The Good Master Study Guide

The Good Master by Kate Seredy

BOOKRAGS

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Plot Summary

In The Good Master, rebellious Kate goes to live with her uncle in the country. Kate adapts to country life, where she learns the value of hard work, as well as compassion and generosity. In the end of the story, her father Sandor comes to live with her on the ranch.

At the novel begins, school-teacher Sandor Nagy sends his incorrigible daughter Kate to stay with his brother Marton, who owns a ranch on the Hungarian plain. Accustomed to the city-comforts of Budapest, Kate initially rebels against her uncle, but soon discovers a fondness for ranch life. Kate's cousin Jancsi teaches her to ride a horse, and the two children build a fast friendship.

Kate spends Easter on the ranch, participating in local holiday traditions. In recognition of her progress, Marton buys Kate a white horse named "Milky." To everyone's surprise, little Kate, caught in great peril, heroically uses Milky to reign in a stampeding herd of cattle. In the following days, Kate meets the shepherds and herdsmen of the ranch, listening to stories selected from their rich oral tradition.

Kate is now proactive, doing chores of her own volition, but she's yet to master common sense. Marton takes everyone to the fair, where Kate causes a scene by publicly debunking one of the sideshows. Some time later, ignoring Jancsi's warnings, Kate swims into the deepest part of the river and is nearly carried away by the current. Jancsi, who cannot swim, bravely rides his horse into the water to rescue his cousin.

In living with her aunt and uncle, Kate has learned about compassion and generosity. When a drought threatens to doom the ranch, Kate and Jancsi each offer Marton their entire month's pay as ranch-hands. He doesn't accept, but he is so moved by the gesture that his morale is greatly improved. Soon after, a storm arrives and stays for several days.

With the harvest comes the gypsies. While Marton is suspicious of their larcenous ways, he is willing to offer work to the nomads in the form of baking bricks and fixing pots. The gypsies perform the work as requested, and Marton negotiates payment. When Marton and Jancsi return from rounding up payment, however, they discover that the gypsies have made off with more livestock than was agreed, and his niece. Luckily Kate soon escapes and is reunited with her uncle.

The Nagys prepare for winter, harvesting grain and canning produce. The shepherds bring in their flocks for the season. Kate takes it upon herself to begin teaching the shepherds to read and write. On the first windy day, Marton and the children take their grain to the windmill, where Kate watches how flour is made. The old miller tells a story about achieving immortality through work, friendship and memory.

On December 6, Mikulas Day, Marton announces that Mikulas, the Hungarian Santa Claus, will be their guest. While initially dubious, the children soon find themselves

delivering gifts alongside "Mikulas." When Mikulas runs out of presents, Kate and Jancsi offer up their own. Kate soon realizes that Mikulas is none other than her own father, Sandor, in disguise. She is overjoyed. While initially reluctant, Sandor slowly comes to realize that his place is on the ranch, with his daughter, so he decides to stay and take up a position as the village teacher.

Chapter 1: Cousin Kate from Budapest

Chapter 1: Cousin Kate from Budapest Summary

In The Good Master, rebellious Kate goes to live with her uncle in the country. Kate adapts to country life, where she learns the value of hard work, as well as compassion and generosity. In the end of the story, her father Sandor comes to live with her on the ranch.

As the novel begins, ten-year-old Jancsi Nagy anxiously anticipates the arrival of his cousin Kate from Budapest. Kate's father is sending her to stay with Jancsi's family to speed her recovery from a recent bout of measles. Jancsi, having no siblings of his own, and being the only child on his father's ranch, has long yearned for a playmate. While he'd rather that his cousin were a boy, he amuses himself by imagining Kate as a fairy-tale princess in need of rescue.

Jancsi hurries through his chores, bathes and dresses in his finest Sunday clothes. Later, he and his father, Marton, take a wagon to the train station, where Jancsi is amazed by his first look at a rumbling steam locomotive, but disappointed by the ordinary people who emerge from it. Finally, an exasperated railroad guard appears with Kate in tow, vowing never to take care of small children again, and compares Kate to a "bag of screaming monkeys." Jancsi is disappointed that Kate is just a little girl.

Kate suggests that Jancsi's riding pants look more like a skirt, thus making him a girl. The two children nearly come to blows. Kate, spoiled by city life, balks at riding in the wagon, insisting on a taxi instead. Once aboard the vehicle, she first throws a tantrum, but then pretends to fall asleep. Without warning, Kate shoves Jancsi off the wagon. When Marton stops the vehicle to collect his son, Kate takes the driver's seat and steals the wagon. Father and son watch as their cart, driven by Kate, vanishes in the distance.

Jancsi and Marton each mount a horse from a nearby herd, riding the animals bareback in pursuit of Kate. They race all the way home, where they find Jancsi's mother outside holding on to a struggling, disheveled Kate.

Chapter 1: Cousin Kate from Budapest Analysis

Jansci views the world through a lens of child-like imagination, something of which he is not entirely aware. While he knows, for example, that the train is not actually a dragon, he is nevertheless disappointed by the mundanity of the people who emerge from it. His imagination has primed him with an assumption of wonder, and so he is disappointed by the seeming banality of the everyday. Similarly, cousin Kate is so different from Jansci's expectation that he is initially unable to recognize her as the girl he has come to meet.

Kate has assumptions of her own, but they're not based on fantasy. Kate is accustomed to city-life, where things are fast, clean and convenient. Initially, her personality is

geared toward comfort and self-gratification. This fact, coupled with the obvious lengths that she will go to get attention, suggests that her father has been spoiling Kate in lieu of spending actual time with her. This notion is further supported by his willingness to abdicate parental responsibility to his brother.

Chapter 2: Motherless Lamb

Chapter 2: Motherless Lamb Summary

Sitting in the protective lap of Jancsi's mother, Kate tells the story of what happened. Marton finds that he's so relieved that he can't stay angry. Jancsi is impressed by the pluck of his cousin. Kate explains that she lost the reins at some point, so she crawled into the back of the wagon and went to sleep. The horses returned to the stable of their own accord. The mother found Kate asleep in the wagon.

Kate gives Marton a letter from her father, Marton's brother. The note apologizes for misleading Marton, explaining that while Kate may indeed be delicate and in need of country air, the real reason he sent his daughter to Marton is because the girl is impossible to manage. He confesses that he has spoiled Kate since her mother's death and warns that she's most ruinous when she seems most innocent. He hopes that Marton's skill at haltering "wild young things" will prove applicable to Kate.

Father and son go out to tend to the horses, but soon return when they hear Jancsi's mother frantically calling for Kate. The little girl is missing, having vanished into thin air while the mother was fetching water. After a fruitless search, Kate gives up her position by laughing. They find her in the rafters, eating the drying sausages. Kate explains that she didn't want to eat the milk that was given to her for supper, so she climbed up to the sausages instead.

