

The Door in the Wall Study Guide

The Door in the Wall by Marguerite De Angeli

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Plot Summary

The Door in the Wall by Marguerite De Angeli portrays life in medieval England through the eyes of a ten year old boy, Robin de Bureford. The book also chronicles how he overcomes a crippling illness. London is a big city for that time, with many churches, and Robin wakes to the sound of the church bells ringing everyday. Robin also describes other common sounds and smells of that time, such as the sound of armor the knights wear, the smell of the fishmonger, and the children playing in the streets. The first chapter also talks about the plague that is going on in London at this time

Robin's father, an English nobleman, has gone to fight the Scottish wars with Edward III and his mother has been called to be a lady-in-waiting for the Queen. Robin is to foster with Sir Peter de Lindsay as a page and learn to be a knight. His parents think he is cared for while they are gone. However, Robin becomes ill, loses the use of his legs, and is unable to travel such a distance. A family servant cares for him but she leaves him when he slings porridge at her and then she dies of the plague later that day. There are no other servants to care for him because they leave or die because of the plague.

Brother Luke, a friar, hears about Robin's predicament and brings him to St. Mark's where he has to stay in Brother Luke's own quarters. There is not a great deal of room anywhere else because of the plague. Brother Luke nurtures the boy both physically and mentally and tells him that there are many doors in the walls and he just has to find them. Robin eventually understands that the doors are another way of saying he has to find a new path in life due to his lameness.

Brother Luke helps Robin become a stronger, nicer person by learning patience through whittling, as well as by his associations with other people such as the monks. Before his illness, Robin was used to being one of the privileged upper class; but the friar expects him to learn skills and treat others well no matter their allotment in life. Luke never actually disciplines Robin but the boy knows what the friar expects of him and wants to please him, so he is ashamed when he does something bad such as flinging the chisel.

After hearing from Robin's father, John-go-in-the-Wynd and Brother Luke travel with Robin to Lindsay castle. The reader learns more about the times through the descriptions of this journey, and Robin shows courage on this trip when he manages to get out of bed on his own and warn the friar that thieves plan to rob them.

At the castle, Robin shows his bravery when he saves his new friends there by going for help when the castle is under siege by the Welsh. The King awards Robin with a jeweled collar for aiding in saving the castle and Brother Luke tells Robin that he has found his door in the wall. Robin learns how he is useful even without being a knight.



chapter 1

chapter 1 Summary

Robin is sitting in bed trying to cover his ears from the sounds outside. All of the bells of the churches in London are ringing and it is extremely loud and feels like yelling in Robin's head.

Robin is the son of a lord and is expected to be a knight like his father. He is supposed to work in the household of another knight to learn the ways of knighthood. Knights must learn to be brave, polite, and strong in body and heart. Robin's father is a brave knight and has to leave Robin and his mother to fight with the King of England, Edward III, in the Scottish Wars.

The day after his tenth birthday, his mom leaves him as well. She is required to serve as a lady-in-waiting to the queen and so she tells Robin that John-the-Fletcher is coming to escort him to Sir Peter de Lindsey. There is a plague spreading in London, so it is good that he is leaving the city; however, while he waits for John, their servants, including Dame Ellen will take care of Robin.

The next day, Robin gets extremely sick. though not with the plague, and is unable to move his legs. He is waiting for Ellen to come make his fire while he listens to the sounds of his old friends running around and playing outside. Robin hears Ellen coming to his room and soon realizes she has brought him more lumpy porridge. When Robin lobs the porridge at Ellen, she tells him that she is never coming back and she does not have to serve him anymore as she is a free woman. Later, it is revealed that she is in the beginning stages of the plague at this time, so it is amazing she is as patient with Robin as she is.

The day passes and Robin listens and waits for the sound of Ellen coming back. As the afternoon passes, he listens to the sounds of children playing and the market noises. Robin tries to get up and look outside but is too weak to move. Eventually, he hears footsteps approach his room and a monk enters with a basket. The monk introduces himself as Brother Luke from St. Mark's.

Luke tells Robin that Ellen died of plague but she told a widow about Robin being left alone and the widow passed the information on to the Monks. While Robin eats, Luke massages him and tells him that he will take him to his quarters. Robin's father donates money to St. Mark's, so Brother Luke plans to have Robin stay at St. Mark's in his own room. Unfortunately, most of the rooms and hallways are filled with the plague victims, so Luke's room is the only place left for Robin.

Robin explains to Brother Luke that John-the-Fletcher was supposed to send a doctor to look at him but never came back. Luke tells him that the doctors are busy with the



plague victims. Also, John may have been taken by the plague or not allowed back through the city gates because strangers are not being allowed back into the city.

After dressing Robin in warm clothes and getting a few of his belongings, Luke carries Robin and his clothes to the courtyard in one trip. Luke lifts Robin onto Jenny, his horse, and they go to St. Mark's. Robin asks Brother Luke what will happen to him now, and Luke promises him that the monks will take care of him until they hear from Robin's father. Unfortunately, they cannot contact his father until the plague is calmer and a message can be sent and received. Robin is put to bed on a narrow cot after Luke's promise.

chapter 1 Analysis

Robin is showing his dramatic side when he perceives the bells as screaming in his head. The bells ring everyday and should be a normal part of his day, yet he is overwhelmed by them. He wants to cry but knows that he has to be brave because a knight does not cry. Robin appears to idolize his father and his father is a brave, strong knight who would never cry.

After his father and mother leave, Robin feels abandoned and alone. Young boys in this time period were frequently asked to grow up sooner than what modern society would consider natural. Boys born to titled families were required to leave everything they knew to serve and learn in another families' household. Robin is taught to be brave and never cry, but ultimately he is still a boy and feels scared and alone. Even though he is proud of his mother and father, it is normal to feel angry and abandoned.

When he throws the porridge back at Ellen, more than likely it has nothing to do with her or the food. Ellen also expects him to react like an adult and rages at him and leaves him as well. Acting like a child is not allowed in tough times.

The loss of the use of his legs amplifies all of his feelings. Robin cannot understand why people do not pity or help him. He also does not know why his family has not rescued him. Unfortunately, communication is difficult and the plague is making things worse for people and it is hard for messages to get in and out of the city walls. No matter what, Robin is still a young boy and expects miracles to happen and his family to know he needs help.

Brother Luke comes to rescue Robin when Ellen is taken by the plague. Robin is lucky that his family is wealthy and has servants who mention his plight to the Friar. Also, the fact that his father donates money to St. Mark's, where Robin is taken, helps them be willing to give him a home during these tough times. A poorer person would probably not be given space in Brother Luke's own room and would not receive the special attention Robin is given by all the monks.



chapter 2

chapter 2 Summary

It is May in London and everything is colorful and blooming in the fields and gardens. Brother Luke is taking care of Robin, including bringing him food, washing him, rubbing his legs, and changing his clothes. Unfortunately, Luke is so busy that he does not have much time to talk with Robin.

