

Good-bye, Mr. Chips Study Guide

Good-bye, Mr. Chips by James Hilton

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Plot Summary

"Good-bye, Mr. Chips," by James Hilton, tells the story of Mr. Chipping, nicknamed Mr. Chips, who becomes a teacher at an English all-boys boarding school called Brookfield. Mr. Chips worked for a year at another school but did not feel comfortable there and did not get a very good review from the headmaster. Mr. Chips is one of the language teachers and rather unenthusiastically teaches the dead languages of Ancient Greek and Latin. Privately, he feels that learning these languages is rather meaningless but nonetheless goes through the motions. He is not a very good disciplinarian and in fact is somewhat intimidated by the student body.

Mr. Chips lives at the school and has very little personal pleasure in his life. Chips has never felt comfortable around women—his ideal woman is delicate, weak and timid. When he is 48-years old, he and a school colleague take a summer vacation on a lake in the area. While on a hike up a rocky hill, a young woman is waving in his direction. He thinks she is in peril and starts to rush to her aid. However, he gets his foot stuck between the rocks and the woman winds up coming to his aid. The woman is 25-year-old Katherine Bridges who helps Chips hobble back to his room. She checks in on him during his recovery and soon the two fall in love and marry before the next semester at Brookfield begins.

Katherine is the antipathy of Chips' ideal woman. She is strong, opinionated and politically liberal. Katherine's effervescent personality and spirit awakens the real Mr. Chips who was there all along. She teaches him to think independently, speak his mind, love and share joy and most of all to have fun and laugh and laugh.

Tragically, Katherine dies in childbirth the year after they marry. The child she was attempting to deliver died that same day as well. Chips is in the throes of depression over his loss, but by tapping Katherine's spirit and outlook he is able to carry on. Chips begins to relax and enjoy himself and ultimately discovers he has another true love—that is the one for his students. Chips is inspired by Katherine's spirit, often relegating the curriculum to a lesser importance than exploring the humor of a situation or person.

Mr. Chips becomes the most popular teacher at Brookfield. After he retires, he moves in across the street so he can stay in close contact with the students—making a special effort to meet the newly-arriving students each year. He is asked to come back and help at school because the staff has been depleted by the demands of World War I. When the young headmaster tells Chips that Chips belongs at Brookfield and is needed to hold them all together, he is overcome with emotion. Chips faces further tragedy with the loss of many of his students who are killed in the war.

In his final years, he spends much time reflecting about his life and career. On his deathbed, he hears a comment from one of his gathered colleagues that it was a pity he never had children. He corrects the person. He has had children—thousands and thousands of them. As he shuts his eyes for the final time, he is comforted by thoughts of his beloved students.



Chapter I

Chapter I Summary

Mr. Chips, a retired teacher, is growing sleepy by the fire as is typical when one is growing old. He asks his landlady, Mrs. Wickett, to bring him a cup of tea. Mr. Chips has rented a room from Mrs. Wickett—her house is right across from the school—for the last ten years. In his daily life, he continues to follow the school's schedule—the toll of the school bell tells him when it is time to eat and when it is time for bed. He tries to read his detective novel each night, but usually gets no further than a page before sleep overcomes him.

Despite his advancing years, Dr. Merivale always tell Mr. Chips how healthy he is. But out of Chips' earshot Dr. Merivale cautions Mrs. Wickett to keep an eye on him, especially when he has a cold or is feeling under the weather.

Born in 1848, Mr. Chips had been to the Great Exhibition as a toddler. When Mr. Chips first came to Brookfield School, old Mr. Wetherby was head master and had hired him. Sadly Mr. Wetherby dies over the summer before Mr. Chips began his tenure. Mr. Chips often recalls how old Wetherby had counseled him to give Brookfield his all and that Brookfield would return the favor. He cautioned Chips to be a good disciplinarian and to take a stern attitude from the beginning. Reviewing Chips' record, Mr. Wetherby noted that he must have failed in that regard in his first teaching assignment at Melbury.

He recalls that first day 50 years before when he began his work at Brookfield. He remembers trying to hide his youthful looks under an authoritative scowl as he entered the Big Hall filled with some five-hundred young ruffians. As he took his seat, a silence fell across the large room, broken by the sound of an inkwell cap falling in the flow. Chips had to assert himself and called out the perpetrator. The young red-haired boy was named Colley. He instructed him to write a hundred lines on the board for punishment.

As the decades pass, the young Colley became an alderman for the city of London and even a baronet. Colley sent his young, red-haired son to Brookfield and to Mr. Chips' class. Starting out on the right foot with young Colley, he reminded him that his father had been the first student he had ever punished twenty-five years before. Even more decades later, another Colley appeared at Brookfield. He was the son of the son of the first Colley. With delight Chips told the grandson how stupid his grandfather had been, how his father was much like his grandfather and that he looked like he would follow the family tradition. The class appreciated the story and erupted in roars of laughter.

The memories stir a sadness with Chips who as fighting back tears as Mrs. Wickett brings him his tea. She can't tell whether Chips had been laughing or crying—he isn't sure either.



Chapter I Analysis

Retired school teacher Mr. Chips is saddened as he recollects his first day at Brookfield School where he taught for over 50 years; he is melancholy that those days are over. While Dr. Merivale tells him he is healthy, though the doctor has private concerns that his health is fragile and failing. The time of the year is autumn and the weather outside Mr. Chips' window is windy and brisk. The "autumn gales rattling the windows," metaphorically foreshadows the impending end (winter) of his life. Autumn symbolizes Mr. Chips' advancing age while the strong winds hint at a foreboding season that is blowing in, that is imminent: winter follows autumn, death follows life. Mr. Chips organizes his day by the bell tones of his old school across the street in an attempt to hold on to his youth and feel a part of a lost relevancy.

Mr. Chips' recollection of having taught Colley and decades later his son and finally many years later his grandson is dramatic rhetoric depicting the length of time Mr. Chips served in the same position. It also provides an image of the reiterative aspect of the life Mr. Chips has led. That Mr. Chips feels both joy and sorrow in his recollections, illustrates the mixed emotions with which Mr. Chips regards his life. Perhaps his dedication to Brookfield prevented Mr. Chips from pursuing personal happiness.