Marton, who is furious, swipes at Kate with a broom. Kate refuses to come down, instead hurling stored items from the rafters. She eventually explains that the oven she climbed up on is now too hot to touch. With Kate stranded, the rest of the family continues with supper, ignoring the girl's complaints. After dinner they put out all the candles and prepare for bed. The oven is still too hot for Kate to climb down.

Later, in bed, Jancsi is woken by the sound of his father helping Kate down from the rafters. He hears Kate giggle and sees his father carrying the little girl to bed. Jancsi is overcome with emotion, deciding finally that having Kate as a cousin is almost as good as having an actual boy.

Chapter 2: Motherless Lamb Analysis

The note explicitly compares Kate to a horse, and by extension compares child-rearing to horse-breaking. If animal-handling skills can be applied to child-rearing, as Sandor's note suggests, then it follows that rural families, accustomed to working with animals on a daily basis, would also prove better at parenting. This is true in the context of the novel, where farm-life provides the structure that Kate needs to behave responsibly.

The rafter incident is important. This is the first time that Kate is forced to face an authentic consequence of her behavior. Rather than endure punishment for her

disobedience, she instead must deal with the situation that her disobedience itself has created. Marton could likely help the girl down, but instead he allows her to suffer for a time. This demonstrates to Kate the relationship between cause and effect.

Chapter 3: The Riding Lesson

Chapter 3: The Riding Lesson Summary

After the incident in the rafters, Kate's behavior is improved. Father and son, with the help of hired men, tend to the ranch while Kate spends her time with the mother. Jansci enjoys spending time with the herdsmen, who tell him stories and teach him ranching skills. He's fascinated by their lifestyle, which is very different from his own.

Kate breaks the remaining ice between cousins by complimenting Jancsi's riding skill. Jancsi offers to teach her to ride. Kate, who is tired of helping the mother with embroideries, is thrilled with the idea, even offering to split her skirt in the manner of Jancsi's riding pants. The next day, Jancsi shows Kate around the ranch. At one point, as Kate rolls on the ground in a fit of laughter, Jancsi notices that Kate has literally split her skirt down the middle, exposing her bloomers underneath.

Although uncomfortable about Kate's skirt, Jancsi shows Kate how to mount and dismount a horse, then how to sit in the saddle while he leads it around by the reins. Though nervous at first, Kate soon grows comfortable. Her enthusiastic scream startles Jancsi's horse, forcing the boy to demonstrate a degree of ridership that Kate finds impressive. When Kate asks to ride Jancsi's horse, the boy agrees so long as Kate can dismount and walk over to him. Kate attempts this, but discovers her legs have gone numb. She can't even stand up.

Highly amused by Kate's predicament, Marton carries Kate into the house. The mother, noting the state of Kate's dress, insists that the girl hurriedly change clothes. Kate explains that she can't hurry and that she has no other clothes to change into. Owing to her sore bottom, Kate eats supper standing up. Mother and father agree that Kate can wear some of Jancsi's old clothes, figuring that the girl is better suited to pants anyway.

Chapter 3: The Riding Lesson Analysis

This chapter demonstrates how rural children, in particular, are educated by their elders. From the herdsman, young Jancsi learns many of the same ranching skills that Marton, his father, uses to provide for the family. Kate's indifference toward her skirt, meanwhile, as well as her earlier ridicule of Jancsi as "just a girl" demonstrates her relative undervaluation of women, or perhaps of the female stereotype. One might surmise that this could be due to having grown up without a mother.

Here again, Kate is subjected to authentic instruction. She wants to ride Jancsi's horse, a exercise for which she is most certainly not yet prepared, but rather than simply tell the girl "no," he instead invites the girl to face the consequences of her actions, demonstrating that Kate has overexerted herself. While Kate could argue with Jancsi's refusal to let her ride his horse, she can hardly disagree with her own useless legs. This form of instruction serves to teach the girl patience and procedure.

Chapter 4: Easter Eggs

Chapter 4: Easter Eggs Summary

Perfectly comfortable in boy's clothing, Kate becomes Jancsi's shadow, following him through his daily chores. Kate doesn't care for smelly pigs and is perplexed by the idea of milk coming from a cow rather than from a bottle, but she is very fond of the horses. Proud of Kate's growing riding prowess, Marton offers, contingent on Kates continued good behavior, to take Kate along when he inspects the new baby lambs after Easter. Kate is thrilled, showering Marton with hugs and kisses.

Seeing that Kate is unfamiliar with Easter traditions, Jancsi excitedly explains to her that eggs are to be dyed, food eaten, and boys will sprinkle girls with water. Kate finds this last custom to be particularly silly. Marton explains that the water represents life-giving rain, an integral part of nature's constant renewal.

The last days before Easter are spent in preparation. The mother bakes piles of nutcakes and poppyseed cakes of various Easter shapes. Each evening they dye eggs. Kate dyes a few eggs on her own and, despite Jancsi's warning, manages to get dye all over herself. When Jancsi laughs at her, Kate tricks the boy into smudging himself with dye. Everyone, Jancsi included, finds this very amusing.

While Kate is troubled to learn that her Easter outfit requires her to wear eighteen skirts at once, she's pleased to discover that Marton has bought her a new pair of red boots. At the church celebration, Kate is introduced to many people. The children hold her in awe. Everyone has heard about the incident with the wagon. Kate is seen as the girl who isn't afraid of anything.

The next day, the Nagys have guests. Kate is sprinkled with water. Later, Kate offers her self-dyed Easter eggs to Jancsi and Marton. Jancsi's egg is decorated with ducklings, commemorating the time that she and Jancsi watched them hatch. Marton's egg reads, "I like you best of all Uncle Marton." Marton is moved, thinking it the most beautiful gift in the world.

Chapter 4: Easter Eggs Analysis

At the Nagy ranch, Kate now lives within a social structure capable of both reinforcing development and incentivizing correct behavior. Learning to ride has served Kate as something more than a distraction. It is an achievement, something that she can feel good about. What's more, Kate is surrounded by people who recognize that achievement can also provide her with the necessary tools to achieve more. The Nagy ranch has provided Kate with clear, predictable outcomes that allow her to set goals for herself.

In addition to being part of a family, Kate is now also part of a community. This is articulated through ritual and tradition. In dressing like the community does and participating in their customs, Kate establishes herself as belonging to that community. This provides the child with the social context required to build her own identity, while also demonstrating to Kate that she is just one child of many.

Chapter 5: The Toepincher

Chapter 5: The Toepincher Summary

Today is the day that Marton promised to take Kate to see the newborn lambs. She leaps from her bed, excited to be underway. She rushes outside to see only two horses prepped for departure. "Old Armchair," the horse she usually rides, is missing. Seeing this, her heart sinks. Is it canceled? Had she not been good enough? Marton gravely insists that Kate finish her milk if she wants to find out anything. Kate does so and surprisingly finds the milk to her liking.