Now, whenever the bells ring, Robin associates them with the movement of the monks. Since he is stuck in bed, Robin learns the habits of the monks and the cat. When the monks go down the corridor and sing and chant, Robin sings along with them and learns their music.

Besides the monks, many other people are at St. Mark's, including people seeking entertainment, food, water, and help. The area around the hospice does not have many inns to spend the night in or any other hospital to receive treatment for the plague, so the monks are very busy with all the activity. However, the walls are thick and where Robin is quartered little noise from the other sections of St. Mark's actually reaches him.

Robin is alone most of the time, so Luke asks Robin if he likes to whittle and he says "of course." Brother Luke promises to bring Robin some pine to use for whittling while he is in his cot. Robin makes plans to carve a boat from the wood.

Later, Luke brings Robin a knife and some wood to begin his new project. While the boy is glad to be doing something, he tires easily and is unable to work as long as he would like. Robin stops only to eat the soup and bread Luke brings because he is so engrossed in the project.

More and more people stop by to visit Robin while he is whittling in his room. He starts to learn the different sounds of the monks as they walk by and a little about a few who have time to stop and chat.

Eventually, two weeks into his project, Robin finishes part of his boat. Luke brings him some additional materials to make the boat a sailboat, such as yarn, ribbon, and fabric. Robin thinks about other things he would like to carve, like dwarfs, but Luke tells him to go slower; however, Luke promises to bring Robin more wood if he will try to carve a cross.

Brother Luke brings Robin walnut for the cross so he begins his next carving project. Robin does not know how to put the two pieces together so Luke promises to have Brother Matthew show him how to finish the cross. As Robin continues to carve the wood, he grows stronger and is able to continue working for longer periods of time.

Most of the time, Brother Luke is too busy to spend a great deal of time with Robin. Once, Luke takes Robin to the part of the monastery where the records are kept.



Brother Luke goes to his workspace and shows Robin the different words and pictures on which he is currently working. Robin asks Luke if he will teach him how to write.

Brother Luke promises to eventually teach him how to write once the people that have the plague are not taking so much of his free time. The hallways are still full of the sick and poor. One of the children in the hallway calls Robin Brother Crookshanks when he sees Robin has to be carried. The other child, Geoffrey Atte-Water is also on crutches and is teasing Robin; however, Robin yells at him. Robin is interested in the boy's crutches but is distracted when Brother Luke explains why the name is not an insult. After their discussion, Luke takes Robin to say his prayers.

chapter 2 Analysis

Once again, Robin is feeling extremely isolated from the activities around him. The monks are very busy taking care of everyone who seeks aid from the monastery. Also, the plague is creating a great deal of extra work for them and nobody has time for one small boy who is unable to move. So not only does he miss his parents, he also is not getting much attention and is bored.

Brother Luke shows his intelligence and insight into a young boy's mind when he suggests an activity to keep Robin from feeling so bored. Robin reacts like a typical young kid and is excited to whittle and makes huge plans for a boat.

When he finishes the boat, it is the first time he seems to feel he has achieved something significant. The lack of use of his legs and his uselessness in general is weighing on his mind, so anything Robin completes is important. His sense of accomplishment immediately gives Robin huge ideas and he starts spouting plans to carve complicated statues.

Brother Luke is quick to change his goals to something more manageable. Luke realizes that if Robin tries something and fails at this point, when he has just started to gain his confidence back, it will crush all of the progress already made. The reader realizes what an insightful man Luke is to have Robin start with something simple. Luke also gives Robin much encouragement.

After completing the boat and almost finishing his new project, the cross, Luke takes Robin on a small adventure. He shows Robin the place in the monastery where the monks keep the records. Despite Robin's advantages in family and wealth, he is unable to read and write. Robin so very excited at all the beautiful words and pictures that Luke shows him that he begs to learn how to read and write.

Later, the reader sees that Robin is still very insecure about his lot in life. A young boy on crutches calls Robin a Crookshanks. Robin lashes out, calling the boy a lout and being bratty in general. Brother Luke half-heartedly tells Geoffrey not to call Robin names; however, is intelligent enough to explain the reason for the name to Robin. Robin's jealousy of Geoffrey's crutches foreshadows his interest in finding a way to use crutches himself.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The monastery is finally getting a bit of a breather as the plague begins to loosen its hold on the area. The monks now have some free time, so Luke takes Robin on an interesting outing. He carries Robin through the monastery until they reach the gardens. The gardens are a more pleasant place than the cot, and two other monks, Matthew and David, can look after Robin while he whittles in the fresh air.

Brother Matthew looks at Robin's latest project, which is a cross. Robin is unsure about how to put the cross together but Matthew assures him that he will help Robin when he is closer to being done. Matthew also shows Robin better tools, including a sharp chisel that will move the task along faster.

Robin works most of the day on the cross but late into the day, he makes a mistake and the cross breaks. In anger, he throws the piece of wood and the chisel and just misses Brother Matthew's face with the tool. Matthew is surprised at first but then comforts Robin telling him that he will continue to improve as time passes.

Back in his cot, Luke massages Robin and talks to him about a variety of topics, including reading and writing. Robin asks again to be taught to read and write and Luke promises to teach him over time, not immediately. Luke starts teaching Robin by writing a letter to his father that John-go-in-the-Wynd can carry to the battlefield. Robin dictates the letter and then Luke reviews it with Robin, slowly reading each word as Robin's first lesson.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Once again, Luke shows his understanding of young boys when he gives Robin new scenery in which to whittle. Also, the new location has new tools that are more difficult to master and harder to use, which continues to improve Robin's strength. Luke feels confident that Robin can and will eventually be strong enough to feel useful, hopefully before his father gets back from the Scottish wars.

Using the new tools gives Robin more confidence and he realizes how strong he is now. He needs only a few rests and really likes the feel of the chisel beneath his hands. Robin is a little overconfident and the chisel slips, breaking the piece of the cross on which he is working. Angry, he tosses the tool, blaming it for his mistake. Robin has not learned to take responsibility for his own mistakes and needs to blame someone or something else. Despite all his growth, he still has a bit of a spoiled attitude, first with slinging the porridge and then with throwing the chisel.

Unfortunately, both incidents almost injure someone else. Brother Matthew is almost hit with the flying chisel and is quick to point out that the chisel is not at fault. He is upset



and starts to scold Robin but realizes he is just a hurt, upset child, who does not feel like he has anybody on his side. Matthew quickly changes his tone and comforts Robin. The reader wonders if Robin should have been punished, because he has not yet learned that his actions may have consequences that may hurt others. If people keep soothing him, how is Robin going to learn, but in his case, this method of showing patience makes Robin feel both guilty and sorry. The method does seem to work in the long run.

Once again, Robin asks Luke to teach him how to read and write, and Luke says that reading is another door in the wall. The door appears to be a lesson learned in any form. Robin says he is starting to understand the doors; however, the reader knows he is still a child and from his earlier behavior has a great deal still to learn. The letter that Robin dictates to Luke also shows Robin's anger at his father for leaving him. He still needs to realize that his parents have responsibilities besides caring for him; moreover they are unaware of his injuries. Also, the reader realizes the depth of his sense of abandonment and hopes that Luke can eventually help ease Robin's suffering with his patience and encouragement of Robin's talents.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

It is summer in London and the monastery is getting back to normal. The plague is gone and much of the population of the city, including some of the monks, leaves the city. Robin finally finishes the cross and Luke asks him to make a doll for a poor child that lives nearby.