Chapter II

Chapter II Summary

Brookfield School, established in Elizabethan times, is located in a lovely setting of ancient elms. There is a group of 18th century buildings, a quadrangle and playing fields. The history of the school contained many up and down periods. However, when Mr. Wetherby became its headmaster, the school saw its best days. Despite Wetherby's efforts, Brookfield remained a second-rank school supported in the main by the middle class. The elites would pretend to have never heard of it.

Brookfield, however, was perfectly suited to Mr. Chips in both an academic and social sense. When he was a young, ambitious teacher, Chips had dreams of becoming a headmaster at a first-rate school. As years went by, he realized he was not qualified, neither by character nor education, for such a lofty position. His family was not wealthy or well-connected—he was where he belonged. Chips was satisfied with his career at Brookfield and became a highly-respected member of the staff. He retired at age sixty-five and was given a resounding send-off.

But along the way, there would be quite an unexpected turn in Mr. Chip's life.

Chapter II Analysis

The reader learns that Mr. Chips abandoned his youthful ambitions to be head of a first-rate school. Although he never achieved those initial goals, at the end of his career there is no bitterness, no lingering feeling of disappointment. Through the years, he came to realize that he was where he belonged—at Brookfield a good, but second tier, school. From this, the reader gleans that Mr. Chips was not the most brilliant teacher and did not possess the characteristics that make a first-rate teacher, at least in the eyes of the elite schools. The cliff-hanger ending foreshadows unexpected events and tragedy.



Chapter III

Chapter III Summary

Mr. Chips is pleased with his comfortable room at Mrs. Wickett's house. He especially likes its location across from his school where he can stroll over to and watch the boys play their sports. Mr. Chips is friendly with the newly-arriving boys and invites them over for tea on occasion. The boys never stay long—Mr. Chips seems to tire out and sends them on their way. He usually asks the boys about their family connections, then after the boys leave, discusses them with Mrs. Wickett who was formerly in charge of the linen room at the school. One of the new young boy's uncle was Major Collingworth who had been killed in a conflict in Egypt.

Mr. Chips takes in his comfortable surroundings, cozy chairs, shelves lined with his favorite books—the classics as well as detective stories. Oftentimes he picks up one of the classics to read but soon replaces it on the shelf and takes up one of his detective novels. The floor of his room has a large Turkish rug and the walls display pictures of the Acropolis and the Forum. Chips did not love teaching the classics and felt that learning Greek and Latin was not crucial to one's education—a few Latin phrases were enough for one's education. The Times provided enough of said phrases. He felt like a Freemason!

After some of his young visitors leave, they comment about the trouble Chips takes to make tea as just the typical bachelor. But they are mistaken—like most people in town, they aren't aware that Mr. Chips had been married.

Chapter III Analysis

Mr. Chips is not a fan of the classics, although ironically as one of Brookfield's language instructors, he teaches them. He attempts to show his respect for the classics through his decor. He has pictures of the Acropolis and the Forum on the wall and a Turkish carpet on the floor. Displaying this art could also signify a secret wish that he had seen more of the world, lands he would have liked to have visited had he not been so restricted by his job. He privately prefers detective novels to the classical books lining his bookshelves which are displayed as a further way to convince others of his love for Latin and Ancient Greek. He devotes sparse prep time to the classics, relying on the Times as his source for Latin and Greek quotations. His tendency to be secretive—his reference to freemasonry—points to a reluctance to reveal his true nature.

There is a mystique about Chips. He had been married, but since Chips has lived alone at Mrs. Wickett's house for ten years, the marriage ended in some fashion some time before. The "why" part is yet to be revealed.



Chapter IV

Chapter IV Summary

At 48 years of age, Mr. Chips feels content and satisfied. His career is going well—he had just been named house master. Over the summer break, Mr. Chips and a colleague, Rowden, are vacationing at the Lake District and renting rooms at an old farmhouse. Rowden is suddenly called away and Chips finds himself alone. Chips decides to hike one day and spots a woman waving his way. Thinking she's in trouble, he tries to rush to her but gets his ankle stuck between two rocks. As it turns out, the woman was in no trouble and had been waving at someone behind Chips. Ironically, the woman and her companion rush to help the now lame Chips.

Chips had never been comfortable around women and certainly not the New Woman of the nineties, that strong and independent creature. In his mind, the ideal woman was weak, timid and delicate. The strong young woman who came to his rescue that day was Katherine Bridges. Chips wound up on bedrest at the farmhouse and Katherine, who felt some blame for his injury, bicycled by everyday to look in on him. After some healing, he was able to accompany her on brief walks. Soon he was captivated by the charming, opinionated 25-year-old and as it turns out she with him. They soon were in love and became engaged. They married in London just before it was time for the school year to begin.

Chapter IV Analysis

Irony is rife in this chapter. Mr. Chips has never been comfortable around women and stayed a bachelor for his 48 years. The ideal woman to Chips is weak, timid and delicate. Thoughts of the strong, independent New Woman is to him frightening. The young woman he thinks he is going to save during a hike, turns out to save him. When Katherine "saves" Chips by helping him back to his room after spraining his ankle, she is metaphorically "saving" him from his dull and unremarkable life. He falls in love with the New Woman, the antithesis of his ideal, and they marry.



Chapter V

Chapter V Summary

Now as an old man, he looks at his two feet and tries to recall which foot it was that changed his fortunes so. He remembers when the couple eagerly planned their lives together. Katherine was supportive of Chips' career, relieved that he was not a stockbroker or a solicitor or dentist. She felt there was nothing more important than education. To ease Chips' concerns, she assured him how much she liked boys and would feel comfortable living at Brookfield.

Katherine only answered with laughter when Chips tried to convince her his teaching credentials and abilities were at best mediocre. The evening before the wedding, Katherine made a point to say goodbye to him for the last time before they became a couple. She thought it appropriate to say, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips."

Chapter V Analysis

The New Woman that Chips was so fearful of proved to be his greatest supporter. He remembers how she laughed at him for his self-deprecating remarks. When she tenderly says "Good-bye, Mr. Chips" the night before their wedding, she is marking the end of the man who didn't believe in himself. This is a masterfully emotional episode—understated, yet touching and poignant. Even though, for reasons unknown yet, they are no longer together, she is ever-present in his memory and he still loves her. There is the foreshadowing of a tragedy and great sadness involving Katherine.