After breakfast, Marton surprises Kate with a gift: a white horse named "Milky." Kate is so happy she cries. With hardly a warning, Jancsi insists that they make haste. The two children race, leaving Marton far behind. Jancsi is barely able to pace Milky. Once he catches up, Marton good-naturedly chastises the kids for racing ahead, citing that they still have a day's ride before them.

At the first herd, they meet shepherd Pista who reports that there is a problem at one of the nearby pastures. Marton and Pista depart to investigate the issue. The kids stay behind at the Toepincher pasture, so named, Jancsi explains, because the brook is full of crawfish. Kate and Jancsi pause for a lunch of bread, cold meat and cookies. Jancsi introduces Kate to the sheepdog Pumi, demonstrating that the animal is both intelligent and conscientious toward his duty to the herd.

Kate thinks she sees an upside-down city in the distance, but Jancsi explains that it's just a mirage and that Kate should ask Pista to tell the story about it. The adults soon return, ravenous for crawfish, but Kate proves careless in collecting them, suffering several pinches in the process. By way of consolation, Pista offers Kate her choice of handmade gits, insisting that he can't accept coin for them. After all, he explains, nature provides everything he needs. At Pista's request, however, Kate gives the shepherd a reading lesson. When Kate asks Pista to relate the story of the mirage, Marton suggests that they might as well spend the night camped in the pasture.

Chapter 5: The Toepincher Analysis

The original agreement between Kate and Marton stipulated that Kate would be allowed to see the newborn lambs contingent on her continued good behavior. The gift of Milky is above and beyond the original contract. This gift serves as a kind of "bonus," further incentivizing Kate to behave due to the possibility of receiving further bonuses. It also shows her that her effort has been recognized and appreciated.

Marton is willing to leave the children unattended, trusting them to govern themselves in his absence. He also allows them to participate in activities that might cause them to suffer minor harm, such as collecting crawfish. Here again, Kate is subjected to authentic instruction. Despite the pasture's cautionary name, and despite Jancsi's

warning, she is still careless in the handling of the crawfish. Pain, in this case, is the ultimate teacher.

Pista serves as the novel's mouthpiece on the subject of materialism. In essence, The Good Master asserts that one should be generous with one's gifts, focused firstly on enriching the lives of others before enriching oneself. Implicit in this idea is a kind of reciprocity. In caring for others, you yourself will be cared for. Pista shares his artwork and, in turn, Kate shares her education.

Chapter 6: The Mirage

Chapter 6: The Mirage Summary

Pista tells the story of the mirage, set thousands of years ago when fairies supposedly still lived. Once upon a time, Pista explains, there was a village upon the plains and everything was owned by one wealthy man. The man is greedy, unwilling to share with neither man nor animal, often using his hired soldiers to plunder nearby townships.

Many miles away lives a poor shepherd, well-known for his kindness and generosity. Learning of this shepherd, the rich man leads an army of soldiers to the poor man's pasture, intent on stealing the man's livestock. The nearby animals, who love the poor man and recognize the rich man for his cruelty, report the invasion to a nearby fairy. The fairy takes the form of an old woman and visits the rich man's encampment.

The fairy, disguised as an old woman, asks to sit at the rich man's camp and share his food. The rich man refuses, insisting on payment. Producing a gold piece, the old woman explains that, not only is she wealthy, she has so much gold that the sheer weight of it all has caused her many houses to turn upside-down. The old woman explains that she needs the help of good strong men to turn them right side up.

The men, planning to steal the old woman's gold, offer their assistance. Leaving their horses behind, the men walk toward the village on the horizon. They stumble through the heat of day, traipsing through poppy fields, tiredly dropping their possessions as they travel. The distant village grows no closer. Come nightfall they fall asleep among the poppies, where they are soon killed by the flower's heavy scent.

Pista concludes the story by revealing that the bodies of the rich man and his soldiers were eventually found. The rich man's ill-gotten treasures were buried and his land was divided among his former subjects. Jancsi wants to hear the story about the Milky Way, but Pista suggests that his great uncle Arpad would be the one to ask for such a telling.

Chapter 6: The Mirage Analysis

In The Good Master, rich men are almost universally depicted as selfish, greedy and usually fat. They live at the expense of others, unable to sate their hunger for material possessions. In this example, the man in question even denies the very animals that live on his property, choosing to see them as parasitic. It is worth noting, however, that this depiction is not intended to be taken as part of the novel's reality. The rich man in this example lives among the fiction of this world.

This story suggests that the fundamental weakness of the rich man, and by extension, of any person driven by greed, is that he is a slave to his avarice. The rich man, in his drive to accumulate more wealth, is helpless to resist the allure of the mirage. By placing wealth above all else, he loses everything, even his life. This depicts the rich

man as something less than human, something incapable of the self-governance that one should expect from a human being.

Chapter 7: The Round Up

Chapter 7: The Round Up Summary

The crops are slowly reaching maturity. Kate, watching her aunt plant a flower garden, asks if she might plant one as well. The aunt gives Kate an assortment of seeds as well as instructions. Kate, who soon proves vigilant in the care of her garden, also now cares for the poultry yard, in addition to feeding, cleaning and exercising her horse Milky. One morning, Kate alarms everyone by loudly announcing that her garden now has seedlings.

Marton announces that he plans to take everyone to the big county fair next week, but that he first must select twenty horses to sell from among his herds. Marton, Kate and Jancsi cross the river using a komp, a kind of rope-guided ferry. Marton tells Arpad, his lead horse-tender, that Kate and Jancsi will participate in the roundup. The venerable herdsman fears for the children's safety should the horses stampede, but reluctantly defers to Marton's authority.

While Kate and Jancsi are driving the herd, the horses are startled by a flock of partridges. The horses turn and begin to stampede. Seeing that Kate lies directly in their path, Jancsi tries to shout out a warning. The cousins are soon separated by the chaos. Remembering his father's orders, Jancsi works his way to the head of a column and begins to lead them toward the corrals. Surprisingly, Kate has done much the same, leading her half of the herd to the stables as well.

Later, when Marton asks whether or not the children behaved themselves, the horse-tenders sheepishly praise Kate and Jancsi. Over supper, Kate explains that she was simply fleeing the stampede. Everyone is pleased that Kate is in one piece. The horse-tenders then select twenty of Marton's finest horses.

At Jancsi's request, Arpad tells the story of the Milky Way, detailing the rise and fall of Atilla the Hun. The story suggests that the brilliant band of the Milky Way was created when Csaba, son of Atilla, marshaled a spirit army down from the heavens to rescue the Huns from invading Romans. Looking at the heavens, Kate wishes that Csaba would bring her father back to his home at Nagy ranch.