He is learning to read and write now, not just whittle; however, his whittling is more exciting. One of the other monks, Hubert, is also teaching Robin a little about the stars and history. Robin is growing stronger in mind and body and Luke proposes a field trip to go fishing.

Luke and Robin fish for a few hours until a group of children, including Geoffrey, run towards the water. Geoffrey greets Robin and then jumps into the water. Robin watches the boys and Luke carries Robin into water so that he can teach him how to swim. Robin loves swimming and Luke explains that this will make him stronger. Robin realizes that everything is leading towards him using crutches.

Everyday he goes for a swim in the water to gain strength. Also, his studies and chores increase and Robin is asked to help around the monastery. When Robin goes swimming at the brook, he starts to make friends with the boys there. He helps them make boats like the sailboat he originally made and learns to swim as fast if not faster than the other boys.

In his spare time, Robin watches the creation of his crutches. He asks to help shape them and proves that he is strong enough by showing Brother Matthew and Luke that he can support his weight on his feet. Amazed at Robin's progress, he begins work on his own crutches. Soon, they are almost complete and Robin just needs some leather and padding to help support his arms. Luke takes Robin into town during the Midsummer Eve celebration to get the materials to finish the crutches. This is the first big outing Robin has gone on since his illness and he finds it exhilarating to see the sights and sounds of the city again.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Luke convinces Robin to make a doll for a young girl in the area. He is reluctant at first and seems disdainful of the thought of creating something for a girl and maybe is still slightly prejudiced against the fact that she is poor as well. Robin still needs to learn more humility but he does show signs of progress by agreeing to make the doll. He does think carving a face and making joints that move might be fun, so he may have an ulterior motive.



When Luke takes Robin fishing and then swimming, he mentions that he has been planning on having Robin learn to swim to gain strength in his limbs. This knowledge provides insight into the fact that the friar has long-term goals in mind for encouraging and helping Robin get stronger. It also foreshadows the fact that in the end, Robin's father asks Luke to stay on as Robin's tutor since he is so good with the boy. Every activity that Luke plans has a purpose, as does everything he teaches Robin.

Robin's determination is shown when the reader learns he is working on gaining strength in his legs in secret. When he sees Matthew starting his crutches, Robin shows the monks that he can support his weight on his feet and can even move if he has something to lean on. This bodes well for the ability to be able to move with the crutches. The monks give Robin the appropriate support and encouragement that he desperately needs because he still greatly misses his parents.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Robin is turning the pages for the choir in late September when a message comes for him. John-go-in-the-Wynd has returned with a message from his father and tells Robin that his father is alive and fighting well.

The letter from Robin's father is good news. His father is glad that he is alive and did not have the plague. He also tells Robin that he wants him to journey to Sir Peter's home as originally intended. John-go-in-the-Wynd and Brother Luke will escort Robin to Sir Peter's home to ensure his safety.

The monks begin to prepare for Robin leaving by making a special saddle, cooking food, fixing his clothes, and planning the route for the trip. Robin is sad to leave his friends and the monks, but, like most boys, finds it exciting to travel to a different place and meet new people. The trip is approximately 100 miles and winter is fast approaching, so they plan to move as quickly as possible.

Their plan for the first day is to attempt to reach the White Swan before dark. Along the way, John plays his harp and the three sing along to keep themselves occupied. Robin walks a small part of the way until he is too tired to continue on his crutches. Finally, the group reaches a split in the road and neither adult knows for sure which way to proceed. After a discussion, John and Luke make their best guess and continue on the trip.

In the early evening, they see no signs of an inn or any signs of life or civilization. They realize they have taken the wrong path and will need to sleep along the road. Luke and John find a hollow log beside the road and prepare a bed for Robin in the log because the inside will keep him dry. John starts a fire and the group eats, and then goes to sleep for the evening.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Robin receives a letter from his father that conveys his father's love and sorrow at hearing what his son has been going through since he left for the war. Despite the angry tone of Robin's letter, his father seems to understand and just assures his son how much he is loved by himself and his mother. Also, he is glad to know his son is alive, no matter his condition, which shows an acceptance of his son's infirmity. While Robin feels a great deal of pressure to be a knight, it seems to be a self-inflicted demand, because his father does not seem to be upset that Robin will probably never be a knight. It is unusual for a father to be so understanding and loving of a "crippled" child in this time period.

Robin's father asks that his son be taken to Sir Peter's by John and Luke. Robin sees the entire trip as an adventure, not realizing that going 100 miles by horse may be



difficult and dangerous, especially when one person is unable to walk or run. John entertains them by playing the harp and Robin stares at the harp and wonders if he could ever carve or play such an instrument. This foreshadows Robin creating a harp and learning how to play his new instrument. Robin seems to be very quick to learn new things, as long as he really desires to. This is not unusual, as most people do better at something they find interesting.

Along the way, the group makes a wrong turn, which would cause many people to fight or become angry but instead they take it in stride. They realize that arguing about who did not choose the correct path or feeling despair over never finding the White Swan is not going to help them find their way. Luke, of course is very religious, but even John seems to be a very kind, loving person.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

The rain is still falling the next day when Robin wakes. John and Luke are preparing breakfast and then plan to continue on their journey. John has spoken to a nearby shepherd who tells them they took the wrong path and the inn is on the other road. The shepherd gives them new directions that allow them to get back on the correct track. Along the way, John sings joyous songs with his harp that makes the journey a pleasure. When they reach a stream, Luke tells Robin to jump in.

They stop for lunch and the host asks them for news of the wars. Robin says that he heard the wars will be over by Christmas and the host is hopeful. After the quick lunch break, they get back on the road, traveling until nightfall. The group finds an inn with rough looking people inside. There is no food at the inn, so they eat some food from their packed bags and buy some ale to drink. After eating, they walk upstairs to sleep.

Robin sleeps poorly as the boards under the thin straw are uncomfortable, so he hears two men talking loudly downstairs. Straining to hear, Robin realizes the men are discussing how to steal the bag that has their money. Acting quickly, Robin tries to reach the friar without the men hearing any movement. Finally, he taps Luke who wakes immediately and Robin tells him that thieves are planning to rob them. Luke wakes John and then they all grab their possessions and climb out the window. Realizing that their prey has escaped, the thieves attempt to give chase. Robin trips one with his crutch and the thieves are so drunk that they hit each other and the trio gets away.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Luke wants Robin to swim in the stream as the exercise everyday seems to be helping his limbs. Robin complains that the water is cold but Luke encourages him by mentioning his father and how brave he is. Robin goes in the water and quickly gets acclimated to the cold and is glad he went swimming. Luke seems to understand how to manipulate Robin into doing what he feels is necessary for the boy's well-being.

