

# **The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, The Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog Study Guide**

**The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, The Three Magical Children  
and Their Holy Dog by Adam Gidwitz**

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# Plot Summary

The following version of the book was used to create this guide: Gidwitz, Adam. *The Inquisitor's Tale Or, the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog*. Dutton Children's Books Penguin Young Readers Group, An imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2016.

*The Inquisitor's Tale Or, the Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog*, by critically acclaimed novelist Adam Gidwitz, is a story set in medieval time that is relevant to today's world. Gidwitz tackles difficult themes about religion and persecution while creating an engaging tale full of action and humor.

The novel begins with the narrator sitting in the Holy Cross-Roads Inn hoping to collect stories about three children who are said to perform miracles and their dog, who is considered holy by the villagers where she lives. Several people come forward throughout the novel to add their stories to the overall plot of the novel.

The action begins with a description of Jeanne's childhood. Jeanne is a peasant girl whose parents have very little at the time of her birth except for a beautiful white greyhound named Gwenforte. One day while they are working in the fields Gwenforte kills a snake. Jeanne's parents misinterpret the blood on the dog's coat and kill her because they believe she harmed Jeanne. They discover that the dog saved Jeanne and from then on the village consider Gwenforte holy.

When Jeanne is older she begins to have visions. She does not tell anyone about them because she fears she will be burned as a witch. In a vision she sees men coming to burn the grove Gwenforte is buried in and she sees Gwenforte standing on her grave. She goes to the grove and finds the dog alive and knights coming to take her away. Jeanne is eventually captured by the knights and taken away from her village.

Meanwhile, another person tells about Jacob, who is a Jewish boy. Jacob is a smart boy with a gift for healing. When his village is burned, he finds the butcher with a serious head injury that he heals in moments with yarrow root and a prayer. Jacob is separated from his parents during the fire and leaves to travel to his cousin Yehuda's house in Saint-Denis where he hopes to find his parents.

William's story begins with William being dropped off at a monastery when he is just a baby. He is the son of a wealthy Lord and a woman from Africa. He has dark skin and is unusually large. William is intelligent and enjoys a good argument. When he argues with a monk and breaks a stone bench with his bare hands, he is expelled from the monastery and sent to take some books to the abbot in Saint-Denis.

The children meet when Jeanne is brought to the inn by the knights, William stops there for the night, and Jacob wanders there in search of food. William helps Jeanne and Jacob to escape the knights and they decide to all go to Saint-Denis together.



When the children reach a village, Jeanne and Jacob go into the market to ask directions to Saint-Denis. Jeanne spots Michelangelo di Bologna, a monk with a reputation for taking heretics away to be burned. They try to run, but the two are captured by knights.

While Jeanne and Jacob are travelling with the knights, Jeanne has a vision and sees a dragon. When they arrive at the home of Lord Berthulf, Jeanne tells the lord that Jacob can defeat the dragon.

The knights go with Jeanne and Jacob to battle the dragon, who is said to burn people with its deadly flatulence. Jacob says he needs to see the dragon to figure out how to beat it, so they lure the dragon to them. One of the knights is badly burned and Jacob heals him with plants and a prayer. The knight's brother, Marmeluc, is grateful and becomes friends with the children. Jacob heals the dragon by curing its stomachache.

That night Jeanne and Jacob attend a feast in the lord's hall. William bursts in to save them and Jeanne explains that the people there are friends and William should not harm them.

The next day all three children travel to Saint-Denis. They learn that Michelangelo is the prior there. They spot Michelangelo and run to Abbot Hubert's office. Once there, they learn that Abbot Hubert is not the good man they thought he was, but is the one who ordered Gwenforte's death. Just as the abbot is about to kill Gwenforte, Michelangelo bursts in and tells the children to follow him.

Michelangelo takes them to Rabbi Yehuda's house, who is Jacob's cousin. Jacob's parents are not there.

Michelangelo tells the children he has been chasing them not to harm them but to help them. He asks them to help him save some Jewish books from being burned. He tells the children he believes they are saints. The children agree to help save the books.

The children go with Michelangelo and they meet King Louis who invites them to stay at his palace. King Louis and his mother, Blanche, have ordered the book burning.

Michelangelo devises a plan for Jacob and Jeanne to grab books from the pyre while he creates a distraction and William defends them. At the book burning, Michelangelo climbs on the pyre and is burned with the books. Jacob grabs some books, but they are knocked out of his hands as he runs.

The children are saddened by Michelangelo's death. William remembers that there were strange looking books in the packs he was supposed to deliver to the abbot, but were left at the inn when they ran from the knights. The children go back to the Holy Cross-Roads Inn where they discover there are Jewish books in the bag. They also meet the narrator who has been collecting the stories.

The narrator offers to travel with the children to take the books to Mont-Saint-Michel as Michelangelo had instructed them to do before the book burning. On the way, he



reveals that he is an inquisitor and that he had planned to capture the children and turn them in for heresy or kill them so he could claim he discovered them as saints. However, he now believes they are saints and cannot kill them.

Just before they reach Mont-Saint-Michel, the king and his knights arrive. The children and the narrator are lead through dangerous quicksand by an old hunchback they meet at an inn. The knights sink in the sand and die. When Blanche tries to race after them, she sinks, too, but the children save her. The king lets the children leave and take the books with them.

The children continue to Mont-Saint-Michel where they discover that Michelangelo is not dead and that he is the Archangel Michael. He tells them they can either go their separate ways or continue to travel together doing God's work.



# Prologue and Chapters 1-4

## Summary

The Inquisitor's Tale: Or, The Three Magical Children and Their Holy Dog, by Adam Gidwitz, follows the story of William, Jacob, and Jeanne and her dog Gwenforte as they run from those who would harm them because of their differences, whether they be economical standing, religion, or race.

The Prologue begins with the narrator telling the back story of the novel. The narrator states that King Louis of France is preparing to go to war against three children and their dog. The narrator is at the Holy Cross-Roads Inn to gather information about the children. Marie, a brewster, offers the first tale.

In Chapter 1, The Brewster's Tale, Marie tells about Jeanne. Marie says Jeanne and her family were peasants who had a beautiful white greyhound named Gwenforte with a distinctive copper marking on its nose.

One day they leave Gwenforte to look after baby Jeanne while they work in the fields. While they are in the fields a poisonous snake comes into the house and Gwenforte kills it to protect Jeanne. When Jeanne's parents come home they see the dog covered in blood, but do not see Jeanne. They fear the dog has harmed the baby, so they take the dog outside and kill her.

The narrator interrupts the story saying that the dog is not dead and Marie says it was dead, but now it is not.

The parents go back into the house and discover Jeanne and the dead snake. Realizing they made a mistake, they bury Gwenforte in a grove and people begin to uphold her as a saint.

Jeanne grows into a kind girl who enjoys visiting people. Her favorite person is Old Theresa, who people suspect is a witch, but a kind one.

One day Jeanne has a fit, which Marie witnesses along with Old Theresa. When Jeanne comes to she says she saw rain and, at that moment, it begins to rain. Old Theresa tells Marie agree not to tell anyone what happened.

One day after a fit Jeanne tells Old Theresa that a giant is coming to take Old Theresa away. The next day a huge monk named Michelangelo di Bologna arrives and takes Old Theresa away. When Jeanne asks Charles the Bailiff what is happening, he tells her that Old Theresa is going to be burned for witchcraft.

Jeanne runs home and tells her mother she is afraid she will also be burned, but she does not tell her mother why. After that she changes and becomes more serious. Then, men come to take Jeanne away.



Marie states that is the end of her story and then a nun tells the narrator that she can tell about Gwenforte and the men who took Jeanne.

In Chapter 2, The Nun's Tale, Jeanne has another fit and sees the grove where Gwenforte is buried. She sees men coming to burn the grove and Gwenforte standing on her grave. When she wakes, Jeanne goes to the grove and finds Gwenforte and then sees men with torches and axes coming. The men see Gwenforte and Jeanne. Sir Fabian tells the men to kill the dog, but Jeanne and the dog run in different directions.

Later, Jeanne and Gwenforte hide near her parents' yard. When her father comes out, Jeanne tells Gwenforte to stay and she goes to her father. Her mother comes out and then a boy comes and says that some men are looking for Jeanne along with Charles the Bailiff. Jeanne's mother instructs her to hide in the woods.