Chapter VI

Chapter VI Summary

Katherine was a great hit at Brookfield. Everyone loved her—even the women who were at first jealous of her youthful beauty. But the most amazing thing about her presence was the change it had on Chips. Although he had come to be respected in his job, he had never been loved by the students nor had he inspired them. He was stiff and kept himself remote from them. Influenced by Katherine's positive attitude and cheerful support, he relaxed and allowed himself to reveal a side no one had ever seen. His sense of humor that had always been there now emerged to the delight of his students. He had never been a good disciplinarian but was rigid and misunderstood. But with Katherine in his life, his disciplinary skills improved, and though he became tougher on his students, their admiration for him only grew.

Although Chips maintained his Conservative political views, he was open to hearing the opinions of his young, liberal wife—sometimes even captivated by them. Katherine suggested that some poor boys from East London be brought out to play soccer against the boys at Brookfield. Everyone, including Chips was aghast at the idea—it could never work for a myriad of reason. But Katherine held her view, finally convincing Chips who became a strong advocate. The school acquiesced and began a tradition of bringing the boys from the slums to play against the Brookfield teams.

Years later, one of those boys from East London who was allowed to play at Brookfield, dropped by to visit Chips. He recalled the wonderful experience he had playing at Brookfield and asked about Chips' lovely wife he remembered so well. Chips explained that Katherine had died the year after the boy had been there, only the year after she had first arrived there. The young man was saddened by the news. Chips heard a month later that the young man, who was a private in the army, was killed in a conflict at Passchendaele.

Chapter VI Analysis

Katherine did indeed save Chips. With her effervescent presence, he rises from adequate and respected to loved and inspirational. Through Katherine's young eyes, Chips sees life in an entirely new perspective. Katherine saw something deep within Chips that no one else saw—not even Chips himself. Through her magic, a kinder and strong man emerged, a man who learned how to relax, enjoy life and allow his brilliant sense of humor that had been there all along to surface.

Katherine's strong views opened Chips to new ways of looking at ordinary things. Her compassion in understanding how bringing poor boys from London to play in matches against the Brookfield boys awakened a compassion in Chips that remained with him the rest of his days.

Though it is revealed that Katherine died only a year after they married, it is obvious from his tender memories of her that she remains a part of him. The strength he gained while with Katherine gave him the courage he needed to carry on after losing her.



Chapter VII through Chapter VIII

Chapter VII through Chapter VIII Summary

Chapter VII

Memories of Katherine flood Chips' memories. He pictures her running down the corridors, laughing at some silly thing. He remembers when she played the cello at a Mozart concert at Brookfield. He recalls how she advocated leniency in many cases of boys who were being punished. Many times she was convincing. Though she looked on the good side of people, when a boy had merited punishment she would push for the most severe. Years later when a disciplinary issue faced him, he would recall her words which would influence his actions.

In his declining years, he remembers so many incidents that seemed serious or funny but now the years had dulled their intensity. Were they really that funny or serious after all? He recalled names and incidents, forgetting their timing and sequence—all seeming to blur together. So many of those involved were dead now. He muses about all the events and incidents that must have taken place since the school's establishment in Elizabethan times. Why was one of the rooms called "The Pit?" No one knew—the reason lost in the years. Was a holiday called when news came of Waterloo? Some day he might write a book. In fact, he had already written down some notes—but seeing them in writing the incidents seem to have lost their sheen, their life.

Chapter VIII

A student asks for time off to welcome visitors. Chips is annoyed thinking that the boy can go to blazes for all he cares—his wife and child just died. On his classroom desk there is a stack of letters. He opens them to find that they all contain blank sheets of paper—in honor of April Fool's Day—the very day his wife and child died.

Chapter VII through Chapter VIII Analysis

Chapter VII

Chips recollects on the happy times with Katherine and on the multitude of serious and silly incidents from his many years at Brookfield. He imagines all the events that must have taken place at Brookfield in the centuries before his time there. How many lost memories there must be. Attempting to diminish his pain, Chips tries to give some perspective to his tragedy in losing Katherine. To most, his heartache will be merely become an insignificant incident if remembered at all.

Chapter VIII

In bitter irony, Chips' wife and child died on April Fool's Day, the day of the child's birth. The day he wished he would have died as well.



Chapter IX

Chapter IX Summary

After Katherine's death, Chips turned into an old man—old beyond his years. Although he was only fifty and had graying hair before his wife's death, it was now that everyone seemed to notice it. His odd remarks were taken as something an old man can get away with. (Now eighty, Chips thinks back with a chuckle at being called old at fifty.) Chips' eccentricities were accepted—his fraying almost threadbare gown, the ritualistic way in which he called roll. Years later he could remember the sequences of names on the roster he had called in alphabetical order, wondering what happened to all of them. When he did well at a game of fives, he overheard the comment that he did well for an old chap. He was permitted to be an old man by staff and students alike and all the graces that went with that status.

The life was taken out of him in one sense, but Katherine's short influence on Chips' life allowed him to survive. He had pride in his work and skills as a teacher he didn't have before. He was able to deal with disciplinary issues much easier. Kathie could not bequeath her brilliant mind to him, but she left him with a calm that had never been there. He took former serious issues—like political disputes—lightly and his stride. However, his disregard for Mr. Lloyd George emerged when the Welsh Prime Minister visited the school, although George was completely charmed by the aging teacher.

Chapter IX Analysis

The grief over his wife's death, sends Chips into premature old age. Although he physically ages, he holds onto the youthful spirit of Katherine. The students and staff respect Chips and have great sympathy for his loss. They allow him to "get away" with saying anything. They are understanding and lenient with him—tolerating his eccentricities, silently feeling for the old man. Although Katherine was much younger than Chips, she was stronger and more resilient than Chips. Her legacy to him is in part the strength of character that he carries with him every day.