Robin needs to feel important and useful so when they stop for lunch, he brags to the host that he has a letter that tells him the war will end by Christmas. Later Robin proves how important he really is when he overhears two thieves talking about stealing their money. His quick-thinking saves their lives and the reader sees that he is no longer totally crippled by his illness. Robin is able to think and act to perform a brave deed. He does not think that he is useless anymore. This foreshadows the importance his new found confidence will have when he is the only person who can save a whole castle.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The group arrives in Oxford to find a great deal of student activity. Outside of Oxford, they see a sign for a fair and John and Robin express their excitement and desire to stop at the event. Luke tries to hurry them but relents and lets them stay a few hours so they spend some time enjoying the fair. Robin tries to see and eat everything at the fair and once again, when Luke tells them they should leave, Robin begs to see one more show. Luke says only one and eventually they leave because they still have several days left in their journey. They do reach a safe stop right before night, in an Abby, where the abbot gives them excellent directions to their destination.

As they travel that week, it begins to get cold and two or so days before the end of the journey, it rains, causing them to be wet and miserable. In the afternoon, they stop, dry their clothes and have some lunch. They worry about the Welsh and John remembers that he has been through the approaching woods and a kindly couple gave him shelter during his previous travels.

As John had predicted, the couple welcomes the group into their home and gives them shelter and food. The next morning, they travel for a while until they run into some Welsh travelers. John gives them directions and tells them that his mother is Welsh and he knows a bit of the language. They are able to continue with no trouble from the Welsh.

Finally, Robin sees a castle ahead and the group is pleased that they have finally reached Sir Peter's home. They are welcomed and immediately led to Sir Peter and his family. Everyone is very friendly and Robin is glad that they are so happy to see him. John asks if he can leave when Robin is settled so that he can see his mother who lives nearby. Robin begins to settle in immediately and explores the castle and surrounding areas.

At the top of the keep, Robin is amazed he can see for miles. John points out his mother's house and Adam the Bowman points out all the local sites. After looking at the local sites, John takes Robin to the different areas around the castle, including the stables and the local workshop where bowls, arrows, and other supplies are made. The workshop is also where Robin will work on making a harp with John's help and John says that as soon as he can find the proper wood, they will begin.

Robin begins to get comfortable in the household but he does have to study as well as doing chores. Luke continues his old lessons, such as swimming, and adds new things such as learning Latin and archery. Robin would normally be required to help serve the food during dinner, but because of his condition, he helps the younger boys cut their food. Since he has access to the food, he feeds one of the dogs, D'ath, good table scraps. The dog becomes Robin's loyal friend and follows him everywhere.



Chapter 7 Analysis

In Oxford, Robin notices the dress of the students and makes a slightly snide comment about their strange attire. He drops the issue quickly and does not disparage their status in life, so Robin is still making progress in his attitude towards others. As they walk through and out of Oxford, a group of well-dressed people, with a lady in the lead, rides along the road. The lady makes Robin think about his mother and how much he misses her. He is still vulnerable and feels the sting of his absent parents.

During lunch, Robin worries about their destination. Now that they are fast approaching Sir Peter's home, Robin wanders about his future. He asks John if his father is correct and Sir Peter is a good man. John tells Robin that the entire family is known to be kind and good to everyone around them. This comforts Robin and the reader notices that he is not blindly accepting his father's word; he may feel some mistrust of his father's opinion and needs a second good confirmation about his new home.

Once Robin arrives at Sir Peter's castle, he quickly explores. When he is at the top of the keep, Adam the Bowman points out that, despite the good visibility today, a fog could block their view of the area. This foreshadows that a fog does occur and is a danger to the castle. Also, Adam tells him that Sir Hugh, Sir Peter's cousin with whom Peter is at odds, lives nearby. Robin is surprised that Adam worries about someone sneaking up on the castle because it seems so sturdy; however, Adam tells him that the keep could be under siege and if it were for long enough, their supplies may run out allowing everyone inside to starve.

While he is at the top of the keep, John also tells Robin about his mother's house. Robin is shocked at how far away his mother's house is and cannot imagine going such a great distance. This shows the reader what an accomplishment it is when Robin eventually does traverse such a distance. It is fortunate that John gives Robin such detailed directions since he does need them later.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Robin is learning how to shoot a bow and arrow and is quite good. While he likes the new skill, he is very focused on the finishing the harp and learning new songs. Robin is also growing stronger and is able to swim faster than ever, walk down the stairs, and beat the other boys at most games, even on crutches. Besides the kids, Robin has a new friend in Alan-at-the-Gate. Alan lets Robin come and go from the gates as he pleases and, in return, Robin always carries some of the sweets that Alan loves.

Finally, it is time for John to visit his mother. After showing Robin how to string the harp and making sure he knows how to get to John's mother's house in case he needs help, John leaves. During dinner that night, Adam the Bowman runs in and announces that the Welsh have attacked the town and castle and they are surrounded. Sir Peter orders the men to begin the defense and the women and children to gather in the keep. Later that day, when it is realized that the town is lost to the Welsh, the rest of the yeomen and people from town are admitted to the keep. The gate is lowered with the hope that the keep may be defended and held until some form of help arrives.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Despite his acceptance in the household, Robin is still worried about his crippled and bent condition. He asks Luke if he will ever be able to straighten his back and Luke tells him it is in the hands of the Lord. Luke also reminds Robin that it is better to have a crippled body than be a bad person, which seems to reassure the boy. Robin is questioning his abilities less, which foreshadows his belief in his ability to help others.

John makes Robin repeat the directions to his mother's house before he leaves the castle. Considering the distance, it is strange that he keeps asking Robin if he remembers the directions. It is doubtful that Robin would really travel all that way just to get help with the harp, which makes the reader wonder if he senses Robin might need his help in some other manner.

That same day, the mist rolls around the castle, which is an ominous sign considering Robin has been told previously that the fog could allow a sneak attack on the castle. Later that day, the Welsh do attack but Robin does not seem extremely worried. He also shows his attitude change by asking how he can help instead of assuming he will be taken care of by someone else. Robin seems to be confident that Sir Peter can take care of the problem.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Inside the walls of the keep, everyone wonders how many Welsh are outside. Robin is working on his harp to keep his mind and hands occupied, but he is worried when he learns the food and water supply is running low. Robin, Denis, and Adam decide to keep the problem a secret but all the men are needed, so Adam does not know who can be spared to go to Hugh for help. Robin volunteers to go to John's mother's house and ask John to go to Hugh for help.

Dressed in rags, Luke and Robin pray before Robin leaves the castle. When he gets to the ravine, he carefully makes his way down the cliff, worried that the Welsh might hear him. At the bottom, Robin swims in the cold river and exits to walk in the field. A Welshman hears him, but Robin plays stupid and the man lets him go on his way without a problem.

Finally, Robin makes it to John's mother's house and yells for help. John hears his cries and quickly picks up the exhausted boy and carries him inside. Robin explains the problem and John leaves immediately to get help. John's mother feeds Robin and he falls asleep until John gets back. Hugh has agreed to help and they must ring the bell of the church to indicate when the attack should begin.