Chapter 7: The Round Up Analysis

In caring for her flower garden, as well as her horse, Kate demonstrates that she is now capable of managing priorities and setting long-term goals. It's worth noting that she herself asks to plant the garden. It's something she does of her own volition. Gone is the spoiled little girl who once sought attention through misbehavior. Kate has learned to seek gratification by investing in work. When flowers bloom by her own effort, Kate's sense of self-worth is reinforced.

The stampede represents a rite of passage. Once the herd begins to turn, Kate is in real danger. Her survival depends on her ability to remain calm and use the riding skills she has learned. This authentic demonstration, more than any praise that she might receive, shows that Kate has changed. This is Kate's first real-world application for what began as a child-like interest in horses.

Kate realizes, by recalling her education, that Atilla and Csaba are historical figures, and yet the story is clearly fantastic rather than factual. This touches on the role of mythology in culture. The Hungarian shepherds have a common identity which is based, in part, on their oral tradition. History itself is less important than their understanding of history. The stories hold a deeper truth that speaks to the values of the cultures who tell them.

Chapter 8: The Fair

Chapter 8: The Fair Summary

The big day has arrived. Remembering that her uncle wanted to get an early start, Kate wakes Jancsi and proposes that they surprise Marton by doing all the chores before he wakes. The sun not yet risen, the children work by lantern-light, finishing moments before the first sunrise that Kate has ever seen. She is spellbound by the sight.

Seeing that smoke now rises from the chimney, the two children go inside to announce that there is nothing left to do. Marton, who is greatly impressed, declares Kate and Jancsi to be his farmhands. He pays them each a silver piece. Marton and his wife discuss how much Kate has changed since her arrival. She's grown strong and conscientious.

Soon after their arrival at the fair, a short, fat man buys out Marton's entire selection of horses. With the deal done, the man calls Marton a fool, announcing that he'd have paid twice the price. Marton suggests that what he asked was the fair price and that the man would've been a fool to pay more. Kate is pleased that Marton sold the horses so quickly, since now he can enjoy the fair with everyone else. In celebration, Marton declares that he will buy a gift for everyone.

The fair is in full swing, farmers and ranchers forgetting their troubles. The children run form booth to booth, taking in the sights and making a mess of their outfits. During lunch, Jancsi decides to spend his silver-piece on his mother. He pays the gypsies to play his mother's song request. Marton dances with his wife. Jancsi dances with Kate. As the music gets faster, the crowd gets wilder, compelling Marton to withdraw his family from the dance floor.

Kate uses her silver-piece to buy pocket-knives for herself and Jancsi. Marton buys each child a set of spurs and his wife some scented soap. They watch a circus. Afterward, in the freak-show, Kate causes a scene by publicly debunking the girl-with-no-body. Marton is momentarily cross with her for this, but he can't argue with the girl. The girl-with-no-body had indeed been a trick and a lie. Kate's actions had been more intent on truth than mischief.

Chapter 8: The Fair Analysis

Kate now takes the initiative. She's been on the ranch long enough to know the routine and she understands that work must come before play. Since she doesn't want chores to delay her day at the fair, she takes the proactive approach by seeing that the work is done beforehand. This demonstrates that Kate is intrinsically motivated to work, willing to perform without being told do so, and able to work without supervision.

Marton's deal with the fat man underscores an important message of The Good Master: money isn't everything. If Marton wanted to maximize his profit, he might have set a higher initial asking price and then had the man haggle him down. If he had done this, however, he would've spent more time negotiating the deal, time that might otherwise be spent with his family. By having the deal done, Marton is able to return to that which he values above all else.

Jansci uses his silver-piece to buy his mother a song. Kate uses half of hers to buy Jansci a pocket knife. Marton buys a gift for everyone. This exemplifies the novel's philosophy of how money should be spent: to express love and appreciation. Money itself, the story seems to say, has little value beyond its ability to express love and provide comfort.

Chapter 9: Strange Waters

Chapter 9: Strange Waters Summary

Kate's flowers are budding and the corn is high, but the summer has seen little in the way of rain. Water is scarce. Marton worries that a long drought might mean his ruin. The children offer to donate their month's pay to help Marton with the ranch. The man is so moved by the gesture that he worries no more. He asks his wife to tell a funny story, something cheerful. She tells the story of "The Little Rooster and the Turkish Sultan."

Having befriended all the insects in his yard, a hungry rooster, looking for food, finds a diamond button. The button says that the rooster's old mistress would like to have it as a gift. On the way to his old mistress, button in beak, a group of three fat men, working for a greedy Turkish sultan, steals the button. The rooster repeatedly insists that the button be returned.

The sultan's three fat servants make several attempts to steal the button. They throw the rooster down a well, only to have the rooster swallow all the water and fly. They throw the rooster into a fire, but the rooster extinguishes the flame with well-water. They throw the rooster into a beehive, but the rooster swallows all the bees. The sultan finally tries to sit on the rooster, but finding himself suddenly swarmed by released bees, he allows the rooster access to his treasure room, where the button awaits. The rooster eats up all the treasure, then waddles home to surrender his bounty to his old mistress.

No sooner is the story concluded than a thunderstorm is upon them. They're all so happy to see the rain that they almost forget to come in out of it. The family celebrates with hot milk and honey. After three straight days of rainfall, Marton leaves to check the status of his fields. He leaves Kate and Jancsi to play on the ferry. The children soon grow bored of this, however, and decide to go swimming.

Despite Jancsi's warnings, Kate swims too far out and is caught up in the current. Unable to swim himself, Jancsi pilots his horse into the river. He soon overtakes Kate and is able, with some difficulty, to get her out of the water. Later, their clothes now dry, they weigh whether or not they should tell Marton what happened. Later, Kate blurts out the whole story to her uncle. Marton proves very understanding and praises Jancsi for his heroism. Kate is surprised that she doesn't get a spanking.

Chapter 9: Strange Waters Analysis

As the owner and operator of his own ranch, with many people on his payroll, Marton is undeniably a man of means. Nevertheless, no amount of wealth can coax water from the sky. This speaks to the limits of what money can buy. Fortunately, Marton is wealthy in another way too: He has the love of his family. They give him the strength to persist in the face of adversity, where otherwise he might not have.

The little rooster is a righteous hero, an underdog who turns a weakness - in this case, an empty stomach - into a strength. He succeeds by virtue of a seemingly inevitable justice, giving hope to the listener who feels helpless or wronged. There is a suggestion of magical realism in the storm's arrival so soon after the tale is told, implying that there may be an inherent power in storytelling.