Chapter X

Chapter X Summary

In 1900, old Meldrum, who had taken Wetherby's position as Headmaster of the school died of pneumonia. Chips was appointed interim Headmaster until a suitable replacement could be found for Meldrum. Chips held hope that he would receive the position permanently. But those thoughts were dashed with the appearance of the young (age 37), new Headmaster. Chips did not like the young headmaster's remote and rigid style.

Chips reflects on the years with the new headmaster. He recalled when the severe young Headmaster Ralston called everyone to the Assembly Hall to announce that King Edward VII had died. He remembered when the railway workers went on strike. Some of the strikers Chips had known for years and would not dream of ignoring them. His friendliness with the strikers was controversial—but with a smile he thought of how proud Kathie would have been of him.

Chips was proud of his country but sensed difficult times were coming. He and Katherine had witnessed the procession of the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. He remembered how fragile she had looked and questioned whether the fact that her days were coming to an end also marked the end of an era for England. There were so much unrest and change taking place in England at the time—labor strikes, crusading suffragettes, tariff reform, problems with Ireland—the list was long.

One of Chips' students, Grayson, seemed upset. Chips held him after class to see if he needed a lift. Turned out that Grayson's father had sailed on the Titanic. There was no word yet if he had survived. After a few fretful days, Grayson learned that his father was rescued. Much relieved, Chips could have no idea at the time that he would one day be offering condolences to the father.

Chapter X Analysis

Chips half-heartedly wanted the promotion to Headmaster—it would have been his last hurrah. But when that didn't happen, he wasn't all that disappointed—he knew it really wasn't right for him. The political unrest that is taking place in England and Europe is growing. The year is 1900 and just a few years away from skirmishes that will lead to World War I. The metaphor comparing the aging monarch as marking the end of an era of peace is stark and moving. A student who feared he lost his father is relieved that he survived. The chapter ends with a foreshadowing of the death of the son.



Chapter XI

Chapter XI Summary

Chips and Headmaster Ralston had quite an argument. After calling Chips to his study, Ralston basically asked for his resignation. He asserted that Chips was not cutting mustard. He was not up on his Greek and Latin, refusing to follow the pronunciation standards set by Ralston. For example, he insisted that staff and student pronounce "Cicero" as "Kickero." Mr. Chips was slovenly as well—his tattered robe was the talk of the school. He is just past sixty, however, and is not ready to retire which he forcefully let Ralston know.

A student happened to be just outside the room as the argument ensued. It was soon all around among staff and students that Ralston had been rude to Mr. Chips and had shown a total lack of respect. No one liked Ralston and his treatment of Chips confirmed their feelings about him.

While it was true that Ralston had improved the school, he was turning it away from its traditions of an inclusive democracy that placed duke and dustman in the same place and time. Ralston was turning Brookfield into a rich boy's school—filled with boys who couldn't buy their way into Eaton or Harrow. Ralston had no idea how the staff and students loved Brookfield and were anxious to defend the tradition of their school.

Sir John Rivers came to visit Chips one day. He was a former student but now was Chairman of the School's Governors. He told Chips he had heard the story about Ralston's rude treatment of him. Rivers conveyed the sentiment of the Board of Governors: They were thoroughly in his corner and he could stay until he was a hundred if he liked. And Mr. Chips broke down, then, and whenever he retold the conversation.

Chapter XI Analysis

Although Mr. Chips' brief time with Katherine was the best time of his life in one sense, there emerges the realization that Mr. Chips had another love that was there all along—his love for Brookfield, especially the students. Unlike the instant love he felt for Katherine and their short, whirlwind life together, his love for Brookfield was one that grew slowly over the many years he was there. His love was not for his career, not for teaching per se—even he knew his shortcomings—it was for the environment, the thousands of students he encountered over the year, his colleagues—the fun he shared with all of them.

When he is asked to retire by the rigid new Headmaster, he is defended by one and all. It is only then that the reader, and perhaps even Mr. Chips himself, understands the depth of his emotional attachment to Brookfield. The story of Mr. Chips is a love story—one of a man and his wife as well as that of a teacher and his students.



Chapter XII

Chapter XII Summary

As it turned out, Mr. Chips stayed at Brookfield and Ralston resigned to better himself at a more prestigious school. Replacing Ralston was an even younger man named Chatteris who was a bright, friendly and sympathetic young man. Chatteris and Chips hit it off right away. He sensed immediately the emotional connection Chips had with the school and students. Following a bout with bronchitis that made him miss most of the winter semester, at 65, Chips decided it is time to retire. He loved Brookfield and the students and staff and he'd always be part of them. He'd be right across the street and would be able to stop by whenever he wanted.

At the end of the summer term, Chips was given a farewell celebration. He spoke before those assembled in a short speech that was full of jokes and recollections of the fun times he shared with so many students. Chips threw in a few Latin quotations as a dig to the former headmaster. He told his students he would always remember them just as they were that day. He asked to be pardoned if he didn't recognize them as adults. In his mind they would never grow old. His words were enjoyed by all, and he was given a rousing cheer at his departure.

After his retirement, he kept busy with personal reading and with many activities at Brookfield. In 1914, a year after his retirement, he was at several dinners where there was talk of war. Chips dismissed the conflict in the Balkans as minor.

Chapter XII Analysis

Mr. Chips is happy in his retirement but never cuts ties with the students and school he loves. Mr. Chips claims to remember all his students—but only as children; he may not recognize them as adults. Mr. Chips would have liked to have been frozen in time with all his students—he their affable teacher and they all the thousands of boys whose lives he touched over his many years at Brookfield.

There is a drumbeat of war. Noting the year 1914, World War I is not far off. In the succeeding chapters, there is the ominous sense that Mr. Chips will be faced with more tragedy and loss.



Chapter XIII

Chapter XIII Summary

The world was in the throes of war. Chips, like many others, at first did not feel the fighting would amount to much. He was wrong but, unlike many others, admitted it. In 1915, as conflicts escalated, Chips would sit in the chapel every Sunday evening and listen to Chatteris read off the names of former students who had been killed in battle that week. Chips always thought how they were just names to Chatteris, but they were faces, real boys to him. The Battle of Somme of 1916, sadly yielded the names of 23 former students one Sunday evening.