John and Robin go to the shoemaker's house who knows John and the sound of his harp. When they arrive, John plays a tune, and after the sentry passes, a chair is lowered to the ground. Robin is lifted into the house and then John.

Chapter 9 Analysis

When the keep is running out of supplies, Robin realizes that he must be the one to save everyone. If the Welsh see him, they will think he is just a poor crippled boy and of no threat to them. This is a good theory, but it shows Robin's new strength of character that he is volunteering, because there is no guarantee that the Welsh will not kill him just for being English. Robin again shows his bravery, when he does not fall apart when he runs into a Welsh guard.

Once Robin and John have the help they need, they must go to the church to ring the bell to indicate when the army should attack. John is worried because he considers himself just a minstrel and messenger, but this situation seems to bring out the best in everyone. Robin considers this second part an adventure, now that he has already faced what he considers the worst possible situation. He also cannot wait to tell his father about everything that has happened. Robin is excited to have done something that will show his father his worth and his ability to be useful even in his current handicapped state.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

In chapter ten, Robin and John leave the shoemaker's house; enter the graveyard of the church, and then go into the church. Their entrance wakes up the sacristan, who then leads them to the bell tower. John says they will go ahead and climb further because it is too early to ring the bell and at the top of the tower they will be able to see a great distance. Robin is exhausted at the top but recovers quickly. After an hour, John leaves Robin at the top to watch and goes down to ring the bell.

Robin is able to see very small moving figures and, when John climbs back up, they see arrows hitting the Welsh guards on the wall of the tower. Sir Hugh seizes the town back from the Welsh. John goes back down to ring the bell in joy and to tell the town the good news. Sir Peter acknowledges Robin as a hero and tells him he is just like his father. John is also a hero and is given land and sheep as a reward.

Time passes and it is getting nearer to Christmas. Robin has finished his harp and is learning to play. Brother Luke is teaching him a Christmas song. Robin goes often to the top of the keep to watch for his parents. The day before Christmas, he sees knights with the King at the head riding to the castle with flags flying.

After the grand greetings to his parents, Robin goes to his room to prepare for the feast. Later, when the King praises him in public, the many cheers hearten him and he feels he may deserve to be his father's son.

Robin sings and plays his harp for the crowd, which makes quite an impression on all present at the celebration. Later, when Robin asks his father about his feelings, his father says his bravery makes his bent legs unimportant. Robin's mother says she is glad he will not have to ever go to war. Brother Luke, who will now be his tutor, tells him he has found his purpose in life.

Chapter 10 Analysis

John asks Robin if he needs to go piggyback up the tower stairs, but Robin says he can manage. He has been greatly strengthened in his legs and arms because of Luke's massages and the swimming. Also, he has been climbing the "towers and turrets" in Sir Peter's castle, so feels confident about climbing this tower. It is quite a climb and apparently after they reach the bell, they then go 30 feet higher to the tower's top, which is a good height when we consider how bad Robin's legs were. It is amazing how far his legs have progressed in this amount of time, without modern therapy. One of the themes of this book is clearly the will and faith to overcome the trials of life.

On page 108 there is a charming illustration of John picking Robin up in excitement after the town is taken back and they are both smiling. The illustrations in this book do



add to the story as we get to see what the people look like and how they react from their expressions. They are quite well done and even the black and white ones are very good. The color illustrations are a work of art. On page 116, we are able to see the flags in the background and the clothes worn by the court, as well as the bright color of Robin's mother's cloak. We know her as a noble because dying clothes would have been mostly reserved for the upper class as it was an expensive and time consuming process. Also, even without words, we can see the affection Robin and his mother feel in this picture.

When Robin sees the knights approaching the castle he wants to run down to greet them, but decides to stay with Sir Peter as he says they might not recognize him in the crowd. He is nervous to see his parents and is afraid they will not feel the same about him since he has changed for the worse in his opinion. They greet him with love and say nothing about the crutches, so Robin knows he is loved no matter what. He has been worrying about how his parents will react for quite awhile, so this acceptance on their part is a big relief. When the King later praises him and gives him the jeweled collar, it seems to put the crowning touches on his happiness. He has done something "noble" like his father, proved his worth to all, and found his "door in the wall."



Characters

Robin de Bureford

Robin de Bureford is a 10 year old boy who is the main character in the novel. He feels small for his age, which is good, because Brother Luke carries him around a great deal until Robin is able to use crutches.

The story is told from Robin's viewpoint, which is not as sophisticated as an adult viewpoint would be; however, he does seem to be quite intelligent. He is of noble birth and has always been told he must be brave. When his father and mother both leave he tries to be brave and strong but does not always succeed.

Robin does have a temper, which is seen when he gets mad at the chisel and throws it. He is ashamed afterward and grateful that Brother Luke never mentions it or reprimands him for the deed. He also shows his temper when Geoffrey calls him Crookshanks but eventually becomes friends with the boy. Robin shows his capacity to forgive someone for what he considers an offense.

Robin's unexpected illness does make him act somewhat selfishly, however; his good upbringing to this point in his life and the compassionate and patient influence of Brother Luke, does eventually overcome this behavior. Most people that have conditions similar to Robin's act poorly until they adjust to their problems. Some never recover, so Robin's actions are completely understandable and some 10 year old boys act selfish and bratty without any of the issues that plague Robin.

Later, when Robin goes to Lindsay and meets Sir Peter, he tells him that he will not make a good page because he is unable to walk; but Sir Peter says that if this door is closed, another will open. Brother Luke has been telling him about open doors as well, so many of the adults seem to know about these doors. The door is basically about finding one's own identity in life, which Robin does begin to do by the end of the novel. We know he will continue to mature as he gets older, but he has made a good start in the months that this story covers. In the end, Robin acts bravely by getting help for the castle and saves the day.

Brother Luke

Brother Luke is a wandering friar who is now at the hospice of St. Mark's. He hears about Robin being left alone, goes to the boy's home to aid him and then takes him to the hospice. Brother Luke says he will have to share his room as all the beds and even the corridors in the hospice are full. The illustrations show Brother Luke as a small man but he must be strong as he carries Robin often; however, Robin does seem to be small for his age.



As time passes, due to Brother Luke's excellent care of Robin, he begins to improve. The friar is a good man and very intelligent. He can even read and write, which was a skill usually only acquired by the upper class and clergy because there was not education for the poor masses. Even Robin, a nobleman's son, has not been taught many skills. Robin asks Brother Luke to teach him to write, which he agrees to do. Even with all his other duties at the hospice, Brother Luke still finds time for Robin's needs as he is very dedicated to his calling.

Brother Luke and John-go-in-the-Wynd escort Robin to Sir Lindsey's castle for his duties as a page. He protects Robin along the way, giving him the best tree to sleep inside and protecting them from robbers. Brother Luke never complains or shows his frustration when they pick the wrong path. He seems to be a very mellow, brave man. His wandering ways may end as Sir John de Bureford asks him to be Robin's tutor. His love and patience for the boy is evidenced throughout the book. Brother Luke seems to almost consider Robin a substitute son.