Jeanne's parents stage a scene to distract the knights. They tell them that Jeanne is a wicked girl who likes to hide in the manure pile. One of the knights comments that peasants like filth and Jeanne's mother plays along saying they do. The knights dig into the pile with their hands while Jeanne and Gwenforte look on from the forest.

Sir Fabian sneaks up on her from behind and grabs her. He tells her parents that they are there on the orders of Saint-Denis to stop the pagan worship of a dog. They say they are taking Jeanne because she protected the dog. Jeanne's parents are shocked and ask what she has been doing, so she tells about her vision. Her parents are afraid of her and watch as she is taken away.

The nun ends her tale and a monk named Brother Jerome says he can tell about William who grew up in the monastery where he is the librarian.

Chapter 3, The Librarian's Tale, starts with the librarian saying that William was brought to them as a baby. His father is a lord and his mother may have come from Africa because William's skin is dark. He is also extremely tall. William is intelligent, happy, and talkative, but the librarian likes him better than any of the other oblates.

The librarian explains that William was expelled after a confrontation with Brother Bartholomew. Brother Bartholomew tells his class that peasants are lazy and they lie. He also says that Jews are evil and women are in league with the Devil. William disagrees with all of this, but says nothing. He also says that Saracens, which is a term used in talking about anyone who looks foreign, are the Devil's foot soldiers. William is offended and stands up for Muslims, Jews, peasants, and women. He gets angry and breaks a stone bench with his hands.

Chapter 4, The Second Part of the Librarian's Tale, picks up with the abbot telling William he does not fit at the monastery so he is being sent to Saint-Denis to see Abbot Hubert who will decide what to do with him.

The abbot instructs William to do penance by going through the forest of Malesherbes where the Foul Fiends live. Williams says he is not afraid and if he is given a weapon, he will kill them all. The abbot tells him he cannot use a weapon because he has taken



the monks' vows. William asks if he could fight if they tried to take his underwear since that would mean he would have to appear naked in front of them, which is a sin. The abbot concedes and says he could fight then, but only with "flesh and bone" (53).

Marie stops the story and asks Jerome if William ended up in the forest and if he saw the fiends. Jerome says he does not know. The group in the inn can tell the nun knows more. She says she might, but that her cup is empty. The innkeeper offers her more ale to tell her story.

## Analysis

The author begins the book with a Prologue that sets up the framework of the story with the storyteller at the Holy Cross-Roads Inn to learn more about the children who are the target of the king's current war. The structure of the story is like that of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in which travelers share stories with an overall framework of the stories being told as a storytelling contest for the prize of a free meal. The framework in *The Inquisitor's Tale* is not shared in its entirety as the story begins. The reader is told only that the narrator is collecting stories, but not why. In Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, the stories told are not related to one overall plot as they are in *The Inquisitor's Tale*, so, with the exception of both being set during medieval times in England, that is perhaps where the similarities between the two end.

The setting in medieval times is important since it lends an air of realism to an otherwise fantastic tale. The time period in which the novel is set is during the Inquisition, so Jeanne's fear of being burned at the stake as a witch is believable since Inquisitors were traveling the country seeking to root out anything they believed to be heretical. The setting also allows the author to talk about the way that people were treated at the time due to their differences, such as Jeanne's socioeconomic class, William's race, and Jacob's religion. While the author uses the medieval setting to discuss the persecution of people for their differences, this particular theme is also relevant to today's world.

In this section, the storytellers are Marie the brewster, the Nun, and Jerome the librarian. Marie is a woman from Jeanne's village who knew her as a child. She is a peasant who seems to enjoy a good story and likes having the attention focused on her, as is evidenced by the way she initially claims to have "practically raised" Jeanne (6). Brother Jerome is the librarian at the monastery where William was raised. He is partial to William and enjoys his intelligence and inquisitive nature.

The Nun poses the biggest mystery of all of the storytellers who will contribute to the plot. She is described as a small, elderly woman with bright blue eyes that sparkle. She comes across as mischievous since she often sits with a knowing smile on her face. She also knows much more than she should. Marie challenges a portion of the nun's story because the nun talks about what Jeanne is thinking and feeling. Marie says she cannot possibly know those things, but the nun says she could be making it up or she could "have [her] ways" (20). Nothing is provided about her background and the narrator states she has an odd accent that he cannot place. Despite her small stature and





appearance, the narrator indicates feeling a little frightened of her, which further adds to her mysterious nature.

The author uses the storytellers and the narrator to comment on the overall plot as it progresses. Their comments are often thoughts that the reader may be having. For example, Marie tells about Jeanne being left with Gwenforte as her babysitter, which seems ridiculous. The narrator pipes up and asks if it is common for peasants to use dogs as babysitters, which may be what the reader is thinking as well. Later, when Marie tells the story of Gwenforte's death after saving Jeanne from a snake, the narrator questions the dog being dead since those gathered, and the reader, already know she is alive. As the stories of each individual storyteller come to an end, the narrator or others often speak up in indignation that the story is at a suspenseful plot point, or cliffhanger, and the storyteller does not have more to tell. This occurs first when Jeanne is about to be taken away and Marie ends her story.

This section of the novel is told in a non-linear fashion since the author is introducing the main characters and their stories begin simultaneously. Therefore, Gidwitz jumps back and forth in time as he first tells Jeanne's story of discovering her abilities and leaving her village and then goes back in time again to tell how William came to leave his home.

The author describes Jeanne's childhood as a happy one, at least until she begins having visions. Jeanne is a friendly child who enjoys talking to the people in her village. However, when she begins to have visions, Old Theresa warns her not to tell anyone about them. Though she does not tell Jeanne why she should not tell, it later becomes clear when Theresa is taken away to presumably be burned for witchcraft. As a result of her visions, Jeanne becomes quieter and more serious. Then, when Theresa is taken away, she becomes fearful as well. When Jeanne's abilities are revealed to her parents, she sees fear in their eyes and interprets it as them being afraid of her.

William is introduced as an unusually large boy with dark skin, which is what sets him apart from others. Brother Jerome describes him as a happy, talkative boy with an inquisitive nature. He is intelligent and his intelligence makes him one of Jerome's favorite students. Though William is friendly, he enjoys a good debate and even a physical fight when the opportunity presents itself. It is William's willingness to vocalize his disagreement with others that gets him expelled from the monastery. He listens to one of the monks talk about the wickedness of peasants, women, and Jews. Though he wonders how every person in those groups could possibly be alike (e.g., all peasants are lazy), he does not speak up until the monk disparages Saracens. William is a Saracen since he has a foreign appearance and his mother is from Africa. The monk's comments about Saracens angers William so much that he argues and breaks a stone bench with his bare hands. This breaking of the stone bench reveals William's special ability, which is his superhuman strength.

William is also incredibly clever and able to think well ahead in order to hatch a plan. In this section, there is what seems to be an odd conversation between William and the abbot in which William tries to get permission to fight with any enemies he encounters



on his way to Saint-Denis. The conversation is humorous because William seems to be trying to wear the abbot down. When the conversation turns to the idea of enemies trying to take William's underwear, it seems a ridiculous idea and that it may be included only for humor. However, the conversation will later prove to be William's clever mind thinking of a way to engage in a fight without breaking any rules.

The author often includes humor that appeals to the age group for which he is writing, which is students at a middle school level. Another example of the author's use of humor occurs when the knights come to Jeanne's village to take her away and her mother tricks them into digging into a manure pile with their bare hands to fish Jeanne out. This scene also shows the way that peasants were persecuted for their lack of money. The knights see them as filthy people and look down on them for their way of life.

In this section, the author also provides a brief introduction of two other major characters in the story: Gwenforte and Michelangelo di Bologna.

Gwenforte is Jeanne's faithful dog who is magical in nature because she has been brought back to life. Gwenforte is revered by Jeanne's village because of her heroic act when Jeanne was a baby in which she saved Jeanne from a poisonous snake, but was then killed when Jeanne's parents misunderstood the situation. The killing of the dog and subsequent worship of her allows the author to introduce the idea of sainthood and that becoming a saint requires death. This concept will later inform some of the decisions the children are forced to make.