Headmaster Chatteris visited Chips one evening. Chatteris looked pale and drawn. He revealed to Chips that he was in ill health and the toll that the stress he faced on a daily basis was taking on him. Many of the teachers that Ralston had hired were young and were off fighting. Chatteris was having to do double-duty himself, taking some classes. He asked Chips to return to help out. He didn't want Chips to over-extend himself, but take on only the work he wants to. More than anything, Brookfield needed Chips. He was the most popular teacher ever and they needed him to hold everything together—he belonged there. With joy in his heart, Chips agreed to return.

Chapter XIII Analysis

The demands of the escalating war has depleted the staff at Brookfield. Headmaster Chatteris asks Chips to come out of retirement and return to Brookfield at least temporarily. Chips is moved when Chatteris tells him that the school needs him to hold everyone together. He has lost his wife and their child and cannot help them, but the other love of his life is suffering and needs him. With joy he accepts the request to return to the beloved school where he belongs.



Chapter XIV through Chapter XV

Chapter XIV through Chapter XV Summary

Chapter XIV

Things went exceedingly well when Chips returned to school. The most gratifying thing to him was that for the first time in his life he felt needed. Chips eased the tense situation by poking fun at things like the new menu reflecting changes by the food-rationing system. Chatteris fell ill in the winter of 1917, and Chips once again became Acting Head of Brookfield. Chatteris died in the Spring and the Board of Governor asked Chips to stay on as Acting Head through the term. Chips was satisfied with that—he knew that he was too old to take the position on permanently.

Chips enjoyed his time as Headmaster—he handled complaints, dealt with problems and requests. Sadly, the somber job of reading the list of former students killed in action fell to Chips. He could not always hold back his tears. One Sunday, he shared the tragic news that Max Staefel, the former German Master at Brookfield had been killed in a conflict. Some thought it inappropriate that he would list a German, the enemy, in a list with English boys killed in the war. Chips was satisfied that he made mention of Staefel. He heard someone commenting on the incident say that Chips still "has 'em." Chips took that comment that he still "has 'em" to mean that he still had dignity and generosity.

Chapter XV

While Chips is teaching Latin to fourth-graders, Brookfield is hit and shrapnel is falling all about outside. Though the building was reverberating, Chips remained calm, talked a little louder and went on with his lesson. Some of the boys became nervous. Chips asserted that although the affairs of Caesar thousands of years ago may not seem important, they will not be obliterated by the explosions outside. If the class was to be "interrupted" at least they were doing something worthwhile. One of the boys volunteered to read. The passage Chips selected for him had a reference to a German defeat. Although the explosions sound nearer and the building was shaking, the boys all enjoyed Chips' less-than-subtle message. Later they learn that nine people were killed in the area by the bombings.

Everyone assembled on November 11, 1918, Armistice Day, to cheer on the victory. Mr. Chips went to the podium as silence came over the room. He hesitated for a moment then left the podium without speaking. He fell sick a short time later and turned in his resignation. It was time for him to retire permanently.

Chapter XIV through Chapter XV Analysis

Chapter XIV



Chips feels needed for the first time in his life. He enjoys being needed, offering advice and filling requests. When he announces that the former German Master of the school was killed in action, some felt it was inappropriate to honor the death of an enemy. But to Chips, the German colleague was not an enemy; rather, he was a friend who Chips honored appropriately—with dignity and respect. Chips does not restrict his feelings within a parameter decided by others.

Chapter XV

While the school is under attack, Chips keeps the children calm by making them continue their lessons. The Latin passage he has a student read aloud contains a line about the defeat of Germans. He purposely selected the passage to buoy the spirits of the boys. He attempts to diminish the importance of the enemy by asserting that the Latin they are studying will survive long after the conflicts have ended.



Chapter XVI

Chapter XVI Summary

Now fifteen years after his final retirement, Chips is happy in his cozy room—even in winter where he can read by the fire and look forward to summer when there would be continual visits from the old boys—his former students. The war ended years before. He is proud of England's sacrifice—although it may have been too much. The General Strike of 1926 lasted a week—without bloodshed—a lesson in decorum for England's more trigger-happy allies. Whatever meeting or dinner he attended, everyone looks forward to his jokes. Laughter is everywhere Chips goes.

Chips has no worries. His retirement and money provides more than he needs. He often gives money away when someone he knows needs help. Chips prepares a will leaving a small sum to Mrs. Wickett and the missions and the rest in a scholarship fund to Brookfield. Chips no longer makes trips into London, fearing he'll catch a chill. But he does make it across to Brookfield when the weather is good. The new students have already heard about Mr. Chips and do their best to evoke the latest Chips joke or quip so they can share their fun with the other boys.

Chapter XVI Analysis

Chips is happy in his retirement. Although in failing health and warned by his doctor to stay indoors, his love for Brookfield is so strong he cannot stay away from the school. The school loves him, too—Mr. Chips is a legendary part of Brookfield. Chips has become a loving, humorous force in the lives of the students and staff—a force which the school is not willing to give up.



Chapter XVII through Chapter XVIII

Chapter XVII through Chapter XVIII Summary

Chapter XVII

Dr. Merivale reminds Chips to stay indoors, adding that he wished he had Chips' life. Chips thinks that it was, after all, quite a life—so many memories and good times to keep him company. While Mrs. Wicket is away, there is a knock at the door. Though he probably should not answer the door—might catch a draft—Chips makes his way there. There is a very young boy standing there in a Brookfield cap. The boy, Linford, tells him that he was told Chips wanted to see him. Chips knows the older boys were playing a joke, a gag—so he'd play along. He invites the shy youngster in. Sensing that Linford was having a hard time at school, he tells him about his rough entry into Brookfield as a young teacher. He assures the boy that he'll soon feel at home there. Linford seems to feel a bit relieved. After a quick tea, Chips is tired and tells the youngster it's time for him to return to school. As the boy departs, he thanks the old master and says, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." Chips remembers how Katherine had said the same thing to him so many years before.