John-go-in-the-Wynd

John-go-in-the-Wynd is the minstrel who takes Robin's first letter to his father at the battlefield and brings him one back from his father. John has been instructed to escort Robin to stay with Sir Peter in Lindsay. John's mother lives near Sir Peter's castle, so this gives him the opportunity to visit her.

While John is visiting his mother, the Lindsay castle is attacked. Robin escapes the castle walls and goes to John's mother's house to seek their help. John goes to Hugh, Lindsay's cousin, and asks for his help in defeating the Welsh. Hugh agrees to help and John and Robin ring the bells that start the battle.

Despite the fact that John is a minstrel and a messenger, he shows great bravery in helping Lindsay and Robin. Without his aid, Robin and the castle might not have received help.

Sir Peter de Lindsay

Sir Peter de Lindsay is a knight who is supposed to foster Robin and teach him to be a knight. He is welcoming to Robin even though he is unable to walk well. He has a daughter and two sons and his wife is called Lady Constance.

Geoffrey Atte-Water

Geoffrey Atte-Water is a boy who limps and gets off on the wrong foot with Robin because he calls him Crookshanks; however, they eventually become friends. He lives by the River Fleet and works there with his father. Robin goes swimming with him and even helps him make a crude boat.



Sir John de Bureford

Sir John de Bureford is Robin's father. Sir John leaves Robin and his mother when he goes to fight the Scottish wars with the King of England. He tells Robin he must be brave and strong.

Dame Ellen

Dame Ellen is a free woman who works for Robin's family and brings Robin food. When she gets the plague, Ellen stops serving Robin and he is left alone until Brother Luke comes to rescue him.

Brother Andrew

Brother Andrew is a monk at St. Mark's who drags his foot.

Brother Thomas

Brother Thomas is a monk at St. Mark's who walks fast and whistles quietly.

Brother Paul

Brother Paul is a monk at St. Mark's who is a big man and makes things shake when he walks by. He has a shoe that squeaks.

Brother Matthew

Brother Matthew is a monk at St. Mark's who is in charge of the gardens. He helps Robin craft his crutches.

Brother David

Brother David is a monk at St. Mark's who is the stone mason.

Brother Hubert

Brother Hubert is a monk at St. Mark's who studies astronomy and Brother Luke tells Robin that Hubert can teach him about the stars. He also tells him about other countries.



Adam the Bowman

Adam is the bowman sentry at Sir Peter's castle who tells Robin about the castle's defense system and helps him learn to shoot a bow. He tells Robin that they could be starved out even though the walls might stand.

Alan-At-Gate

Alan is a crusty older gate keeper who decides who enters the castle. He plays a flageolet and Robin makes friends with him. Robin keeps honey cakes in his pocket because he knows the gatekeeper likes sweets.

Sir Hugh Fitzhugh

Sir Hugh Fitzhugh is a cousin of Sir Peter's who lives to the north and has disagreed with Peter. John gets him to help Sir Peter when the castle is surrounded by the Welsh.

Lady Maud de Bureford

Lady Maud de Bureford is Robin's mother who is attending the queen when Robin is taken ill.

King Edward the III

King Edward the III is the King of England at the time this novel takes place. He is away fighting the Scottish wars with Robin's father. In the last chapter, he comes to Sir Peter's castle with his men and presents Robin with a special collar to show his thanks for Robin's aid against the Welsh.



Objects/Places

Hospice of St. Mark's

The Hospice of St. Mark's is where Brother Luke takes Robin to care for him. The monks are caring for many plague victims here as well. It is surprising that Robin does not catch the plague, considering his immune system is already low. Robin's father has given the hospice money in the past, so even if the monks were not charitable, it is likely they would have cared for him because of his father's gifts.

Jennet or Jenny

Jennet is a small Spanish horse that Brother Luke brings to Robin's home to transport him to St. Mark's because he is unable to walk.

Carving Knife

Brother Luke brings Robin a knife to carve wood so that he will not be so bored. This knife has the added benefit of strengthening his hands. The crutches and the harp he carves are two of the most important items in the story.

Sailboat

A sailboat, made from pine, is the first item Robin carves with his knife. He is so pleased with it that he decides to make a cross from walnut. Robin also makes a puppet for a poor child. One of his best projects is a set of his own oak crutches.

Cat

The cat at St. Mark's chases the mice, which of course carries the fleas that cause the plague. Sometimes it is so quiet at the hospice that the mouse squealing when the cat catches it is the only sound Robin hears for most of the day.

Shropshire

Shropshire is the part of England where Sir Peter de Lindsay lives. He is the knight from whom Robin is supposed to learn all the skills of knighthood.



Oxford

Oxford is where John, Luke, and Robin spend the night at St. John's College before they continue their journey.

D'Arth

D'Arth is the dog that Robin makes friends with at Castle Lindsay. Robin feeds him table scraps, which makes the dog a special and loyal pet. The dog sleeps by Robin's bed at night and follows him around.

Saxon Harp

Robin carves a Saxon harp and plays a Christmas carol on it for the King and all the others in the castle. He learns to play it in a very short time.

Yule Log

The Yule log is burned at Christmas time.

Jeweled Collar

The King presents Robin with a jeweled collar as a token of his regard and as thanks for what he did to save Sir Peter's castle.

Top of the Keep

The top of the keep is where Robin stands to see who is coming to the castle. He finally spots his parents coming with the King and Queen on Christmas Eve.

Church and Belfry

The Church and belfry are where John rings the bell that signals the attack on the Welsh who surround Sir Lindsay's castle. John has Robin climb up thirty feet higher in the tower to see if ringing the bell brings the desired result. This was a good climb for someone who has problems with his legs.

Castle Lindsay

Castle Lindsay, home of Sir Peter de Lindsay, is where Robin is escorted by John and Brother Luke. He helps save the castle and everyone is grateful.



Well in Castle

The well inside the castle is going dry when the Welsh are laying siege to the castle. When Robin hears about the well, he knows someone has to get help. Robin feels that he is the least likely to be suspected as anything but a harmless boy by the Welsh.

Crutches

The crutches are a crucial project for Robin. He sees another boy named Geoffrey on crutches and hopes that one day he will have his own pair. When he is strong enough, Robin carves the crutches and learns to use them with ease.

Cross

Robin's second whittling project is a cross. He has not learned enough patience during this project and almost injures a monk during a fit of temper when the cross breaks and he throws a tool in frustration.



Themes

Perseverance in the Face of Adversity

The main theme in *The Door in the Wall* is perseverance in the face of adversity. The main character, Robin is crippled by a sudden illness just as he is ready to learn to be a knight. In that time period, it was essential that each person, especially young boys, learn to be a functioning part of society. At this time, most of the noble families foster their children to another knight as a page to be trained to be a noble knight. This is known to the boys at an early age, so they are not surprised to be fostered out. Robin seems to be angry because he feels that his parents should be around now that he is ill; however, they are unaware of the situation, so Robin must learn to adjust or he will not survive his situation.

