he really is and who his father is.

When they reach the city, Crispin experiences lots of new things. He is no longer the naive and miserable village boy, but a person who can take delight in and wonder at the things around him. He is a lot braver, and can stick up for himself. When Bear is taken prisoner, he forms his own plan to rescue him and is brave enough to put it into action. When John Aycliffe challenges him, he speaks back to him with confidence and is able to demand Bear's release.

Just as Crispin has finally formed a sense of who he is and what his place in the world is, he learns who his father and mother really were. He learns that he has noble blood and is descended from two very rich and important families. Suddenly, he has to come to terms with two different identities: the Crispin he has developed into, and Lord Furnival's son. He realizes that he is not a nobody anymore, and that he has changed. This is not the result of being Lord Furnival's son, however, but of Bear's help. He realizes that his identity as Bear's friend and son is more important to him than the truth of being Lord Furnival's son. He rejects the noble part of his identity and gives up the cross of lead which proves his birthright. He feels no connection to Lord Furnival at all, but rather a deep connection to Bear and his way of life. He has found his freedom, and has found his identity at last.

Growing Up

At the beginning of the story, Crispin has a lot of growing up to do. He is scared and alone, and does not know how to look after himself. He is ready to give up, and only the thought of how much he actually wants to live can keep him going. He believes everything he is told and does everything he is instructed to do. He has lived in a small village, never experiencing anything else, and does not know much about the world.

When he meets Bear, this all begins to change. He starts to experience new things and learn about the world. He is introduced to new points of view. Bear makes him learn a new skill, and when he is successful he takes enormous pride in himself. He is encouraged to ask Bear to teach him other new things. Soon he is learning all kinds of new skills, such as mending clothes and setting traps. Bear also teaches him to have



more confidence in himself and to ask questions. He learns that he cannot always believe everything he is told and must decide some things for himself.

In the city, Crispin wanders off against Bear's orders and gets into danger. However, instead of giving up, he actually manages to get away and uses his brain to figure out a way to find the city gate. Later, when Bear is captured, Crispin makes a plan to rescue him and bravely carries it out. He sticks up for himself to John Aycliffe and speaks with confidence. He manages to demand Bear's release. Crispin proves that he does not need to rely on others anymore. He does not need Bear's protection, but still values his friendship and love. Finally, at the city gate, Crispin gives up his cross of lead. He rejects his connection to the Furnivals and shows that he is not greedy for money and power. He can value the more important things in life. He has come to understand what true freedom is, and now he knows that this is what he wants. He has grown up.

Life in the Middle Ages

This story tells the reader about life in England in the Middle Ages. Life was very hard for most people. The majority of the peasants were very poor, and many died of sickness such as the plague. They were taxed heavily and not paid very good wages. They were treated unfairly and considered unimportant by those in power. Many of the rural poor were serfs, which means that they were attached to the land, forced to work to grow food that they then had to give to their lord. All their possessions belonged to the lord and they were not allowed to leave. Some might save up and hope to buy their freedom, but in reality this was not easy.

In contrast, the rich were very rich. They owned huge amounts of land that was worked for them by the poor. They would employ a steward to watch over their land, and would spend their time in leisure instead. They might have several houses and live mainly in a big city. They were often very corrupt and greedy and cared very little for the peasants that lived on their land.

Religion was a very important part of life. Catholicism was the main religion of Europe. People were expected to attend church at least once a week to attend mass, their main religious ceremony. In addition, the days were split into prayer hours. People would pray to God whenever they needed comfort. Religious ceremonies were led by priests, who could sometimes be just as corrupt as the lords. Monks were holy men who dedicated their lives to worship and prayer. They were supposed to take vows of poverty, but in reality many of the monasteries were very rich.

Many people were not happy with the way things were. A desire for reform in the Church emerged, and some rebel leaders began to preach for more equality in daily life. They wanted to put an end to serfdom and make taxes and wages fairer. In 1381 there was a Peasant Revolution in England, in which many people rose up to demand changes. One of the leaders was John Ball, who appears in this story. The revolution was very violent, and unfortunately was not successful. John Ball and other rebel leaders were executed. This took place just a few years after this story is set.

Style

Point of View

The story is told in first person from Crispin's point of view. The reader gets a direct view into Crispin's thoughts and feelings, but doesn't not necessarily know what any of the other characters are thinking. Sometimes one's impression of people and things might be influenced by Crispin's perception of them. For example, Crispin finds the city amazing, so it is described in great detail with a sense of awe and wonder. By telling the story in this way, the author makes sure that the reader experiences the world and events as Crispin does. One can understand how he reacts because one knows exactly what has happened to him and how it made him feel. One knows how much Bear means to Crispin, and so feel afraid and upset with him when Bear is taken. One can also see how Crispin changes throughout the book, as he begins to gain a greater sense of confidence, form his own opinions and ask more questions. This allows the author to show Crispin growing up to the reader.

Setting

This story is set in the Middle Ages in England. This means that things are very different from how they are today. There are not as many cities, and most people live in the country and work the land. The peasants are extremely poor. Many of them are serfs, which means that they are attached to the land and are not supposed to leave. Their possessions and houses are the property of their lord, who owns all the land they work on. They are made to pay very high taxes and are not paid very good wages. Many people die of sickness, and living conditions are not good. Meat is a luxury which most people do not eat very often. Cities are dirty places where sewage is poured out into the street. Catholicism is a very important part of life, and everyone attends church at least once a week. The days are separated into prayer hours, with church bells announcing each one.