Chapter XVIII

When he wakes, Chips is surprised to see Dr. Merivale standing over him. He learns that he gave them quite a scare. When Mrs. Wickett returned, she found he had fainted and called Dr. Merivale. Dr. Merivale tells Chips to sleep as long as he likes. But his sleep is not restful. . .he sees that Merivale, Mrs. Wickett, the new Headmaster and others are all standing in his room. He wonders why they are all there. As he tries to sleep he hears one of them say that it was a pity that Chips never had children. This comment brings an immediate response from Chips ". . .a pity I never had any children, eh? . . .But I have thousands of 'em. . .thousands of 'em. . .and all boys." (131)

Chips drifts off while he reviews in his mind the names on all the rosters he called out over the years. Where had they all gone? He wanted to spend his last moment with all of them. Mr. Chips soon falls asleep.

Chapter XVII through Chapter XVIII Analysis

Chapter XVII

The shy, young student Linford is buoyed by Mr. Chips' assurance that he will soon feel at home at Brookfield. Chips has been through such talks so many times that the faces and names blur into each other. But even in his ill health he does not let the opportunity to help a Brookfield student slip by. Chips is moved by Linford's parting words, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." The same words that were spoken by Katherine so many years before.

Chapter XVIII

On his deathbed, although surrounded by colleagues and friends, he pays them little attention. Chips only thinks of his students. Chips wants no pity about having no children—he, in fact, had thousands and thousands of them—all boys. He can still recall the names on the many rosters he read. The memory of all his children comforts Chips in his last moments.



Characters

Mr. Chips

Elderly Mr. Chips is retired and reflecting on his life and career at Brookfield School. In his retirement, he opted to rent a room across from Brookfield and so he can visit as often as the weather and his health allows him. Mr. Chipping, nicknamed Mr. Chips, as a young man applied for a teaching position at Brookfield. He was aware of his less-than-stellar education and abilities—he did not receive rave reviews from the first school he taught. After gaining a teaching position at Brookfield, it took Chips a while before he felt comfortable in his new environment.

Although appearing as a somewhat solitary figure, Mr. Chips did have a personal relationship, though it was brief. He had never felt comfortable around women—thinking the ideal woman should be timid, delicate and weak. While on a summer vacation, he meets a young woman who comes to his rescue. Her name is Katherine Bridges. She is the antithesis of Chips' ideal woman—she is strong, opinionated and liberal. He marries Katherine, but just a brief year later she dies in childbirth. The child she was carrying died with his mother.

Although their time together was brief, Katherine changed the trajectory of Chips' life. By example, Katherine taught Chips to speak out against unfairness, love life, share joy and above all to laugh. Chips is all but destroyed when Katherine dies but survives through the strength of her legacy and spirit. Katherine's qualities begin to emerge in Chips who then passes on the same values to his students. When Chips' life ends, he is comforted by the memory of the thousands of students he had over his many years at Brookfield.

Katherine Bridges

Middle-aged Mr. Chips meets 25-year-old Katherine Bridges while he is on vacation over summer break. Katherine is a bright, spirited young woman who is the antithesis of Chips' view of an ideal woman—that is weak, timid and delicate. Katherine helps Chips back to his rented room after he injures his foot during a hike on a rocky hill. She checks in on his recovery, and they eventually fall in love and marry before the fall semester starts. Young Katherine teaches her 48-year-old husband how to speak out about injustice, how to enjoy life, how to share joy and how to laugh.

Katherine dies in childbirth a short year after she and Chips marry. Although her tragic passing and the loss of his only child throws Chips into grief and agony, what Katherine taught Chips about life gets him through those rough times. Chips passes the legacy and spirit of Katherine on to his students. His sense of humor which had been there all along, emerges and soon Chips becomes a favorite among his students. Although their



time together was so brief, without Katherine in his life Chips would not have become the legendary teacher that he became at Brookfield.

Mr. Wetherby

Mr. Wetherby is the headmaster of Brookfield who hires Mr. Chips as a teacher. He cautions Chips to be stern and a good disciplinarian.

Mrs. Wickett

When Mr. Chips retires, he rents a room from Mrs. Wickett whose house is across the street from Brookfield School. He elects to live there so he can walk across to school and visit as often as he is able.

Dr. Merivale

Dr. Merivale is Mr. Chips' doctor. Marivale tells old Chips that he is fine but privately is concerned about Chips's health.

Headmaster Ralston

Headmaster Ralston is a young man who becomes Headmaster of Brookfield. He asks Mr. Chips to retire because he feels Chips is not doing a good job and that his appearance is not up to par mainly because of the threadbare robe he insists on wearing.

Headmaster Chatteris

After Headmaster Ralston leaves Brookfield, he is replaced by another young man, Headmaster Chatteris. Unlike Ralston, he is kind to Chips and recognizes how important Chips is to the school.

Linford

Linford is a young student who visits Chips in his last days. Linford, a shy new student, receives a pep talk from Chips. As Linford departs, he turns and says, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips." Linford has the distinction of being the last student to see Mr. Chips alive.



Max Staefel

Max Staefel was the former German Master at Brookfield who is killed fighting for the Germans in World War I. Chips is criticized for honoring him in a service at the Chapel for those killed in the war.

Mr. Chips' Students

Mr. Chips loves his students. He tells them that to him they will always be children and asks their forgiveness if he does not recognize them as adults. On his deathbed, he tells his colleagues not to pity him for having no children. He had thousands and thousands of children—all boys.



Objects/Places

Brookfield School

Mr. Chips spends more than thirty years at Brookfield School, an all-boys boarding school set in the English countryside. The school consists of a group of 18th-century buildings, a quadrangle and playing fields.

Mrs. Wickett's House

After Mr. Chips retires from Brookfield, he rents a room from Mrs. Wickett whose house is located directly across from the school. By living there, Chips can walk across to the school and visit as often as he is able.

The Lake District

Mr. Chips and a colleague vacation at The Lake District over one summer break. Chips meets his future wife, Katherine, while on a hike near the lake.

Assembly Hall

Assembly Hall at Brookfield School is where Chips first meets his students. The hall is used to make important announcements to the students.

Chapel

After World War I begins, every Sunday night at the school's chapel the headmaster reads off a list of former Brookfield students who have been killed in the conflict.

London

Mr. Chips attended various meetings and dinners in London on occasion during his career. As he advanced in age, he became too frail and weak to travel and could no longer attend such events.

Mr. Chips' Tattered Gown

Mr. Chips, in his later years as a teacher at Brookfield, insisted on wearing the same robe he had for years. It had grown tattered and frayed causing one headmaster to ask him to retire. His tattered robe was symbolic of the rebellious nature that was inside the quiet man.