Robin's trials and growth after being crippled by illness show the strength of his character. It is also amazing that, when his resistance is already low, Robin does not get the plague since it is all around him. It is almost like he was predestined to get ill and become crippled so he would have to face unexpected struggles and find a different vocation in life.

Fortunately for Robin, a patient and compassionate friar named Brother Luke learns of his problems and cares for him. Luke seems to be an unusually intelligent friar and understand Robin's needs. He massages Robin's legs, which helps him regain mobility and cares for his other physical needs. However, the most important thing he does is tend to Robin's mental needs and helps him learn how to be a better person. Luke teaches Robin not to be mentally crippled by his illness. Luke challenges Robin to learn new things, such as whittling, music, swimming, reading, and writing, which show Robin that his life can still have a purpose.

Robin's father tells him in his letter to go to Sir Peter's castle as originally intended. Now Robin has the assurance of his father, Sir Peter, Brother Luke, and several others that he can still be useful without being a knight. As a result of this knowledge and confidence, Robin volunteers to leave the safety of Sir Peter's castle to find help when it is surrounded by the Welsh. Robin knows that the Welsh will view him as he once viewed himself, "just a crippled boy," so he will not be a threat and he will be less likely to be stopped when he leaves the castle. Robin knows that walking a great distance through enemies is difficult, but has faith that he can save the day and bring help. By his being able to help others, even though he is crippled, Robin finds he can still be a person of value in his world and has found his door in the wall.

Importance and Impact of Friends

A second theme in the book revolves around the friends Robin makes and how he interacts with them. As the son of a fairly wealthy and important noble, Robin's friends



are other sons of his social class. When Robin is ill, he must rely on his servants and the kindness of those less fortunate to look after him. Robin has never learned to show a great deal of compassion for others and chases those that he feels are beneath him away.

Luckily, Brother Luke sees through the angry, entitled boy and nurtures the good inside of Robin. Luke is one of the most important friends that Robin makes and the brother seems to show infinite patience and wisdom. Anyone would be lucky to have such a wonderful friend. Most of the character growth that Robin shows is due to Luke's guidance. However, a few other characters become Robin's friends and also help him to mature. The other monks, especially Brother Matthew, realize that Robin is desperate for acceptance and love from those around him. They teach Robin skills they have learned and try not to show their anger when he does something foolish or hurtful, such as throwing a chisel near Matthew's head.

From the local boys around the monastery, Robin learns that friendships transcend class and physical deformities. Initially, Robin assumes he is better than most of the people around the monastery, even another boy, Geoffrey, with a similar problem. Geoffrey teases Robin and nicknames him Crookshanks, which angers Robin. Luke explains the boy means no harm and Robin should be more understanding. Eventually, Robin becomes friends with Geoffrey and the other local boys and builds boats and swims with the boys. They love the boats and are impressed by Robin's skill as well as his ability to swim faster than them despite his injury. Robin's friends help him see his worth and that other people have value despite their difference in physical appearance and social status.

John-go-in-the-Wynd becomes another friend of Robin's. Originally, he is just a messenger between Robin and his father, but when he is asked to escort Robin to Sir Peter, he develops a friendship with the young boy. From John, Robin discovers a love of music that he eventually displays for the King. Robin also watches the interaction between John and Luke and learns that even in the face of adversity, you must be calm and anger does not serve a purpose. When they choose the wrong path on the trip, everyone brushes it off as an adventure. All of Robin's friendships help him grow as a person and accept the difficulties that are a part of life.

Impact of Family Dynamic on Child's Growth

Another theme in the book revolves around the impact of a family dynamic on a child's growth. In medieval times, young children, especially boys, were expected to grow up much quicker than they are in modern times. Life expectancy was much shorter, so maturity had to come earlier, as by age forty, you were considered old. Another difference between the times was devotion to the King and Queen. If you were asked to serve with the Royal family, you had to obey even if it was at the expense of your family.

Robin is from a well-to-do, noble family, so his father is expected to fight with and for the King, and his mother is asked to be a lady-in-waiting to the Queen. Both parents must



obey the Royal family and leave their child; they expect him to survive and grow up well, without their influence.

Despite the fact that he understands he is supposed to be brave and study to be a knight, Robin wishes his parents were still around to help him. When he becomes ill, Robin is angry that his parents are not there to help him and feels that they should know he is sick and should rush back to his side to nurture and care for him. Robin sends a bitter letter to his father that expresses his anger and feelings of abandonment.

Robin's father ignores the anger in the letter and expresses his happiness in finding Robin is alive and being taken care of by Brother Luke. When his father ignores the part about Robin being crippled, it seems to give Robin a bit of his self-confidence and worth back. Part of Robin's bitterness seems to be caused by the fear that his father will not accept and love him now that he is unable to be a knight. With his father's approval, Robin is able to begin to accept his situation and to realize he is loved unconditionally.

Also, Brother Luke has taken over the role of surrogate father and friend to Robin. Luke constantly reassures Robin that his parents love him and gives him new skills to learn. When Robin's parents see him again, they are overjoyed that he is alive and well. Since his parents can see how much Robin has learned and improved and know that they are not always going to be available because of their required duties, they ask Luke to be his tutor. They are ensuring that their son has someone who will continue to love and nurture him in their absence. Despite the unusual family dynamic, Robin is lucky to have an extended family comprised of parents and friends to help him mature.

Style

Point of View

The Door in the Wall is written in the first person. The book is written from the point of view of a ten year old boy who is leaving home to be a page for a knight. Robin is actually starting work at a young age. There are some explanations about things Robin does or experiences but on the whole, almost everything is seen through his eyes.

Most of the descriptions and impressions of people are fairly superficial because a child does not see the world the same as an adult. A novel written in the first person does not have quite the amount of character development as one where the author describes things in depth because Robin is unable to see into the minds of others.

Robin is more interested in his desires and needs than what others are doing. For instance, he expects Dame Ellen to care for him and does not think of her feelings when he flings the porridge. He is surprised when she does not come back as she always has before. At this point, he is very selfish but as the book progresses he becomes more considerate of others.

One example of this growth is that he keeps sweets in his pocket for Alan, the gatekeeper at Lindsay who has become a friend to him. Finally, Robin is thinking of others. The dialogue with Robin and the other characters in the book show much of what is happening and there is no dialogue that takes place when Robin is not there.

Even though the reader gets less insight into characters and places, this is still a very effective novel for the ideas that the author is trying to convey. All people have to find their own purpose or destiny in order to live a contented life.

Setting

The Door in the Wall takes place in medieval England. The first 46 pages take place in London during a plague. Due to the severity of the plague, nobody is allowed to come and go from London.

In London, a crippled, young boy named Robin is taken in by a monk named Brother Luke when his servant catches the plague and leaves him alone in his home. Brother Luke takes Robin to the monastery of St. Mark's, where Robin spends most of his time in and around the monastery grounds. Eventually, he does get to go to the local swimming area but does not go out of London until the plague abates, and his father sends him to Sir Peter's keep.