Michelangelo di Bologna is introduced when he comes to Jeanne's village to take Theresa away. He is a monk who stands out due to his enormous size and fiery beard. Jeanne is terrified of him and believes him to be a wicked man. His name is another example of the author's use of humor since it will undoubtedly cause middle school children to think of lunchmeat. The name implies that perhaps Michelangelo is not exactly what he appears to be, but is instead "full of bologna."

## Discussion Question 1

What is society's opinion of peasants during medieval times? Which characters provide this opinion? Do Jeanne's family and the other people in her village fit this stereotype? Why or why not?

## Discussion Question 2

Why is William so angry when his teacher talks about Saracens?



## Discussion Question 3

How does the author use the storytellers to comment on the events that occur in the novel? Is his use of the storytelling motif effective? Why or why not?

## Vocabulary

subjects, adder, shimmied, grove, jowls, pagan, scabbards, pathetic, mystical, mesmerized, dung, interposed, venerate, inherit, peasant



## Chapters 5-8

### Summary

Chapter 5, The Second Part of the Nun's Tale picks up with William lying in his bed. When he is sure everyone else is sleeping, he pulls out a belt that has been hidden in his mattress and replaces the leather belt he had been using to keep his underwear up.

The next morning William leaves with a donkey and some books for Abbot Hubert. He sees an old book, but when he reaches for it the abbot stops him.

William travels toward the forest of Malesherbes. Along the way he sees peasants and women and wonders about them.

As he enters the forest, his donkey stops and refuses to move. Fiends come out of the woods and a woman called the Wicked One demands the sacks with the books in them. William tricks her into taking his robes. When he takes off the robes he is wearing he reveals a belt made of gold.

The narrator interrupts the story to ask about the belt. Jerome tells him the belt is the only thing William has from his mother.

The Wicked One demands the belt and William says he cannot give it to her because he will be naked and that is a sin. William fights the fiends using only his hands and then the leg of the donkey. When it is over, he puts the donkey's leg back on and they continue toward Saint-Denis.

The narrator again interrupts the story and asks Jerome if what William did is a miracle. Jerome says it is. He then asks if William is a saint and Jerome replies that it takes many miracles and then death to become a saint so they will have to wait until William dies to see. The narrator then asks about the third child and a butcher named Aron says he knows the boy.

In Chapter 6, The Butcher's Tale, the butcher says the boy's name is Jacob. He is Jewish and lives in a small house with his parents. He is gentle and polite but a bit odd, as he likes talking to adults more than children.

Jacob's house is visited by a man named Levi and his son. The boy is acting strangely. He blinks his eyes and then holds them open very wide. A rabbi is there and says he believes the boy is possessed. Jacob speaks to the little boy and asks why he blinks that way. The boy replies that his eyelashes get stuck together.

That night the town is set on fire by two Christian boys. When the boys reach Jacob's house, his mother breaks a hole in the wall and shoves Jacob out of it. She tells him to meet them at Cousin Yehuda's house. Jacob runs.



The next morning Jacob finds the butcher lying under a collapsed wall with a head wound. He pulls the butcher out. He runs to get some yarrow root and places it on the wound while he prays. The wound is healed. He then heads toward Saint-Denis, which is where Cousin Yehuda's house is.

The butcher interrupts the story and shows those gathered the scar on his head, which looks years old. Jerome then asks the narrator why he is there. The narrator says he collects stories, but Jerome says he believes there is a greater motive. The narrator prompts the group to continue with the story and the innkeeper says he knows the next part.

In Chapter 7, The Innkeeper's Tale, William arrives. He sees some people with a cart and calls out to them. The father looks nervous and asks William to remove his mask. William is confused as he is not wearing a mask. Then he realizes they think he is wearing a mask because of the color of his skin.

Further along the way, William comes upon the people again and their cart wheel has broken off. He lifts the cart by its axle and urges them to fix the wheel, but they refuse to approach him, so he leaves.

William arrives at the inn and the innkeeper offers to let him sleep in the stable at no charge. William sweeps the stable in exchange for food.

Later, a group of knights enters the inn lead by Sir Fabian. Fabian is leading Jeanne by a rope around her neck.

Jacob then arrives at the inn. He takes food from a pig's trough and is accused of stealing by one of the knights. The knights shove Jacob around between them and then one suggests they kill him. The innkeeper shouts because he does not want anyone to be killed at his inn. Jeanne also yells at them to stop.

William hears the noise and goes into the yard to see what is happening. Jacob is trying to pray as a knight holds his neck down with his foot. William knocks the knight away. Jeanne has wrapped the rope attaching her to Fabian around a doorknob, so one of the knights cuts the rope to free Fabian. The three children run into the woods with Gwenforte following.

The innkeeper ends his tale and a handsome man joins the group. The nun says she knows the next part of the story.

Chapter 8, The Third Part of the Nun's Tale begins with the children in the woods. They are reluctant to talk to one another. Jeanne does not trust monks or giants. Jacob does not trust Christians. William does not trust girls or peasants.

Finally, William cannot stand the silence and asks the name of Jeanne's dog. Jeanne introduces her as Gwenforte, the Holy Greyhound. Jacob asks if Christians worship dogs. William and Jacob start arguing about religion and then William calls Jeanne a peasant.



The children finally go to sleep. When Jeanne wakes she sees Jacob praying and thinks he looks like a Christian when he prays. She asks him where his parents are and he tells her about the fire. Jacob asks about her parents, but she says it is not important. They wonder where William is going. They wake him up and ask about his parents.

The children share their stories with one another. Jacob invites Jeanne to come to Saint-Denis with her. This prompts William to realize he forgot his donkey at the inn. He says the books he is to take to Saint-Denis are with the donkey. Jeanne says she does not want to go to Saint-Denis because of Michelangelo di Bologna. William begs her to come with him to see Abbot Hubert. When he insists he will stay with her, she agrees to go.

The children walk toward Saint-Denis. On the way they learn more about one another and realize they all felt different in their home towns. They like one another and find it easy to talk, despite their differences.

They realize they are lost and William says he meant to be at this spot. Jeanne laughs and William feels as though he is being laughed at. Jeanne points out a market and suggests they go there to ask for directions.

A boy interrupts the story and says he knows something about the children.

## Analysis

In keeping with the storytelling motif, this section of the novel is told by the nun, Aron the butcher, and the innkeeper. Of interest is the fact that the nun tells the part of the story that none of those gathered in the inn could know about because only the children are present. Once again, she is able to provide input about the private thoughts of each of the children though how she could know these things is still not revealed.

This section of the novel introduces the third of the main characters, Jacob. Jacob is a Jewish boy who is quiet and intelligent. He is a natural healer and sees situations more clearly than the adults around him, as is shown when he realizes that Levi's son is merely blinking oddly because his eyelashes are sticking together while the adults blame far more complicated things, like possible possession. Indeed, Jacob's special ability is the ability to heal, which seems to be rooted in his faith in God. When Jacob finds Aron injured after the fire, he knows to apply yarrow root to the wound, but he also seems to know it takes more than the root. Jacob prays as he holds the root to Aron's head and the wound is miraculously healed in moments.

The author has now introduced all three of the main characters, and they are quite different from one another. Each of them is from a group of people that one would not expect to be saints, yet the author sets them up as potential saints and the question of whether or not they are, in fact, saints occupies the storytellers at the inn throughout the book. The idea of God using unlikely people to do his work is one of Gidwitz's themes.



Each of the three main characters is from a group of people that is persecuted in medieval Europe, and being persecuted for differences is another of the author's themes. Jeanne is a peasant who is looked down upon for her lack of money. As a peasant, Jeanne has very few rights, so the knights are able to take her from her village without any repercussion. She is then lead around by a rope around her neck like a stray dog.

Jacob is a Jew whose people are persecuted for their religion in a time when Christians were trying to rid the world of heresy. One of the most heinous acts of persecution that occurs in the novel is the burning of Jacob's town by some Christian boys. Jacob sees the boys and understands that they are Christians and that they see the burning of the Jewish town as some sort of prank since they are laughing. The author describes the scene in great detail and the reaction of the listeners in the inn again reflects what Gidwitz expects his readers might be thinking. Marie mutters "oh no" and Jerome covers his eyes (69).

William is also persecuted for being different since he has dark skin. When William meets a group of people on the street pulling a cart they are frightened by his dark skin and believe he is a brigand wearing a mask. Later, when he comes upon them again and tries to help with their broken cart, they are so frightened of him that they refuse his help. William seems to be used to being treated differently and being an outsider because of his skin color. Even after he has gotten to know Jeanne and Jacob and has decided he likes them, he believes they are laughing at him when they laugh at having gotten lost.