The Board of Governors

When the Board of Governors of Brookfield learns that the headmaster had asked Chips to retire, the chairman of the Board informs Chips that he can stay there as long as he wants—even until he was one hundred. The chairman told him he was the school's most popular teacher.

World War I

During the latter part of his career at Brookfield, World War I broke out. Quite a few former students were casualties of the war. One day while teaching Latin, the school was bombed. Chips refused to stop the class, his calmness giving strength to his students.

Ancient Greek and Latin

Mr. Chips was one of Brookfield's language teachers, charged with teaching ancient Greek and Latin. He saw no real purpose in teaching dead languages and went about doing so in a perfunctory manner. This was a point of contention between he and Headmaster Ralston.



Themes

Two Loves

"Good-bye, Mr. Chips" is a love story but not in the traditional sense. It is the story of two loves, diverse in type. The story first introduces the young Mr. Chips as a rather stoic, conservative man who appears to be a solitary, lonely figure. There are no signs of "love" in his life. Mr. Chips, at age 48, finally meets a young woman, Katherine, with whom he falls desperately in love. The deep emotion that was always there is awakened in the middle-aged Chips. Tragically, Katherine dies, along with Chips' only child, in childbirth just a little over a year after they marry. He is alone once again, but Katherine had taught him how to love, or rather, showed him that he had love within himself to give.

The other love Mr. Chips experiences is that for his students. He loved every student for his own unique qualities and never forgot any of their faces. Chips' emotions take over when the Chairman of the Board of Governors tells the aging teacher that he can stay at Brookfield as long as he likes, even 'til he's "a hundred" because he belongs at Brookfield, and the staff and students need him. Even near death, when a new student visits the retired teacher he cannot turn the student away but rather tries to comfort him and send him off feeling better about himself. Chips had a deep, unselfish love for his students. When on his deathbed, he hears a colleague whispering that it was a shame Chips had no children, Chips then asserts himself. He was not childless at all. He had thousands and thousands of children—all boys. While slipping into death, he thinks not of Katherine and his dead baby; rather, his thoughts are on his students allowing him to die in comfort of his love for them.

Katherine's Legacy

Mr. Chips, a rather joyless, middle-aged man is a teacher and a life-long bachelor. He never felt comfortable around women, and the only type of woman he could tolerate at all was one who was timid, weak and delicate. However, at age 48 Chips meets 25-year-old Katherine Bridges. When he thinks he is coming to the aid of a "weak" woman in distress on a mountain hike, it is he who sprains his foot and is saved by Katherine. Unlike his "ideal woman," Katherine is strong, opinionated and socially liberal—the scary New Woman in the flesh. Despite their vast differences, they fall in love and marry shortly after meeting.

Sadly their union only lasts a little over a year when Katherine dies in childbirth. The child Katherine was carrying died with his mother. Katherine was not wealthy and left Chips no wealth and unfortunately left him no children, but what she did leave him was the key to the rest of his life. She taught him what joy was and how to have fun—and to laugh. She taught him to laugh in the face of controversy, to be compassionate to those less fortunate and to think in large ways leaving pettiness behind.



For the rest of his life, while saddened by her premature departure, he kept her spirit close—always thinking what she would do or how proud she would be of a rebellious act he dared to risk. Although his great sense of humor was always there, Katherine summoned it and gave it new life. As the years went on, the students and the staff could not get enough of the witty teacher. Students would try to engage him in conversation so they could share the latest Chips quip or joke with his friends. Chips lived many years after Katherine's death, and because of her gift, he lived it with joy and happiness and a free spirit.

Teaching Joy and Laughter

Mr. Chips was not a great teacher in the literal sense of the word. He readily admitted that his own education was at best mediocre. He did not receive the greatest reviews from the first school he taught at—one complaint was that Chips was not a good disciplinarian. At Brookfield, Mr. Chips was one of the language teachers. He taught Latin and Old Greek language forms in a rather tongue-in-cheek, perfunctory manner. He relied on the Times newspapers to supply the Greek or Latin quotes for class prep. He really didn't think it was necessary for the students to learn those dead languages. One rigid young headmaster asked Mr. Chips to retire because he was slacking off on his teaching duties by not adhering to the new pronunciation standards for the old languages. Additionally, the headmaster told him, he was slovenly in appearance, unwilling to retire his threadbare gown that was the talk of the school.

But to Chips, these were minor concerns. He knew he wasn't the best teacher in the world, not the one who would inspire students to excel in the classroom; however, to Chips there were more important things to teach his students. He taught them to be joyful, to laugh and to feel. By example, he taught them how important a sense of humor was. Chips, who began at Brookfield as a rather stoic young man, became the most beloved teacher at Brookfield. His humor was legendary—on his many visits to school after his retirement, new students would try to engage old Chips in conversation so they could share his latest quip with their friends.

When another headmaster asked him to return temporarily to help out at school, Chips was moved to tears. The young headmaster told him he belonged at Brookfield and that in times of strife, he was the only one who could hold them together.



Style

Point of View

The novel "Good-bye, Mr. Chips" is written in the all-knowing, third person omniscient narrative allowing the reader to know the thoughts and motives of all characters. The author of Mr. Chips, James Hilton, was the son of a schoolmaster and attended various English boys' schools himself. In writing this story, he could, therefore, draw from his personal knowledge of life at an English boys' school—both from his own experiences and those of his father as a schoolmaster.

Most of the story is written from Mr. Chips' point of view. The reader is privy to Chips' thoughts—how uncertain he feels with his life and career as a young teacher through his evolution when he permits his emotions to override his pride and become unafraid to share love and laughter with others—particularly his beloved students.

The narrative point of view allows the reader to understand the evolution that Mr. Chips' character undergoes from his very early days until his death. The reader is privy to Mr. Chips' uncertainty as a new teacher at Brookfield and before he meets Katherine and the positive transformation his self-esteem undergoes after he meets and marries Katherine. The transformative effect Katherine had on Chips stays with him throughout his life.