Kate's mishap at the river is yet another example of learning by trial and error. She fails to heed Jancsi's warning and is swept up by the current. Ironically, it is Jancsi's inability to swim that saves her. Had he been swimming with her, he couldn't have braved the strong currents on his own, nor would he have time to swim back to fetch his horse. This suggests success and failure are partially left up to circumstance. Jancsi's idea to use his horse, however, shows that it's possible to make the best of a bad situation.

Chapter 10: Kate and the Gypsies

Chapter 10: Kate and the Gypsies Summary

Haying has begun. Grass is cut and piled into stacks. The children help load hay while the mother cans foodstuffs. Kate's garden is in full bloom. The workers sing praises for Marton as the "Good Master," who is willing to work among them whenever an extra hand is needed. Kate is surprised and pleased to see that, in harvesting the wheat, the workers spare sections occupied by partridge nests. The wheat is threshed, the golden grain collected into bags.

Jancsi tells Kate that traveling gypsies will soon visit, explaining that the nomadic folk are reputed to have supernatural powers. Incredulous, Kate asks Marton whether it's true that gypsies can cast hexes and charms. Marton says that he doesn't know, but advises her to stay clear of them since they tend to be thieves. Kate avows that nothing, not even gypsies, can force her do something she doesn't want to do. Jancsi reminds Kate that the river did exactly that.

Kate finds that working on the ranch has increased her appreciation of food. The Nagys work to prepare for the winter. Near the end of summer, gypsies make camp in the ranch. Seeing that the gypsies are already cooking up one of his chickens, Marton orders the visitors to stay out of the coop and suggests that he might find a sheep for their supper. Despite their thieving nature, Marton can't bring himself to dislike the gypsies.

Kate finds the gypsies fascinating. By day they work baking bricks and mending pots. At night they sing songs and play beautiful music on the violin. Marton negotiates payment for the gypsies' services, deciding on four sheep and a dozen chickens. When father and son return from rounding up the payment, however, they discover that the gypsies have made off with most of the chickens, the fattest pig, and Kate.

Kate escapes her captors by pretending to sleep. She flees to the main road where she eventually encounters Marton and Jancsi in pursuit of the gypsies. Later, safe at home, Kate explains that she pretended to want to go with the gypsies lest they gag her, tie her up, and hide her in the loft.

Chapter 10: Kate and the Gypsies Analysis

It's no coincidence that the gypsies appear during this time of the year. This is the time of the harvest, when farmers reap what they have sown. As a nomadic people, the gypsies have no farms of their own, and so they must they must live as performers, scavengers and thieves. In the logic of the story they correlate directly to animals such as rabbits, partridges or wolves, an unavoidable nuisance.

Kate's work has instilled in her a greater appreciation for the food she eats. Extrapolating from this, it follows that gypsies are less appreciative of their food, having had no hand in its production. This hearkens back to the city vs. country debate. City-folk think in terms of products and commerce, rather than livestock and labor. Ranchers have earned their sustenance in a way that gypsies and city-folk cannot claim.

As a wealthy man, Marton can stand to lose a pig and some chickens. The gypsies take advantage of Marton's hospitality and violate the terms of their contractual agreement. They take more than they are due. The only thing that truly upsets Marton, however, is the theft of Kate. This demonstrates that while Marton may indeed be a "rich man," he is not a villain from Hungarian oral tradition. His priorities are in order.

Chapter 11: Tall Tales

Chapter 11: Tall Tales Summary

The Nagys make final preparations for winter. The cousins have become local celebrities, with everyone having heard of their exploits. Kate enjoys the praise and admiration, but wishes her father were there. Jancsi surprises Kate with some good news: Her father will be visiting some time around Christmas. Marton avows that he will do everything he can to convince his brother to stay permanently.

The following week, the herders lead their flocks in. Each evening, in the kitchen, Kate gives a reading lesson. The temperatures drop, until one day the Nagys wake to chilly winds and frost-covered windows. Having the necessary wind power to grind their grain, Marton and the children take a teeth-chattering ride to the windmill.

At the windmill, Kate meets the old miller and his helper Daniel. Daniel remarks on the miller's propensity for telling humorously implausible tall tales. Kate watches as the vanes turn the mill to grind the grain. Marton and the children then go downstairs to watch the flour sift down from the grinder. Everyone is covered in flour. Marton relieves the miller of his flour collection duties and suggests that he take the children outside for a story.

The old miller tells the story of lazy Prince Matyas, his favorite servant Matyi, and their quest for the land of eternal life. In their quest, they come upon the Land of Work, the Land of Friendship, the Land of War and Hatred, and finally the Garden of Remembrance. The king of the Garden explains to Matyas that the truth to immortality lies in the lessons he has learned from the other lands. The garden king returns the prince to his kingdom, urging him to rule with the wisdom he has gained.

Chapter 11: Tall Tales Analysis

Kate has begun to think of the ranch as her home. While she does wish to be reunited with her father, she doesn't wish to return to her home in the city. Rather, she wants her father to join her at the ranch. There is a sense among Marton, Jancsi and even Kate that the Nagy ranch is the true home of Kate's father. It's just a matter of getting him to realize it. This also suggests that Kate belongs there as well and that her improvement is largely due to her now being where she "belongs."

Kate's reaction to the old miller shows that she's intellectually grown since her encounter with the girl-with-no-body. Kate had been unable to accept the impossible premise of a head surviving without its body. She had known it was untrue and she had been unwilling to stand the falsity. Now she meets the old miller who fibs continuously, and yet she seems willing to accept the situation. This suggests that she now understands the concept of an artful lie, and possibly that there may be truth to be found in fiction.

Chapter 12: Mikulas, Bearer of Gifts

Chapter 12: Mikulas, Bearer of Gifts Summary

With winter comes snow. December sixth is Mikulas Day, the day when Mikulas, the Hungarian Santa Claus, brings toys for the children. Hearing the childrens' excitement, Marton announces that they will be picking Mikulas up and bringing him to the house for a visit. The children are suspicious, but Marton insists that Mikulas is real and that he had last seen him some twenty years before.

Marton and his wife chuckle between themselves, nearly giving away the surprise that "Mikulas" will actually be Kate's father, Marton's brother Sandor, in costume. Marton and the kids ride the sleigh to the train station, pushing their way through heavy snowfall. As promised, Mikulas exits the train, complete with a bag of gifts. Marton, who greets Mikulas in a familiar fashion, asks Jancsi to drive the sleigh while he sits in the back with Mikulas. Kate tries to look at the visitor's face, but it's too dark to get a good look.

Mikulas explains that he has a few deliveries to make before going on to the Nagy ranch. As they make their way from one house to the next, the children, alight with the warmth of generosity, help to place gifts on doorsteps. At the very last house, Mikulas reveals that the only gifts he has left are those that he has planned to give to Kate and Jancsi. Without hesitation, Kate insists that her gift be left for the children in the house. Jancsi makes a similar offer. "Mikulas" is barely able to contain his emotion.