Gidwitz ties this theme of being persecuted for differences into another of his themes, which is the idea that one should get to know a person before jumping to conclusions about them. This idea is first introduced when William is traveling and wondering about the peasants and women he sees around him. He worries about having contact with the "daughters of Eve" who might corrupt him with their sinful ways even though he has not had contact with women before since he has been raised in a monastery. He also wonders about the peasants he sees working hard in the field and wonders which ones are the lazy ones.

Later, when the children meet, all of their ideas about other kinds of people are put to the test. They spend their first hours together uncertain and afraid of one another. Jeanne looks at William and sees a huge monk, just like the monk she is so afraid of, Michelangelo di Bologna, and so she does not trust William. Jacob is in the presence of two Christians so shortly after his home was burned by Christians. William mistrusts Jeanne because he has never been around girls before and has been taught that they are sinful beings. Then, when William and Jeanne learn that Jacob is Jewish they are shocked that he does not look somehow different. However, when the children start to talk they learn that their differences are not so great that they cannot be friends. In fact, it does not take them long to discover they have more things in common than they do differences. Jeanne notes that when Jacob prays he looks just like a Christian. Each of them is alone and in need of friendship. Jeanne is surprised and touched by the idea



that these two boys not only invite her to travel with them, but actually want her to stay with them.

This section of the novel not only brings the children together, it also sets them up to travel to Saint-Denis where more of the action will occur. William is on his way to Saint-Denis to deliver books to Abbot Hubert. These books will be important later in the story, so William's taking notice of one of the older books and being distracted from looking at it before he leaves his monastery foreshadows their importance. Jacob is on his way to Saint-Denis to go to his cousin Yehuda's house because his parents told him to meet them there after the fire. Jeanne is convinced to go to Saint-Denis by William who assures her that Abbot Hubert is a good man and will help her.

The author reveals the importance of William's underwear debate with his abbot when William enters Malsherbes and encounters the Foul Fiends. He has strapped a golden belt he received from his mother around his underwear, so when he tricks the Fiends into taking his robes so that they will see his belt and try to rob him of it, William is given an opening to fight the Fiends without breaking the abbot's rule against fighting. The author also cleverly uses the abbot's warning to fight only with bone and flesh to allow William to use the leg of the donkey to fight off the Fiends. This battle is another of William's miracles since he not only singlehandedly defeats his enemies, but he reattaches the donkey's leg when it is over. This story alludes to the Biblical story of Samson defeating a thousand men with the jawbone of an ass as is told in the book of Judges.

The author injects humor into this section when William suddenly remembers that he left his donkey back at the inn. He rants about having lost his ass, which sounds humorous due to the double meaning of ass. The fact that Jeanne and Jacob have no idea what he is talking about makes the scene even more funny.

In this section, Gidwitz hints that there may be some larger scheme at work in the narrator collecting stories about the children. Jerome asks the narrator why he is at the inn, but the narrator refuses to say any more than that he is collecting stories. Jerome states that he believes the narrator has a motive. His suspicions will later be confirmed.

## Discussion Question 1

How do the children feel about each other when they first meet? What changes their perceptions of one another?

## Discussion Question 2

What part of the story does the nun tell? How do you suppose she knows what the children are doing and thinking when no one else is around?





## Discussion Question 3

How is each of the children treated by society because of who they are – a Jew, a Saracen, and a peasant?

## Vocabulary

dormitory, illuminated, abbey, imminent, inlaid, converged, fiend, peering, thatched, motive, pilgrims, brigand, laden, fleeting, ogling



# Chapters 9-12

## Summary

Chapter 9, The Jongleur's Tale begins with the jongleur setting up to entertain in the market when he sees the three children. Jeanne and Jacob walk through the market while William waits in the woods. Jeanne spots Michelangelo di Bologna, who is called Red, Fat, and Wicked. She grabs Jacob and runs. They see knights on the road so they jump off to the side and land in the river. A knight picks them up and carries them out.

The jongleur interrupts the story to say his story is worth some pie. He then says he followed the children hoping he could find them and get some money from Red, Fat, and Wicked. Jerome is shocked to hear he would betray the children, but he says he has to earn a living any way he can. He says he will continue the story for ale and the nun asks him if he would like a cup of water, to which they all react with disgust.

Chapter 10, The Second Part of the Jongleur's Tale picks up with the knights tying ropes around the necks of the children and leading them down the road. The jongleur joins them and starts to learn the knights' names. They are Sir Fabian's men. Marmeluc asks Jacob about the prayer he is saying because it sounds Jewish. He asks as though he is curious, not angry. Jacob says he is Jewish and Marmeluc asks if Jacob does not believe in God. He says he believes in God, but not Jesus. Marmeluc is confused by this. Jacob tries to explain. Haye, Marmeluc's brother, gets angry with Marmeluc, but he says he just wants to know because he has never talked to a Jew.

They all stop for the night. Marmeluc sits by the fire with the children while he keeps watch. They hear Fabian crying in his sleep. Marmeluc says it is because of a terrible experience they had in the crusades in which the enemy tried to starve them to death. When they escaped, Fabian had suggested they become brigands for a while. Marmeluc did not want to, but he knew he could not survive on his own. They robbed a group of travelers and Fabian killed them. The men turned out to be monks who devoted their lives to healing soldiers. When they got to France one of the men in their group betrayed them and joined a monastery to repent. Marmeluc's and Haye's father disowned them. He believes Fabian cries because his twin sister will no longer talk to him.

The next morning they see gigantic claw marks in the earth. Jeanne has a fit and sees a dragon.

The jongleur stops his story and says that is all there is to tell. The others want to know more, but he says he left when he heard about the dragon. He says he did not find Michelangelo di Bologna. The others wonder if he would have told the monk about the children if he had found them. He says he would have told for the money, but he would have helped them escape afterward. The innkeeper throws the jongleur out.



A man named Gerald the Scot, who is a chronicler, approaches the table and says he knows more of the story. He asks if they have heard of the Dragon of the Deadly Farts.

Chapter 11, The Chronicler's Tale, starts with the chronicler at the table with Lord Bertulf and Lady Galbert-Bertulf in their great hall. The knights bring the children into the hall. Fabian tells the lord and lady that Jeanne is a witch and that there is a dragon. Lord Bertulf asks the chronicler what he knows about the dragon. He says that a knight found the dragon eating the food from a ruined inn. When the knight fought the dragon it farted and set the knight on fire.

Lord Bertulf asks Jeanne if she saw this in her vision. Jacob takes her hand and she looks surprised. She says she did see the dragon and a sickness. The lord says there is no sickness and then asks Fabian to fight the dragon. Fabian refuses and Jeanne says that Jacob could fight the dragon. She says that with help from the knights, Jacob's magic could defeat the dragon. The lord says that if they get rid of the dragon, the knights will take them to Saint-Denis to see Abbott Hubert. Jacob wonders how he is supposed to kill the dragon.

In Chapter 12, The Second Part of the Chronicler's Tale, the children and the knights eat with the lord and lady in the great hall. The chronicler realizes that Jacob is Jewish when he notices that Jacob will not eat certain foods.

A smelly cheese called Epoisses is served. It is considered the best cheese in the kingdom, but the children think it smells rotten. Marmeluc asks the children if they are afraid of cheese, so Jeanne bravely takes a bite. She realizes she likes it and compares it to life. Marmeluc is impressed by her.

The next morning the children and the knights go looking for the dragon. Jeanne explains to Jacob that the dragon is sick and he needs to cure it. Jacob says he needs to see the dragon to cure it. Fabian asks Jeanne if they need to attract the dragon and then make it fart. She says they do.

Baldwin and Haya get an old sheep to lure the dragon in. The knights plan to scare the dragon to make it fart. Two knights need to stay hidden by the sheep. Marmeluc and Haya draw the short straws and are forced to stay, which will be dangerous.

The dragon comes and the knights scare it just as it is about to bite Jeanne. Marmeluc and Jeanne duck out of the way, but Haya is hit by the cloud of gas. He bursts into flame and rolls on the ground to put it out. Jacob gives the other knights leaves and tells them to chew them. He covers Haya in mossy soil and then tells the knights to spit out the leaves so he can put them on Haya's burns. Then he says he knows how to cure the dragon.