Luke, Robin, and John travel outside of London through the countryside, including Oxford. They eventually reach their destination, Sir Peter's keep, which is in Shropshire. The Welsh mountains can be seen in the north near Shropshire, so the keep is fairly



close to the border. Since the keep is near the border, the Welsh have long coveted it and while Robin is there, a small Welsh army seizes the outer walls of the castle and lays siege to the inner walls.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel tends to be formal and the monks use archaic pronoun forms. There are words used that are not common today such as wind hole, flambeaux, hosen and others. This language makes the reader feel the story is really happening in medieval times, which enhances the tone of the novel. The language does require some reference to a dictionary to determine the meaning of the text. The book is rich in opportunities to expand one's vocabulary and many of these words are listed in the vocabulary section.

Descriptive passages are a fair portion of the novel as Robin thinks or talks about other people he meets, as well as about places he is located. When he stands at the top of the keep looking for his parents' arrival, he describes other things he sees, such as the pages dragging the Yule log to the castle. His descriptions are not extremely detailed but then he is only ten and would not necessarily observe things in a meticulous manner. There are particulars he does seem to notice such as when he describes Dame Ellen's looks, down to the wart on her chin and her Cockney accent.

Dialogue is equally important in the novel and most of the people give us an impression of how they are interacting with Robin through dialogue. Robin's thoughts alone would not be enough to tell us what the other characters are like. We find the monks use thee and thou in their speech, which without dialogue we would not know. The dialogue flows well, is well written and certainly lets us know they did not speak the same sort of English then as we do today.

Structure

This novel is 10 chapters long and has 121 pages. The chapters are of varying length but most are between six and twenty pages long, with the last chapter, at twenty pages, being the longest. The chapters are not numbered or named so we have no idea what will happen in the chapter. The book spans a period of only about 10 months from the end of February until Christmas of the same year. It is basically about Robin's life and the friends he makes in these months, with a small amount of information about what is going on elsewhere. The book is a quick read because it does not have a great deal of confusing flashbacks and proceeds in a linear fashion.

There are many charming illustrations in the novel, some in black and white and some in color. These give the reader a sense of what some of the characters look like since there are not a lot of detailed written descriptions of the people in the novel. They also show us what the surroundings at that time were like, as well as how people dressed. The picture on page 116 is especially useful for showing how people in the upper-class dressed and the pageantry involved in their lives.



The plot of this novel focuses on Robin's illness and Brother Luke taking him first to the hospice of St Mark's and then to Sir Peter Lindsay's castle. Robin suddenly becomes sick with some unspecified illness. According to the surgeon, his illness is not caused by the plague that many are catching in London but it makes him sick and unable to walk or move his legs at all. Considering when this novel was written, in 1949, the illness is probably polio as the author would have been very aware of the public concern over the polio epidemic that occurred around that time. However, the disease would not have been named in the medieval time period.

The subplot in the book concerns how Robin reacts to his parents leaving him in their servants' care. This anger would partially explain how poorly he treats Dame Ellen. His parents both think he is going to be escorted to Sir Peter's castle to serve as a page and learn to be a knight. Instead, he becomes ill and is not up to the long journey. Robin is quite upset that his parents are not there to see him through this illness and the letter he later has Brother Luke write to his father shows this anger.



Quotes

"Always remember that," said the friar. "Thou hast only to follow the wall far enough and there will be a door in it." Chap. 1, The Door in the Wall, p.16 .

"At first he scarcely knew where to begin to bring out the shape of a boat, but little by little it began to round out and at one end a point began to appear, as if it had been a prow." Chap. 2, The Door in the Wall, p. 30.

"It is a fine thing that your son Robin is left to the care of strangers. Had it not been for Brother Luke, who is writing this letter, I should be dead." Chap. 3, The Door in the Wall, p. 30.

"All the troubles of the past months seemed to float away with the running of the brook and strength and power to flow into his arms." Chap. 4, The Door in the Wall, p. 37.

"To the surprise of both brothers, Robin hitched along slowly toward Brother Matthew's workbench, where he leaned for a few moments before he found it necessary to sit down." Chap. 5, The Door in the Wall, p. 40.

"They got to the stables, mounted the horses, and were away before the two oafs had untangled themselves." Chap. 6, The Door in the Wall, p. 61.

"Robin looked up in amazement, for there, rising high against the racing clouds, stood a town with a church tower and castle complete. It must be, it was, Lindsay." Chap.7, The Door in the Wall, p. 67.

"It is a true pleasure to welcome you into our house-hold," said Sir Peter to Robin, not seeming to notice that Robin could not straighten." Chap. 7, The Door in the Wall, p. 68.

"Before morning the walls of the town had been breached, and before the day was out the town was taken." Chap. 8, The Door in the Wall, p. 85.

"Without waiting for an answer he grasped Robin's crutches and swept him up into his arms, because he could see that Robin had come as far as he was able." Chap. 9, The Door in the Wall, p. 95.

"What an adventure to tell my father!" said Robin." Chap. 9, The Door in the Wall, p. 10.

"There would be singing and caroling in the hall and Robin remembered his father's letter and hoped that Christmas would bring his father and mother to the castle." Chap.10, The Door in the Wall, p. 111.

"Thou'rt here, Sir Robin," said the friar. "Safe with all thy loved ones. 'Tis the feast of Christmas, and thou hast found the door in thy wall." Chap. 10, The Door in the Wall, p. 121.



Topics for Discussion

What do you think of Robin's behavior in flinging the bowl of porridge at Dame Ellen? Do you think you would behave similarly if you were as sick as he was? Have you ever acted mean when ill, even when it is not the other person's fault? Do you think this is a case of Robin being a child or sick or both? Discuss.

Have you ever met a friar or monk before? Do you think they are all as kind as Brother Luke? Why or why not?

Brother Luke massages Robin's legs. How does he know to do this or do you think he is just being kind? Do you think that the monks had more medical knowledge than modern day history credits them with? Explain.

Geoffrey calls Robin Crookshanks because he is lame. Do you think he is being mean or having fun? Do you think Brother Luke's explanation is valid or is he appeasing Robin? Do you think Robin's reaction is justified? How would you react to such a comment? Discuss.

Robin learns to whittle. Do you think that he would have recovered if not for whittling? How was whittling instrumental in changing Robin both physically and mentally?

What do you think everyone meant by challenging Robin to find the door in the wall? Do you really think Robin found his door? Have you found your door? Discuss and explain.

When the cross Robin is making breaks, he throws the wood and the chisel. Have you ever taken your temper out on inanimate object when it is really your own fault that something went wrong? Do you think it is justified for Robin to lose his temper since he was tired? Is it ever right to lose your temper? Explain.

When Robin lost his temper, and threw the chisel, it narrowly misses Brother Matthew. Could you have been as forgiving and understanding? Do you think that Robin should have been punished for his behavior? Why or Why not?

What award does King Edward give Robin for helping Sir Peter? Do you feel this small award was fair, when John was given lands and sheep for his part, or do you feel Robin was slighted for another reason? Why or Why not?