Later, when Kate sees the way Marton and his wife greet Mikulas, she is overjoyed to realize that it is her father. The costume is quickly removed, revealing a man who looks much like Marton. Sandor introduces himself to Jancsi, offering the dignified handshake befitting a young man. Jancsi decides that he likes his uncle. Marton suggests that the weather will likely keep Sandor until Christmas.

Chapter 12: Mikulas, Bearer of Gifts Analysis

Mikulas is like the girl-with-no-body in that he is a lie intended to entertain. In this case, however, the lie comes not from a disreputable gypsy, but from Kate's own uncle Marton. Nevertheless, she continues to be skeptical. Throughout the sleigh-ride home Kate is constantly trying to solve the puzzle of Mikulas's identity. Later, when Kate uncovers the truth it is all the more satisfying that she has done it herself.

This marks the completion of Kate's arc. She realizes that the children in the home are poor, and that they therefore lack many of things that she takes for granted. Her decision to surrender her gifts is an act of selfless generosity. This is not the same selfish, spoiled little girl who came to stay with Marton. She has learned empathy. Disguised as Mikulas, Kate's father is able to see her in her new "natural" state.

Chapter 13: Christmas

Chapter 13: Christmas Summary

With Sandor and the shepherds visiting, Marton hasn't much to do. He decides to make some new furniture, dismissing Sandor's suggestion that he simply buy "cheap" factory-made furniture from the store. Seeing Marton hard at work, Sandor gets drawn in as well, offering to help. Kate explains to her father that Jancsi's mother is teaching her to spin. Listening to his daughter go on, he marvels aloud at the change she has undergone. A once spoiled city-child has developed a working ethic.

Marton makes the case for Sandor moving in permanently, suggesting that, as a school teacher, he can continue Kate's education himself. He might even become the new teacher in the village. Pista argues that, on the ranch, Sandor will be paid in love and respect. Kate tells her father of Pista's philosophy of living with nature. Sandor is amazed to learn that Kate has been teaching the shepherds. Marton says that Sandor will have the winter to make up his mind about whether or not he wants to stay.

With Christmas coming, and no suitable trees available, Pista offers to craft one. Everyone pitches in to create or improvise decorations. On Christmas, they have a sumptuous feast while Sandor spellbinds the shepherds with descriptions of city-life. Afterward, Kate says she'd like to make a decorative table cloth, but Marton explains that they haven't enough looms. Sandor suggests that he could make Kate a loom, much like the one that he and Marton made for their mother. Marton, surprised, points out that the loom took years to complete. Hearing this, Sandor realizes that he has chosen to stay.

Chapter 13: Christmas Analysis

Marton tempts Sandor into getting his hands dirty, betting that his brother's latent work ethic won't allow him to simply watch while another man works. Sandor easily succumbs, suggesting that this life, not the comfortable city-life he's been leading, is his more natural state. This last section is imbued with a sense of restoration, of healing. In essence, Sandor belongs on Nagy ranch. The implication is that the ranch will do for Sandor the same thing that it did for Kate.

This section depicts family as both generative and self-sufficient. Pista creates the tree. Everyone helps to create the decorations. Together they eat the food that they produced, while sitting in chairs crafted by their own hands. Even the tablecloth is homemade, itself created on a homemade frame. Sandor has returned with twenty years of knowledge brought back from the city, ready to provide one of the few things that the family has lacked: modernity.

Characters

Kate Nagy

Kate is a little girl from Budapest, the daughter of school-teacher Sandor Nagy. Kate lost her mother at a young age, prompting her father to overcompensate by catering to her every whim. This has produced a spoiled, incorrigible child who habitually hides her ill-intent behind a mask of innocence. Finally at his wits end, Sandor sends Kate to Marton, his brother, hoping that Marton's skill at handling animals would prove applicable to taming his wild daughter. This is where the novel begins.

At the Nagy ranch, Kate is forced to face the consequences of her misbehavior. When she climbs into the rafters, for example, she finds that she's unable to get back down, because the oven she climbed up on is too hot to touch. While Marton might have extracted her from the rafters, sparing her the consequences of her actions, he instead leaves her there for several hours, providing an authentic experience.

Once she's in a structured environment, Kate finds that she can set goals for herself and be recognized for her achievements. The world begins to make sense to Kate. Given a means of self-actualization, Kate soon develops an awareness of her place in the world as well as an awareness of those around her. She develops empathy, at long last, realizing that she is not the center of the universe.

Jancsi Nagy

Jancsi Nagy is a 10-year-old country boy, son of the rancher Marton Nagy. As an only child, living on a ranch without any other children, Jancsi is often lonely. Unsurprisingly, lacking playmates as he does, Jancsi has a rich internal life. He is prone to daydreaming, flights of fancy and romantic assumptions. Once Kate is in his life, however, Jancsi's dreams of adventure prove much less necessary. One dream in particular, that of heroically saving Kate's life, even comes true.

While far from a timid child, Jancsi proves more reserved than his rambunctious cousin Kate. He's more likely to consider consequences, both authentic and parental. He tells Kate not to interfere with the girl-with-no-body exhibit. When Kate swims into the river, Jancsi warns her against the strength of the current. While Jancsi may serve as Kate's proverbial partner-in-crime, he is also a stabilizing influence, inviting her to occasionally stop and think about what it is that she's about to do.

Before and after Kate's arrival, Jancsi's education is a by-product of ranching. From the herdsmen he learns to ride and rope. From the stories of the shepherds he learns about his cultural past. This kind of education stresses hands-on, real-world engagement over formal classroom instruction. It also puts emphasis on the child's relationship with adults, whereas traditional school is, intentionally or not, dominated by relationships

between peers. The end result is a less theoretical, although perhaps more rigid, education.

Marton Nagy

Marton Nagy is Jancsi's father and Kate's uncle. He owns and manages the Nagy ranch. He is a conscientious man who, though he does occasionally lose his temper, proves unfailingly patient and compassionate. His manner of dealing with Kate involves a form of authentic instruction presented in a structured environment. He presents Kate with a means of achieving, but makes no attempt to insulate her against the negative consequences of her behavior.

Pista

Pista is one of Marton's shepherds. He tells Kate and Jancsi the story "The Mirage."

The Rich Man

The rich man is the antagonist of Pista's story "The Mirage." He is a greedy landowner who hordes wealth and steals from others.

The Poor Man

The poor man is a character in "The Mirage." He cares for the animals mistreated by the rich man.

The Fairy

The fairy is the protagonist of "The Mirage." Disguised as a wealthy old woman, the fairy tricks the rich man into pursuing a mirage.