They kill the sheep and put foxglove into it before luring the dragon back. The dragon eats the sheep and vomits. Afterward, his deadly farts are gone. Jacob says that the dragon ate cheese and it made him sick.



When they check on Haye, they find he is healed. Marmeluc is grateful and thanks Jacob. Jacob says that God cured Haye. Marmeluc asks Jeanne if she thinks God told her about the dragon and she says He might have. The knights and the chronicler kneel in front of the children and ask for a blessing.

The narrator asks the chronicler why they asked for a blessing and the chronicler says it is obvious they are saints.

## Analysis

This section of the novel moves the plot forward by introducing the subplot of the children's miraculous battle with a dragon. This subplot serves to highlight the special abilities of Jeanne and Jacob that have people wondering if they are saints. Jeanne is the first to become aware of the dragon when she has a vision in which she sees the dragon and also a sickness. She is not specific about the sickness, so the lord doubts her vision at first since he says there is no sickness in his land. However, the author will later reveal that the sickness that Jeanne sees is in the dragon. Jacob's miraculous healing ability is also further explored when he cures Haye of the burns the dragon inflicts on him.

These miracles are witnessed by the knights and the chronicler, who tells the people gathered at the inn about the incident. Their witnessing of the miracles leads to a discussion of the power that God has given these unlikely children. Jacob indicates that he did not heal Haye, but that God did. He states that God made the plants, but he only uses them. During the healing, Jacob again prays over the person he is healing just as he did when Aron was injured. The knights ask Jeanne if she thinks her visions come from God, and while Jeanne is no great theologian, she says she believes they do. The blessing that the chronicler and the knights ask for opens the discussion at the inn for questions of whether or not the children are saints. The chronicler declares that he is certain they are, but the narrator is still skeptical. His skepticism will later be revealed as important when his true purpose is found out.

The dragon subplot not only further establishes the children as saints, but also provides another humorous element. Gidwitz again appeals to the type of humor his target audience is likely to find most humorous and gives the dragon a deadly case of gas.

Because William is not involved in the dragon subplot, the author is able to forge a stronger bond between Jacob and Jeanne that will later cause William to question his place in the trio. The author sets up this time apart as a means of later discussing William's feelings of being an outsider, which the reader already knows he is all too familiar with due to his ethnicity.

The author uses Jacob's interactions with the knights and the chronicler to provide readers with information about the Jewish faith. Marmeluc is interested in Jacob because he has never had the chance to talk to anyone who is Jewish before. He is an example of a character who takes the time to learn about another person before judging



them, unlike his brother Haye and Sir Fabian who both initially decide that Jacob is unworthy because he is Jewish. Marmeluc asks intelligent questions about what Jewish people believe in, which allows the author to explain that Jews and Christians believe in the same God, but that Jews do not believe that Jesus is God. By discussing the things that make people different from one another, it seems that Gidwitz hopes to bridge the gaps between his readers and people they might find different and help them to see where they are alike.

The author provides another example of the theme of not jumping to conclusions about people through telling the backstory of Sir Fabian. Upon first glance, Fabian appears to be a ruthless knight who follows orders regardless of the consequences. However, when Marmeluc explains that Fabian cries in his sleep because of a horrendous experience he had during war and the murders he committed as a result, the Gidwitz shows that even Fabian, who has been chasing Jeanne since the beginning, is not beyond pity and perhaps even redemption.

The storytelling motif allows the author to again look at the way people are sometimes wrongly judged because of their differences. Gidwitz introduces a jongleur who seems to be of questionable morals. He is of the peasant class and appears to have no parents to care for him since he is forced to work for every coin and every morsel of food by entertaining people. The people at the inn judge him for his willingness to betray the children to Michelangelo in return for payment, but the jongleur explains that he has no choice but to do whatever he can to earn a living.

Through the storytelling motif, the author is able to introduce other voices and even other accents. The jongleur's speech is the most different from the storytellers introduced thus far. He speaks in a manner that indicates he is of a less educated social class and not one that speaks proper English as the narrator does. He does not pronounce words the same way as the others do, but instead says words like "fings" for "things." The use of different speech patterns adds to the realism of having several people tell the story and also gives the novel some added texture.

The author again indicates there is more to the nun than has been thus far revealed when she suggests that the jongleur have a glass of water instead of ale. The nun's insistence that water is good because God made it is important because it is not a commonly held opinion for people in medieval times when water was unsanitary and it was safer to drink ale. The conversation also lends some humor to the story since the others remind her that God also made urine.

When the author includes a scene in which Jeanne bravely tastes some very smelly cheese, he shows Jeanne's exceptional understanding of the world around her. Gidwitz uses a simile in which Jeanne says that life is like the cheese in that it is "rotten and strange and rich and way, way too strong" (145). Jeanne's view of the world is informed by her life as a peasant. She may view life as a peasant as often being "rotten," while her visions certainly make her life "strange." And, of course, her new friendships with Jacob and William undoubtedly make her life more "rich." As the story goes on and



Jeanne is asked to use her vision to serve God, her life will definitely become “way, way too strong.”

The cheese also serves as a foreshadow for the defeat of the dragon. Jeanne’s experience with the cheese allows her to determine a means of defeating the dragon, which is hinted at in this section since she states that Jacob is the one who can beat the dragon. Since Jacob’s special ability is his healing power, it seems likely there is something the dragon needs to be healed of. It turns out that the cheese is the cause of the dragon’s sickness since it ate a great quantity of the cheese found in the ruins of the inn. To defeat the dragon, Jacob simply needs to cure it of its stomachache from having eaten cheese that did not agree with it.

## Discussion Question 1

What is the jongleur like? How do you feel about him saying he would betray the children for money?

## Discussion Question 2

What do Jeanne and Jacob learn about Sir Fabian? How might this story change their feelings about the knight?

## Discussion Question 3

Why do you think the author leaves William out of this section of the story? How might this affect his relationship with Jeanne and Jacob?

## Vocabulary

jongleur, insecurity, betray, sanitary, bawdy, scowls, hibernation, liberate, topples, morals, hospitality, vocation, spectators, foresaw, ludicrous



# Chapters 13-16

## Summary

In Chapter 13, The Third Part of the Chronicler's Tale, the children attend a feast in the great hall. The lord says he will see to it they get to Abbot Hubert. The chronicler says he will go with them and assure they get to the pious abbot and are not harmed by Michelangelo di Bologna.

After the dinner, Lord Bertulf takes petitions from the people of the kingdom. A hunchback enters the hall and says that the lord has something that does not belong to him. The lady asks what they have and William and Gwenforte burst out of the disguise demanding that Jacob and Jeanne be released. A fight breaks out and Jeanne yells out to William to stop.

The next day the chronicler goes with the children and the knights as they travel to Saint-Denis. He notices that William looks like he feels left out.

When they approach the town of Saint-Denis, Jacob becomes nervous and says he has to go find his parents at his cousin Yehuda's house. William asks if he means the Rabbi Yehuda who is a great Jewish writer. The two boys begin to argue about whether Yehuda is famous or notorious. Jacob says his writing is beautiful and William agrees, which ends the fight.

Jeanne urges Jacob to stay with them. She says they will go to the monastery first and then find Jacob's parents. Jacob agrees. Jeanne takes the hands of both boys and they walk on.

The chronicler tells them to stay close and be careful because Michelangelo di Bologna is the prior of the abbey. They wonder why Abbot Hubert would have such a man as prior. The chronicler says the abbot is keeping an eye on his enemy.

When they get into the town, Jeanne is surprised by the way all of the people there look wealthy to her. The chronicler explains that they are not wealthy, just townspeople. Marmeluc shakes hands with both boys and hugs Jeanne before departing.

Jeanne spots Michelangelo and he turns and sees them. When Michelangelo comes toward them the children and the chronicler run to Abbot Hubert's office. The chronicler shoves the children inside and goes to distract Michelangelo.

The chronicler ends his tale. The narrator sees that the nun knows more, so he asks her to continue the story.

In Chapter 14, The Fourth Part of the Nun's Tale, the abbot demands to know who the children are. They tell him the chronicler brought them. The abbot is shocked by William's size. William is struck by how inane the abbot's questions seem.