Crispin lives in a small village called Stromford. The village and the land around it are owned by Lord Furnival. The village is all that Crispin has ever known, and he is amazed when he beings to see and experience new things. When he leaves Stromford he comes to a village where everyone has died from the plague. Here he meets Bear, who he travels with from now on. They come to another small village called Lodgecot. This is a similar village to Stromford, owned by Lord Furnival, with one church and a few houses. The villagers are serfs who work the land, just like Crispin was before he left.

When they arrive at the city of Great Wexly, Crispin is amazed. He has never seen anything like the city before. It is full of new sights and sounds, and he takes delight in looking at everything. The main street is paved, with a central channel for the sewage which everyone just pours into the street. Animals wander around freely and the whole city is very unclean. There are walls around the city, with guards at each gate. The



gates are closed at night, when everyone is expected to be indoors. Crispin and Bear stay at the Green Man tavern. They have a room on the second floor with a secret hiding place. In the middle of the city is the town square, where Crispin sees the cathedral and the Furnival palace. This is a whole new world to Crispin, giving him a sense of life and wonder. The people here are freer than any of the villagers he has ever known. Through his traveling, Crispin has gained a sense of freedom and importance which he does not want to give up. Exploring new places and learning new things has brought him to life and given him a sense of identity. He learns what is important in life and realizes that traveling with Bear is exactly where he wants to be.

Language and Meaning

The language in this book may seem strange and old fashioned. This is because it is told in first person from Crispin's point of view. The author uses words and phrases that a real boy in the Middle Ages might use. He tries to capture a sense of realism in the way that the characters speak and interact with each other. Crispin also mentions God a lot, which shows how important religion was in everyday life at this time. Whenever he is upset or worried, he prays and asks God for guidance. This may seem strange to a modern reader, but for Crispin this is a natural reaction to his problems.

Despite the historical style, the language is not overly fanciful. There is a large amount of dialogue, which keeps the story moving quickly. Descriptions are given with a sense of wonder because Crispin is amazed by everything he sees. Everything is new to him, but it is also unfamiliar to the reader. This means that descriptions have two purposes; they help the reader understand the time a little better, as well as evoke a certain mood or feeling.

Structure

The book is told in very short chapters that deal with one incident or new idea at a time. Crispin is learning and experiencing so many new things that his head is constantly full of thoughts and ideas. Each new adventure changes him in some important way. The structure of the book reflects this by emphasizing the importance of each event by giving it its own separate chapter. It also makes the book easier to read and offers plenty of opportunities to stop and think about what has happened. The book has several mysteries running through it, so it is useful to be able to stop and consider events.

The story has a very simple structure. It tells the story of Crispin's escape from Stromford, how he meets Bear, his journey to the city, and his final victory in which he rescues Bear and wins his freedom. There are no side episodes or flash-backs in the story. Everything is always told from Crispin's point of view. This makes it easier to see how Crispin changes for the better and grows up throughout the story. It also emphasizes the developing friendship between Crispin and Bear, which is an important theme of the story.



Quotes

"Spring, summer, and fall - save certain holy days - my mother and I, like every other Stromford villager, worked his fields from dawn to dusk."

Chap. 3, p. 14

"Like all villagers, we were required to ask the steward's permission to be excused from work if ill, to grind our wheat, or bake it, to buy or sell, to travel from our parish, to marry, even to baptize our children."

Chap. 4, p. 22

"When Adam plowed and Eve spun, who was then the gentleman?"

Chap. 19, p. 84

"As God in Heaven knows, both wheat and trust take a full season to grow."

Chap. 22, p. 101

"A wise man - he was a jester by trade - once told me that living by answers is a form of death. It's only questions that keep you living."

Chap. 24, p. 111

"If I knew anything it was that all men belonged to someone. Surely God Himself put us all in our places: Lords to rule and fight. Clergy to pray. All the rest - like me - were on earth to labor, to serve out masters and our God." (

Chap. 24, p. 116

"The more I listened, the more startled I was that I understood what John Ball was saying, that he was, in fact, describing the way I had lived, and how it was wrong and could be made right. But as his words went on, I realized too how hazardous this business truly was, nothing less than rebellion against the realm of England."

Chap. 45, p. 229

"I kept asking myself if I felt different, if I was different. The answer was always yes. I was no longer nothing."

Chap. 51, p. 252

"How odd, I thought: it had taken my mother's death, Father Quinel's murder, and the desire of others to kill me for me to claim a life of my own."

Chap. 51, p. 252

"I suppose some might have considered me blessed in that I was of high blood. But I knew that blood, as Widow Daventry had said, to be nothing but venom."

Chap. 51, p. 252

"Bear - in the short time I had known him - was a thousandfold more a faithful father to me."

Chap. 51, p. 252



"I saw it then: Bear and Ball were talking about the very word Father Quinel had used, freedom. Something I had never had. Nor did anyone in my village, or the other villages through which we had passed. We lived in bondage."

Chap. 51, p. 253

"I was unfettered, alive to an earth I hardly knew but was eager to explore. What's more, I knew that feeling to be my newfound soul, a soul that lived in freedom. And my name - I knew with all my heart - was Crispin."

Chap. 58, p. 297



Topics for Discussion

How does Crispin change throughout the story? In what ways does he grow up? How does he win his freedom?

Why does Crispin give up his cross of lead at the end of the story? What does this mean?

Think about freedom in this story. Who is free and who is not? How can people become free? Why is freedom so important?

What does this story tell the reader about life in the Middle Ages? How is it different from life today?

In what ways are Crispin and Bear similar? How are they different? How does this help them develop their friendship?

Think about greed and corruption in this story. Who is greedy and who is corrupt? Who resists temptation? Do the bad characters get what they deserve?

Is Bear a good role model for Crispin? Is he a good role model for modern readers?

Who is your favorite character and why? What do they do that makes them admirable? Do they have to overcome anything? Do they act bravely?