Arpad

Arpad is an aging horse-tender. He tells the children the story "The Milky Way."

Atilla

Atilla is the infamous Atilla the Hun. He appears in Arpad's tale of "The Milky Way."

The Short, Fat Man

The short, fat man is the fellow who buys Marton's horses at the fair.

The Turkish Sultan

The Turkish sultan is the antagonist of "The Little Rooster and the Turkish Sultan." He steals the the little rooster's diamond button.

The Little Rooster

The little rooster is the protagonist of "The Little Rooster and the Turkish Sultan." He wishes to reclaim his diamond button from the greedy sultan.

The Three Fat Servants

The three fat servants do the bidding of the Turkish sultan in "The Little Rooster and the Turkish Sultan." They repeatedly attempt to kill the little rooster.

The Old Miller

The old miller runs the windmill. He has a reputation for telling tall tales. He tells Kate and Jancsi the story "The Land Where People Never Die."

Daniel

Daniel is the young man who helps the old miller.

Matyas

Matyas is the young, headstrong prince of "The Land Where People Never Die." He visits a succession of lands, each of which teaches him an important lesson.

Matyi

Matyi is prince Matyas' loyal servant in "The Land Where People Never Die." He serves as Matyas' voice of reason.

Mikulas

Mikulas is the Hungarian version of Santa Claus. He supposedly brings gifts for the children on December 6.

Sandor

Sandor is Marton's brother and Kate's father. He is a teacher from Budapest.

Objects/Places

Old Armchair

Old Armchair is Kate's first horse, so called because it is tired and slow.

Milky

Milky is Kate's second horse, a reward for improved behavior, so named due to its white coloration.

Wooden Stick

The wooden stick is used by Jancsi's father to track his son's sins. One notch is cut for each misdeed and is later crossed out after Jancsi performs penance.

Nagy Ranch

Nagy Ranch is where the Nagy family lives, farms and raises livestock.

The Wagon

The wagon is briefly hijacked by Kate. Once she loses control of it, the horses simply return to the stable.

The Rafters

The rafters are used by the Nagys to dry their sausages. After misbehaving, Kate becomes stuck in them for a time.

Marton's Easter Egg

Marton's Easter egg, created by Kate, reads, "I like you best of all uncle Marton."

Sausages

Sausages are Kate's favorite food.

Toepincher

Toepincher is the name of one of Marton Nagy's pastures, so named because it is filled with crawfish.

Gourds

Gourds are used by the shepherds to store water. They are cleared of seeds and fiber and allowed to dry in the sun.

Komp

A komp is a raft pulled across a river via a rope-and-pulley system.

The Diamond Button

The diamond button is the prize found, lost, and eventually recovered, by the little rooster of "The Little Rooster and the Turkish Sultan."

Kate's Necklace

Kate's necklace is hand-crafted by the shepherd Pista.

Pocket Knives

At the fair, Kate purchases matching pocket knives for Jancsi and herself.

Themes

Stewardship

While religion and faith are only occasionally mentioned in The Good Master, the novel's underlying theme is one closely tied to Christian theology. Just as Adam and Eve were supposedly given stewardship over the Garden of Eden, and man was given dominion over the Earth, Marton is responsible for the well-being of ranch and everything, man or beast, that resides within it. He not only provides for his own family, workers and livestock, but Marton also shows consideration for the people and animals who provide him no benefit, or worse, who cause him difficulty.

Fundamental to this idea of stewardship is the practice of magnanimity, a generosity of spirit that expects nothing in return beyond the knowledge that one has done right by his or her fellow man. This is demonstrated by several characters in the novel, primarily among the Nagy family, but including the shepherd Pista. The cultivation of this quality is the benchmark of Kate's development. As she matures, she becomes increasingly magnanimous. First she makes an Easter egg for Marton and Jancsi. Next she spends half her silver-piece to buy Jancsi a knife. Finally she surrenders her Mikulas present to some of the poorest children in the village.

The novel's many oral tales, as told by the characters of the main storyline, offer a few examples of leaders who are poor stewards. The "rich man" character from "The Mirage," for example, presents the antithesis of stewardship. Not only does the man fail to provide for the people and animals of his village, he's actually antagonistic toward them, denying even small birds the crumbs fallen from his table. The dire fate of the rich man suggests that those who put themselves before their fellow man will eventually be their own undoing.

Work Ethic

By living on the Nagy ranch, Kate is given the opportunity to see a direct correlation between work and achievement. Seeing what others have accomplished, and how they did so, Kate can plan her own achievements. If Jancsi can learn to become a skilled rider, then so can Kate. If mother can grow a beautiful garden, Kate could learn to do this as well. This is a different kind of education than the one to which Kate is accustomed. Rather than learning skills which are then assessed by an exam, Kate is learning skills which may be directly applied.

The gypsies see work as something to be avoided. They resent the work that Marton asks of them, apparently believing they are owed the fruits of Marton's labor without having to contribute themselves. The gypsies tell Kate that, once she joins them, she will not have to work, but only dance a play. Since work is a requirement for achievement, Kate can achieve nothing among the gypsies. The implication here is that

the gypsies must resort to thievery because they are unwilling to work for their own betterment. They must live off the hard work of others.

Marton Nagy is unwilling to buy "cheap" factory-built furniture from the store, instead preferring to build his own furniture from scratch. The implication here is that, when someone builds something with their own hands, they can take responsibility for the craftsmanship. In an assembly-line, the responsibility for the product is diluted among everyone working the line. Since no single worker has full control, or even a stake in the final product, there is no one to take pride in a job well done.

Magic and Myth

Magic and myth play an interesting role in The Good Master. Both feature prominently in the oral tradition of the Hungarian plain, where spirits and fairies illustrate values by rewarding the worthy and punishing the wicked. The modern myth of Mikulas, meanwhile, reflects the same generosity of spirit valued in the older tales. While it may seem that modernity threatens the veracity of myth, thus upending the values that they illustrate, The Good Master seems to suggest that stories have a truth unto themselves. Sometimes a greater truth can be found in an elaborate lie.

At the freak-show, Kate is unwilling to accept the plausibility of the girl-without-a-body exhibit. She's certain the trick is done with mirrors. Concerned only for the truth, Kate reveals the girl for the fraud that she is, incensing the duped country-folk. Marton is angry as well, but confesses that it is because he too was fooled. The implication is that people inherently want to believe in the fantastic. It thrills and entertains. When the fantastic proves false, however, anger is the result.

The gypsies are said to have magical abilities that allow them to compel people to act against their will. While this seems unlikely, the gypsies nevertheless manage to place Kate in a predicament that compels her to leave with them. Once among the gypsies, pretending to sleep, she nearly loses consciousness when one of the women tries to drug her with a kind of incense. Since the gypsies are prepared for her to try to escape, this suggests their intention had been to capture her. The gypsies may not be magical, but they are indeed crafty.