As William begins to tell their story someone bangs on the door. William tells the story as the banging continues. The abbot is confused about why the children are telling him the story of Gwenforte when he is the one who ordered her killed.

The abbot takes a knife and holds it to Gwenforte's throat. As he does, he tells the story of an old friend that he attended university with. The two of them agreed that whoever died first would come back and tell the other all about it. They studied black arts so they would know how to come back. The abbot's friend died and returned a few years later saying he had been in Hell and begged the abbot to change his ways. Since then, the abbot has been working to turn people away from the Devil. He believes worshipping Gwenforte is evil, so he ordered her killed. He says that after Gwenforte is dead, he will have the children burned as witches.

The door crashes open and Michelangelo bursts in shouting at Hubert to stop. He accuses Hubert of being a sinner and tells the children to come with him. Jeanne hesitates, but Gwenforte follows Michelangelo, so she and the others go with him, too.

Michelangelo leads the children to a building with a Jewish symbol on the door. He knocks and an old woman answers the door. She invites them in for soup. The woman is Miriam, Yehuda's wife. Michelangelo tells her that the children are saints.

The narrator is shocked to hear that Michelangelo called them saints. Jerome comments that the narrator seems unusually interested in them being saints.

Chapter 15, The Fifth Part of the Nun's Tale, starts with the children and Michelangelo sitting in Yehuda's and Miriam's kitchen eating soup. Jeanne notices that Gwenforte is very comfortable with Michelangelo and wonders why. Jacob is not eating. Instead, he is looking around the room as if searching for something.

Michelangelo tells the children he has been looking for them. Jeanne asks if he wants to kill them like he did Theresa. Michelangelo tells her he let people believe he was going to kill Theresa, but he did not.

William asks why Hubert obeyed Michelangelo. Michelangelo explains that Hubert may outrank him in the world, but he knows that Michelangelo outranks him in terms of powers given by God.

Jacob asks if Yehuda has seen his parents. He has not seen Jacob's mother since she was a child. Jacob begins to cry and so does Jeanne. Gwenforte looks between the two and then goes to Jacob. Miriam puts the children to bed.

The next morning the children are eating in the kitchen when Yehuda teases them about eating him out of house and home. He tells them to keep eating because God will provide more food. Michelangelo enters and he and Yehuda engage in a good-natured argument about the times they live in. William laughs and asks how they can be friends and Yehuda says he should be as lucky to have a friend like Michelangelo. Jeanne says he has two.





Jeanne asks Michelangelo why he calls Yehuda Satan. Michelangelo explains that in Hebrew, satan means “an advocate of the alternative” (194).

Jacob steps outside and stands looking down the street. He wonders why his parents have not arrived yet. He then goes back in and sits grieving on a stool. Jeanne and William sit across the room looking uncomfortable.

Jeanne asks Michelangelo why he called them saints. He recounts their miraculous powers and says that they must be saints. Yehuda asks if Jacob can be a saint since he is Jewish. Michelangelo says there are saints of all faiths. Yehuda says he hopes Michelangelo is wrong because to be a saint a person has to be martyred. William then tells stories of martyred saints.

Michelangelo says they can try to run from their fate, but they cannot ignore the gifts they have been given. Jeanne insists they are staying together, so Michelangelo asks them to help him prevent a book burning where Jewish books are to be burned. Jeanne speaks for them all and says they will help.

The narrator says that people cannot just decide to be saints. A discussion of whether or not the children are saints ensues. The narrator wonders why they are all so insistent the children are saints and Jerome wonders why he is so certain they are not. The handsome man speaks up and says he doubted they were saints when he first met them, too. He then picks up the story.

In Chapter 16, The Companion’s Tale, the children leave Saint-Denis with Michelangelo. Michelangelo tells them he is not sure where the books are, so they are going to Paris to talk to the abbot there who is a friend of the king. The king has ordered the book burning.

They arrive at the abbey. Some monks are removing ivy from the stone walls. One of them stands and when his cowl falls back they see that he is handsome and wears a golden crown. William bows. They can now see that the group of men are only disguised as monks. Jeanne steps forward and bows before another man who is not handsome and appears a bit weak.

The companion concludes the tale. Marie asks why he was wearing the crown and he introduces himself as Jean de Joinville, a companion of the king. The narrator asks if he knows why the king has declared war on the children. Joinville says he does.

## Analysis

The author’s use of the storytelling motif becomes more important in this section of the novel as the people gathered in the inn begin to discuss in depth what it means to be a saint. Everyone except the narrator, who has not met the children, believes the children are saints. They remind the narrator that the children have performed several miraculous deeds at this point, which is one of the qualifications of a saint. Yet, the narrator is adamant that they cannot be saints. Perhaps his reason for being so certain



they are not stems from the theme of God choosing unlikely people to do His work. To the narrator, a peasant girl, a dark skinned boy, and a Jewish boy do not seem like people that could possibly be saints. However, Jerome still suspects there is more to the narrator's reason for wanting to know about the children than he lets on. Jerome again wonders why the narrator is so insistent the children cannot be saints. As the story goes on, the author will reveal that the narrator does, in fact, have a motive for gathering information about the children and that he has good reason to hope they are not saints.

Another qualification for sainthood that comes up in this section of the novel is that saints must be martyred to be declared saints. Yehuda brings this up when Michelangelo states that the children are saints. Yehuda, who is Jacob's kin, hopes they are not since it will mean that they have to die.

The author uses the discussion of what makes a saint to further his theme of God choosing unlikely people when Jeanne asks if Jacob can be a saint since he is Jewish. Michelangelo's response that his religion does not matter perhaps reveals the author's opinion on the subject. Gidwitz suggests that there are saints in all corners of the world from all different religions. Michelangelo says there are "Muslim saints, and saints in lands where they worship God in all sorts of ways" (195).

Another unlikely person God seems to have put in the children's path is Marmeluc, who escorts the children to Saint-Denis. He has become attached to the children, particularly Jeanne, in an emotional way and even hugs Jeanne as they part. Marmeluc seems to be a part of God's plan since he will later reappear at a crucial moment to help the children in their quest.

This section sees the author delving into another theme that is present in the book, which is that people cannot know or understand God's plan. This theme becomes more prevalent after the children are asked to help prevent the burning of Jewish books. Not only will Marmeluc be drawn back into the story as a part of the plan, but other characters will also become integral in helping the children to fulfill their duty.

Michelangelo introduces the idea of God's plan to the children when he tells them that they can make a choice about what to do next. He tells them they can certainly try to run from their fate, but they will be unable to run from their gifts. This suggests that the children may not understand why God chose to give them gifts, but that there is a plan for them and the children will be unable to escape that plan.

The author continues to explore the theme of learning about people before jumping to conclusions when the children finally meet Abbot Hubert and learn more about Michelangelo. Abbot Hubert, who William has been told is a very pious man, turns out to be the one that ordered Gwenforte's death. Moreover, he plans to kill the children, too. William also discovers that he is not the wise abbot he expected, but seems a bit dim since he asks inane questions. When the author reveals Abbot Hubert's backstory and reason for being overzealous about stamping out heresy, readers learn that the abbot once practiced dark arts to learn how to come back from the dead. As a result, the children discover that Abbot Hubert is not at all what they expected him to be based on



the opinions of others. Rather than being the man that will help them, he is their enemy and wants to destroy them.

When Michelangelo crashes through the door of the abbot's office to save them, the children's perception of Michelangelo proves to be wrong as well. Michelangelo has been following the children not to harm them, but to save them. Indeed, Jeanne learns that Michelangelo did not take Theresa away to burn her, but to save her because she is a good woman. Later, William asks Michelangelo why the abbot obeyed Michelangelo when the abbot is of a higher rank. Michelangelo explains that he outranks the abbot with God, which is a foreshadowing of Michelangelo's true identity.

The author reveals a great deal about Michelangelo's character and beliefs through his relationship with Rabbi Yehuda. Despite their differences in religious beliefs, the two men are close friends and it is Rabbi Yehuda that Michelangelo turns to for help when he takes the children away from Abbot Hubert. No one has told Michelangelo that Yehuda is Jacob's cousin, so the only reason that he takes the children there is because he trusts Yehuda. The two bicker about little things like the floors in Yehuda's house and they call one another satan, but there is clearly love between them as each declares the other his closest friend.