Setting

Most of the story of teacher Mr. Chips takes place at the English all-boys school, Brookfield. The story begins in the late 1880s and continues through the early 1930s. Brookfield is located in the English countryside some distance from London. While a teacher at Brookfield, Mr. Chips is given living quarters at the school and remains there after he marries.

Part of the story is in flashbacks, beginning after Mrs. Chips has retired. In his retirement, he rents a room from Mrs. Wickett, whose house is directly across the street from Brookfield. He chooses to rent a room from Mrs. Wickett because of his close proximity to Brookfield where he can easily visit whenever he likes—which is quite often. The room is cozy and decorated with items from faraway lands—perhaps those places Chips would have visited had he not led the rather isolated life he led.

The only other setting that is important to the story is the vacation spot, the Lake District, which is located some distance from the school where Mr. Chips meets Katherine who later becomes his wife. Chips meets Katherine while they are both hiking on a rocky hillside.



While Mr. Chips is teaching at Brookfield, he on occasion travels to London for meetings and dinners. In his advancing years, after retirement, he no longer is strong and well enough to make the trip to London any more.

Language and Meaning

The book, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips" was written in 1934 and contains some antiquated language and some words that are more commonly used in England than in America. Aside from a few words or phrases that may leave the reader slightly puzzled, there is clarity in the overall narrative which moves the story along at a good pace. Most characters in Mr. Chips speak proper English although one character's accent—Mrs. Wickett—is definitively written to be understood as cockney. The dialog of Mr. Chips contains many "umphs" interspersed between his words—indicating that he speaks in a halting, unsure manner.

The story is a sentimental story written in an unsentimental way. Just when the novel seems like light reading, the reader turns a corner to face pathos and tragedy. The touching, emotional moments are sparingly sprinkled throughout the story so their importance is immediately recognized and their dramatic impact is intense and heart-felt. Those tender moments are not lost in a sea of melodramatic rhetoric. Most of the story is written in this light manner with scores of anecdotal incidents and experiences, often humorous, that Chips encounters. But those few touching episodes that are generally contained in just a sentence or even a few words, grabs the reader and do not let go. The style of the story parallels the personality and characteristics of Mr. Chips himself—one that is usually reserved and complacent but given to moments of deep, stirring passion.

Structure

"Good-bye, Mr. Chips" is a novel that is segmented into 18 numbered chapters. The novel is constructed as a frame narrative—the main story of Mr. Chips' career as a teacher is told in flashback mode while it is framed by the account of the "current" day. The tale begins with the aged Mr. Chips who is ailing and nearing the end of his life. He has retired from school and spends much of his time reminiscing about his life and career—it is during these recollections that the story transitions into flashbacks. The narrative alternates between the present (retired years) and his younger years which cover his career at Brookfield. This transition serves to slow the pace and create interest. The structure allows the story to move forward in a satisfying manner by presenting interesting aspects of both perspectives. By ending some chapters in cliffhangers, the author adds mystique and intrigue by its foreshadowing of ominous things to come. The majority of the novel provides a light read but, by design, the author jolts the reader at times with a surprising hint of tragedy that is captivating and engaging. Some chapters are accompanied by relevant illustrations sketched in black and white.



Quotes

"For Chips, like some old sea captain, still measured time by the signals of the past. . . ." (Chapter I, page 3)

"Three cheers, indeed; but there was more to come, an unguessed epilogue, an encore played to a tragic audience." (Chapter II, page 15)

"Shall I call you 'sir'—or would 'Mr. Chips' be the right thing? 'Mr. Chips,' I think. Good-bye, then—goodbye, Mr. Chips. . . ." (Chapter V, page 34)

"And so it stood, a warm and vivid patch in his life, casting a radiance that glowed in a thousand recollections." (Chapter VII, page 44)

"And there he was, dreaming again before the fire, dreaming of times and incidents in which he alone could take secret interest. Funny and sad, comic and tragic, they all mixed up in his mind, and some day, however hard, it roved, he would sort them out and make a book of them. . . ." (Chapter VII, page 53)

"Where had they all gone to, he often pondered; those threads he had once held together, how far had they scattered, some to break, others to weave into unknown patterns?" (Chapter IX, page 63)

"'You can stay here till you're a hundred if you feel like it—indeed, it's our hope you will.' And at that—both then and often when he recounted it afterward—Chips broke down." (Chapter XI, page 84)

"For the first time in his life he felt necessary—and necessary to something that was nearest his heart. There is no sublimer feeling in the world, and it was his at last." (Chapter XIV, page 99)



"With his old and tattered gown, his walk that was just beginning to break into a stumble, his mild eyes peering over the steel-rimmed spectacles, and his quaintly humorous sayings, Brookfield would not have an atom of him different." (Chapter XV, page 108)

"But near him, at Brookfield, and even, in a wider sense, in England, there was something that charmed his heart because it was old—and had survived. More and more he saw the rest of the world as a vast disarrangement for which England had sacrificed enough—and perhaps too much." (Chapter XVI, page 113)

"So that he was both more and less experienced than the youngest new boy at the School might well be; and that, that paradox of age and youth, was what the world called progress." (Chapter XVII, page 120)

"Brookfield will never forget his loveliness. . . which was absurd, because all things are forgotten in the end. But Linford, at any rate will remember and tell the tale: 'I said good-bye to Mr. Chips the night before he died. . .'" (Chapter XVIII, page 132)

Topics for Discussion

Why did Mr. Chips feel he was not suitable to teach at a top-rated school?

What type of female did Mr. Chips feel was the "ideal woman?" Explain the irony when Mr. Chips attempts to help Katherine while they are both hiking up a rocky hill.

How did meeting and marrying Katherine change Mr. Chips' view of life? How long did his brief time with Katherine stay in his memories and affect his life?

Why did some colleagues find it objectionable that Mr. Chips listed Brookfield's former German master along with former students, all killed in the war? What side did the former German master take in the war? What was Mr. Chips' view on the matter?

How does Mr. Chips handle the situation when he is teaching a class while the school is being bombed? What comparison does Chips make between studying Latin and the attack they are undergoing?

What is the most gratifying thing for Mr. Chips when asked to come out of retirement and temporarily return to school?

When Mr. Chips is near death, how does he reply to the comment that infers that it is pitiable that he had no children?