Style

Point of View

The novel is written with a third-person semi-omniscient voice. While most of the action follows the protagonist, Kate Nagy, there are a few minor scenes in which she does not appear or in which she does not play a major role. There are also several short folk-stories, each one narrated by a character from the main storyline. These stories typically adopt a third-person omniscient voice and are characterized by the style and repetition of a story told and retold in oral tradition.

The Good Master often reads like a fable, with the narrative reinforcing a set of values and norms. This is literally true of the many oral-style stories that appear throughout, which themselves support the overarching message of the novel. The work prizes work ethic, generosity and stewardship. These characteristics are exemplified by Marton, his family and those in his employ. These principles are opposed by greed, laziness and selfishness, qualities which are primarily depicted among the oral stories, usually in the form of a fat, wealthy leader who abuses his power.

The novel edges toward a dichotomy between fact and fiction, truth and fantasy. Kate, as the daughter of a school-teacher, views everything through a lens of cynicism. She's unwilling to believe that a head can exist without a body, or that gypsies can use magic to force her to do something against her will. Nevertheless, there are some falsehoods that people accept, perhaps for entertainment purposes, as true. No one really wants to know that the freak-show exhibits are fake, nor do they want Mikulas, the Hungarian Santa Claus, debunked. Kate's questions tend to push the bounds of inquiry.

Setting

The events of The Good Master are set on the Hungarian plane, primarily on the ranch of Marton Nagy, but also at an unnamed nearby village. Most of the story takes place in outdoor locations, such as farms, pastures and rivers, with the principle characters being Kate and Jancsi. If an event features the entire family together, it usually takes place in the Nagy home. The oral-style stories, told by an assortment of characters, are set in a variety of locations, some mythical and some historical. Budapest is obliquely referred to throughout the novel, but it never serves as a setting.

The Nagy ranch appears to be quite large, comprised of several pastures with colorful names like "Hungry Herd," "Frisky Waters," and "Toepincher." Marton controls many herds of livestock, including horses, goats and cows. Marton and his family live in a house with at least one guestroom and, while it isn't clear how they manage it, they somehow also accommodate the many shepherds, as well their remaining livestock, during the winter months.

The Good Master is likely set in the early twentieth century. Marton and his family get around using cart and horse, but their neighboring village has a passenger-train station. Kate, who is appalled by the idea of riding in an open-top cart, suggests that Marton should "phone" for a "taxicab." Marton tells Jancsi that a "taxicab" is a kind of "horseless carriage." This suggests that automobiles are new enough that they haven't made it to the rural areas, but established enough that their use is commonplace in the city.

Language and Meaning

For the most part, Seredy uses a simple language structure, tonally influenced by her child protagonists. The perspective, concerns and expressions are those that a child would have. While her prose may be mechanically simple, however, it occasionally reads like a work in translation, using an odd turn of phrase here and there. Despite this, Seredy's mechanics are simple enough that the novel would easily be understood by an intermediate speaker of English. This is particularly true of young readers, who are likely to empathize with the experiences of the protagonists.

For the Nagys, the meaning of life lies in stewardship. This idea is based upon a number of fundamental concepts including, but not limited to, love, respect, compassion and work ethic. Marton works for the good of his family, but he also has a sense of duty toward both the workers and the animals living on his ranch, a sense of duty which is not limited to their value as resources. Marton tolerates the rabbits, even though they eat his crops. He also tolerates the gypsies, even though they steal from him. Marton takes satisfaction in having known enough success that he might share it with others.

The novel is decorated with an assortment of ink drawings, created by the author herself. They serve as a kind of "opening shot" at the beginning of chapters, providing visual context for the scene. The author also uses them to communicate the dramatic tension of an event, showing the posture and expressions of the characters, information that would prove difficult to express in words. Perhaps most importantly, the artwork provides a sense of the work's regional identity, establishing the characters and the world in which they live as something aesthetically Hungarian.

Structure

The novel is broken up into thirteen chapters, each one named for its defining event. The early chapters detail Kate's arrival, her subsequent misbehavior, and Marton's efforts to tame the child. The middle chapters detail how Kate comes to trust and invest in the Nagys, as well as her development of a work ethic. In the later chapters, Kate demonstrates all that she's learned while living on the ranch, culminating with the reunion between father and daughter.

The plot is almost entirely linear, with the passage of time marked by the change of season, with Summer's approach, for example, being marked by the ripening of crops. There is, however, one instance of non-linear time. When Kate is recovered from the gypsies, the story flashes back to show her perspective, detailing how she escaped.

While time may be linear, it isn't constant. In some cases the story will detail sequential days, in other instances several weeks will be compressed into a single sentence.

Throughout the novel, particularly in the second half of the book, the main storyline will be interrupted by another story told by one of the characters. In one instance, "The Mirage," this results in an entire chapter dedication. In every other example, however, the plot merely pauses for the new story, and then resumes afterward. These nested stories have the structure of oral tradition, with simple characters, strong moral themes and much use of repetition.

Quotes

"He had it all figured out—he would give a donkey even for a sister. Not horses, just a donkey." —Chapter 1, page 16

"She might be just a plain little girl, but she certainly wasn't a sissy." —Chapter 2, page 30

"I split my skirt because you said you'd teach me to ride." —Chapter 3, page 44

"Father took the egg offered to him. It wasn't a very good Easter egg, being a tiny bit smeary, but to father it was the most beautiful gift in the world." —Chapter 4, page 60

"I don't sell these things for money, little lady. I give them to my friends." —Chapter 5, page 74

"He had thousands of sheep of his own, but he couldn't resist his greed." —Chapter 6, page 77

"The seeds are the eggs of the flowers, aren't they?" —Chapter 7, page 84

"You would have been a fool if you had paid more. It was the fair price—that's all I wanted." —Chapter 8, page 107

"They can have my share." —Chapter 9, page 120

"Jancsi and Kate were very proud of each other. Everyone in town had heard about their adventures." —Chapter 11, page 155

"I would rather leave my gifts here, wouldn't you Jancsi?" —Chapter 12, page 180

"Glued and nailed factory rubbish. I want furniture we can use, not rickety stuff like that." —Chapter 13, page 187

Topics for Discussion

Who is the Good Master? What exactly is he a master of, and what makes him good?

What convinces Kate to stop being such a brat?

In what way is Jancsi similar to his father?

If the gypsies hate working, why do they agree to work for Marton?

Why doesn't Marton attempt to recover the livestock stolen by the gypsies?

Based on the events of this story, what kind of person will Kate likely grow up to be?

What if Kate's father had never sent to her to the Nagy ranch? What sort of person would she have grown up to be then?