The author uses the conversation between Michelangelo and Yehuda to educate his readers about the etymology of the word "satan." William asks how the two can be friends and yet Michelangelo calls Yehuda "satan," which he takes to mean the devil. Michelangelo explains that "satan" in Hebrew means "an advocate of the alternative, the one who makes the arguments you don't know how to refute" (194).

Gidwitz's voice is again heard when the children sit awkwardly in Yehuda's house as Jacob grieves the loss of his parents. Gidwitz writes, "There is something embarrassing about someone else's grief. It is hard to know what to do around it. The right answer, always, is hugs" (194). This statement seems to come from the author's own experiences with grief rather than necessarily coming from the storyteller.

The theme of persecution for differences is explored through the king's plan to burn a great number of Jewish books. Jacob is angered by the idea that another burning is being aimed at his people. William is angered by the burning because it means the destruction of so much wisdom. His anger is in keeping with his character as a scholar, and it shows growth in his character as well. William has been taught to believe that Jews are heretics, and he has not left those teachings behind despite his friendship with Jacob. This is shown through the fact that upon learning that Yehuda is Jacob's cousin, he first argues that Yehuda is a "famous heathen" (165). However, he cannot refute the fact that Yehuda is a gifted writer and that if his books are burned, it will be a great loss. This shows that William is learning to trust what he knows of a person, rather than what others have told him.

The author also further develops Gwenforte as a character rather than just as a companion to the children. In this section, Gwenforte begins to make decisions for the group. When the children hesitate before following Michelangelo out of the abbot's



office, Gwenforte charges ahead and makes the decision for them. The author also shows that Gwenforte is an intelligent being through her reactions to situations and people. Jeanne notices that she is unusually comfortable around Michelangelo, which suggests that she trusts him and, thus, that he is a trustworthy person. And, when Jacob and William argue about Yehuda, Gwenforte growls and barks as if admonishing them for fighting. Later, when Jacob grieves his parents and Jeanne is crying, too, Gwenforte seems to understand that Jacob is in greater need of comforting than Jeanne, so she goes to him.

## Discussion Question 1

How does the author use Gwenforte to spur the characters toward making good choices? What might her reaction toward Michelangelo mean?

## Discussion Question 2

From what you have read so far, what are the qualifications for becoming a saint? What does Michelangelo say about saints and religion?

## Discussion Question 3

What is the friendship between Michelangelo and Yehuda like? How does it compare to the friendship between the children?

## Vocabulary

vanquishing, piety, exaggerated, tenants, dwindled, concentric, oblate, embrace, vigorous, corridor, impertinent, craggy, resurrected, credibility, ruddy



# Chapters 17-20

## Summary

In Chapter 17, The Second Part of the Companion's Tale, the children are in the abbey with the king. King Louis asks how Jeanne knew he was the king. Jeanne refuses to tell him, so Michelangelo explains the powers the children have and Jeanne admits she saw King Louis in a vision. Jeanne says that she saw Christ on the cross with no nails in his hands and feet, a hungry bird flying overhead, and the king throwing a tantrum at Christ's feet. The king and Michelangelo realize the Holy Nail is missing.

A short time later the king sits weeping. Gwenforte is between his legs and occasionally licks his face. Joinville then says to the kids that he believes they are either saints or they stole the nail. He says they cannot leave until the nail is found.

Joinville instructs a monk to listen at the door to see if Michelangelo and the children say anything that gives them away. The next part of Joinville's story is what the monk heard.

William says they will be hanged if the nail is not found. Jeanne angrily asks Michelangelo why he told the king about her visions because now they will probably be burned as heretics. Michelangelo says he thought it would help.

Later, the king tells the children the nail has been found. It had fallen into the mouth of one of the decorative eagles.

Joinville stops his story when he hears a rooster crow. He says he must leave because he has to be somewhere. The narrator looks to the nun and asks her to tell what crimes the children committed.

In Chapter 18, The Sixth Part of the Nun's Tale, the king takes Michelangelo and the children to Paris. On the way, the king asks the children about their abilities. Jacob carefully avoids revealing his religion.

Someone knocks on the side of the cart and tells them there will be a debate held that night about "whether God or free will is the cause of evil in the world" (226).

They pass a man yelling at two Jews about undercutting his prices. King Louis says Paris is infested with Jews and he hates it. Jacob had started to like the king, but now remembers that the king is bound by law to hate Jews. Then the king says Jews are worse than peasants, which startles Jeanne. The yelling man hits one of the Jews and the king stops the cart and gets out. He fines all three men for disturbing the peace and prevents the Jew from being further abused.

When they are back in the cart, Jeanne asks the king why he protected the Jews if he hates them. He says the Jews are like his children, though he believes them to be bad,



he will still protect them. Jeanne asks him if he knows of the burning of the village where Jacob lived. He says he does know and it makes him sick. Jacob wonders how he can hate Jews and yet feel bad when they are attacked. They all realize that the king has complete control over the fate of the Jews in his kingdom.

In Chapter 19, The Seventh Part of the Nun's Tale, they arrive at the palace and the king invites them to stay for a while. The king introduces his valets and asks one valet, Eric, to take care of his guests. When the king leaves, Eric tells Jeanne he can let Gwenforte pee now.

Eric takes the group into a room with five beds and leaves to find them dry clothing. Gwenforte poops in the fireplace.

Michelangelo tells them that he will bring up the burning of the Talmud to Blanche, the king's mother, at dinner. He asks Jeanne to fake a fit and say that she saw the burning of the books and that the flames are the fires of Hell. Jeanne has reservations about using her gift to lie. Michelangelo convinces her by saying that the feelings they have are from God and since Jeanne thinks that the burning of the books is bad, God is telling her so. Jacob then asks if the king's feelings of hate for Jews and peasants are from God, too. Michelangelo says that he thinks the king has been taught to feel that way. He says that it can be very hard to determine which voice is God. Jeanne then says she will fake a fit.

Chapter 20, The Eighth Part of the Nun's Tale starts with the children and Michelangelo entering the hall for dinner. Joinville enters and introduces them to Robert de Sorbonne who has founded a university for poor scholars. Joinville suggests that Sorbonne enroll William. William is sure Sorbonne will ask if he is a Saracen, but Sorbonne just asks him what he thinks of Master Albertus's proof of God's existence.

Joinville introduces the children to Blanche. Gwenforte starts to growl and bark. William picks up Gwenforte and takes her to their room as the king enters.

At dinner, Blanche addresses Michelangelo and the children one by one, making disparaging remarks about each of them. When she reaches Jacob she comments on his village burning and says it is just like a stupid peasant to burn their own village. Jacob comments that it is better than burning books out of stupidity. The king says the books they are burning are not Bibles, they are Talmuds and do not contain wisdom. William jumps in and says it is a shame because of the work alone that goes into making each book. Blanche says they will be burning thousands of Jewish books the next day in Paris.

## Analysis

This section begins with Joinville, the king's companion, acting as the storyteller. His participation in the storytelling is important since it provides the tale from the prospective of a noble. He is doubtful that the children are saints as he tells his story and even stations a man outside the door of the room they sleep in to listen for anything that



might give them away as the thieves who took the Holy Nail. However, when the nail is found in a statue of an eagle, he realizes that Jeanne's vision was real and his opinion of the children changes. Joinville leaves the group, and readers, in suspense when he leaves the inn before finishing his story.

Gidwitz continues to explore the theme of people being unable to know God's plan. As the children travel with the king through the streets the cart is approached by someone announcing a debate about the cause of evil, whether it is the result of God or free will. The student has no idea which side the English are fighting on, but it scarcely seems to matter. This suggests that no one knows the answer to the question and that, perhaps, the answer does not matter.

Later, the author takes on the theme again when Jeanne questions the idea of lying about her gift to stop the book burning. Michelangelo's explanation of her feelings being from God indicates that Jeanne's visions and moral judgement are a part of God's plan. However, Jacob questions whether the king's feelings about Jews and peasants are also from God, which still leaves the question of God's plan unanswered. Michelangelo does explain that it can be hard to figure out which voice is God's and which is the voice others, but his explanation still does not answer Jacob's question about God's plan for the Jews where the king is concerned.

The theme of persecution for differences is evident in this section when the king talks about how many Jews are in Paris. He refers to it as an "infestation" (227). His use of the word infestation suggests he sees the Jews as little more than pests, like rats. As he talks, Jacob realizes that he is bound by law to hate Jews, but King Louis shows that perhaps he does not really hate them when he stops to defend a Jew. This suggests that his behavior may be a learned one that is not based on his actual knowledge of Jews, but on what others have told him to think, which is in keeping with the author's theme of learning about people before judging them.

The king makes similar statements about peasants, which shocks Jeanne. The children have started to like and trust the king as he has been kind to them. He defends Jeanne when Joinville tells her she has no choice but to tell the king about her visions and he chats with them as they travel in the cart. As a result, his negative views of peasants and Jews hurts Jeanne and Jacob all the more.

William is also the subject of the theme of persecution in this section when he talks to Robert Sorbonne. William is so used to being wrongly judged for the color of his skin that he is certain that Robert will question his ethnic origins as a reason for keeping William out of his university. In this case, William is wrong and Robert is only curious about his previous education.

Blanche presents an excellent example of the theme of jumping to conclusions about people. When she is introduced to the children and Michelangelo, she speaks to each in turn. She has nothing nice to say about them and judges each of them based on their appearance instead of on who they are. The author sets Blanche up as the true villain of the story since it is she who orders the burning of the books and revels in just how many



they will succeed in destroying. Her evil nature is evident in the way that Gwenforte reacts to her by barking and growling, behavior she has not exhibited toward an individual before. In fact, Gwenforte indicates the king is not a bad person when she licks his tears as he weeps over the lost nail, which provides further evidence that Blanche is the villain and not King Louis.

In this section, the author introduces the idea that the loss of a single book and the wisdom contained in it is like the loss of dozens of lives. When Blanche disparages Jacob by saying peasants are stupid enough to burn their own village, he counters by saying that it is more stupid to burn books. William concurs saying that a great deal of wisdom will be lost if the books are burned. This scene shows the way that Blanche persecutes the Jews because she states that there is no wisdom in the books because they are not Bibles. As the story continues, there will be added discussion about how much work goes into making a book and all of the wisdom that is contained in them. This, perhaps, is the author's voice again showing through as he undoubtedly is aware of the work creating a book requires and also likely values them as a source of education since he is a former teacher.

Gidwitz uses Gwenforte to add humor to this section of the novel. When the group first arrives at the palace, Jeanne knows she cannot let her dog urinate in front of the king. The valet's acknowledgement of her predicament by telling her she can let the dog pee after the king leaves provides a moment of levity. Later, when the children are thrilled by their lavish surroundings in the palace and the idea that they could be friends with the king, they turn to see Gwenforte pooping in the fireplace. Again, the moment is meant to be humorous. However, it might also be Gwenforte's input of her opinion on their surroundings. Perhaps she is indicating that the king and his palace are no better than any of them and not above the normal functions of daily life.

## Discussion Question 1

What evidence does the author provide about Blanche being a villain? What does Gwenforte's reaction to her say about her character?

## Discussion Question 2

Why does the king defend the Jew in the street? What does Michelangelo say about the way the king feels toward Jews and peasants? Do you think Michelangelo is right?

## Discussion Question 3

Do you think it would be okay for Jeanne to lie about having a vision? Why or why not?





## Vocabulary

tapestries, apparent, feats, tantrums, writhed, sluices, exploits, tendrils, disputes, onslaughts, averted, disposition, crustacean, mortifying, agenda



# Chapters 21-24

## Summary

In Chapter 21, The Ninth Part of the Nun's Tale, Michelangelo and the children worry about the possibility of being martyred the next day.

During the night, Michelangelo wakes the children and they leave the palace. As they walk, Jeanne says she wants to save the books, but does not want to die to do it. Michelangelo says he does not plan for the children to die, but sometimes it is unavoidable. He outlines a plan to save the books while he distracts the crowd. He tells them to take the books to Mont-Saint-Michel.

At the book burning Michelangelo's eyes look like fire in the light. Jacob suggests they pray and William asks if it should be a Christian prayer or a Jewish prayer. Jacob says it does not matter.

Several carts are wheeled to the site. Jeanne and Jacob see old, tattered books in the piles that look like they have been read and loved. Both decide those are the books they will save.

A crier announces that the king will pay any Jew who chooses to convert that day. None come forward. The idea of someone converting seems crazy to Jeanne and William. They believe that God will save Jacob's soul just as he will theirs.

Michelangelo yells out for the burning to stop and climbs onto the pyre. Blanche orders the books to be burned and Michelangelo with them. Jeanne carries Gwenforte away from the fire while Jacob runs with his arms full of books. A friar pulls the books from Jacob's hands and the children keep running.

The narrator interrupts the story and asks if Michelangelo is dead. The nun says he was burned with the books. Aron the butcher is saddened at the loss of so many copies of the Talmud. The narrator asks the nun what happens next with the children.

Chapter 22, The Tenth Part of the Nun's Tale starts the morning after the burning. The children and Gwenforte are in the forest of Vincennes. Jacob says that Michelangelo's death is not worth the saving of all the copies of the Talmud. He wonders why God would let Michelangelo die.

That night they sleep outside the Grandmontine abbey. They argue about where they should go next. Jacob suggests they split up so that Jeanne can go home and he can be with Yehuda. William asks where he would go. He is angry and says it would be easier for Jacob and Jeanne if he just went to live in a leper colony. Jacob says he did not mean that and William mutters, "My ass you didn't" (280). This reminds Jeanne of the donkey that William left at the inn and the books that were in the donkey's packs.



William recalls seeing a book that was different from the rest and they wonder if it might have been the Talmud. They ask for directions to the Holy Cross-Roads Inn.

The nun stops her story and they hear voices in the yard of the inn. They go into the yard and see the children and their dog. William says he is looking for his donkey. The innkeeper takes the children to the satchels and they discover some books in Hebrew at the bottoms of the packs.

Chapter 23, The Friar's Tale and the Troubadour's Tale starts with the children sitting at a table in the inn. The children alternate between being proud of having saved the books and sad at the loss of Michelangelo. Jeanne wonders how they can have joy and pain all at the same time. Jacob wonders why God allows it. A drunken friar named Master Bacon hears his comment and joins the conversation to talk about theology.

The friar tells them the question of why a God who is all powerful allows bad things to happen is the hardest question of all. He tells them that when Job asked the question, God asked him who he was and whether he was there when God created the world. He says that means that people cannot know what is good and what is bad because we cannot understand God's plan.

A troubadour named Chretien says he has an answer to the question. Chretien says that God is a troubadour. He says people are characters in God's song about life and that while Michelangelo's death and the death of Jacob's parents may not be beautiful, the song still could be.

The innkeeper asks the children where they are going next and William tells him they are going to Mont-Saint-Michel to save the books. The narrator jumps in and offers to lead them.

The next morning the narrator is excited to be going with the children and muses that God sometimes "smiles on the fox and puts the rabbit in his path" (296). As they walk, William asks the narrator about his life. When the narrator says he is a chronicler, William wonders who the right people to hear their story are. The narrator avoids answering.

At night when they rest Jacob takes out one of the books and reads it. The narrator wishes he did not have to kill the children.

Jacob discovers one of the books is the Bible written in Hebrew. He points out to William that if his abbot did not read Hebrew, he probably did not know the book was a Bible. He wonders how many Bibles were also burned.

When the children go to sleep, the narrator takes out his knife. He holds it while he watches the children sleep.

Jacob reads to the other children from the Talmud. The story he reads shows that the whole of the Torah is about people treating others the way they want to be treated. Jeanne comments that that is what Jesus taught, too. Jacob says that his rabbi taught



that Hillel was one of Jesus' teachers. The narrator says that is true and that he learned it at the Cathedral School of Avignon.

William then asks the narrator who he is. The narrator says his name is Etienne d'Arles and the children beg to know more.

In Chapter 24, The Inquisitor's Tale, the narrator says that he is an Inquisitor. During his first assignment Etienne fell in love with a woman, which was forbidden. He was punished and told that he would be expelled if he made another mistake. He vowed that he would perform his next assignment well enough to redeem himself. His next assignment was to get rid of Gwenforte.

Etienne tells the children he began collecting stories as evidence, but as he heard the stories he began to believe in them as saints. Then he takes out his knife and says he cannot go back to Rome and say they are saints because it would start an inquiry. He says that if they are martyred he can be the one who discovered these saints.

Etienne stands as if to stab the children with his knife, but instead he thrusts it into the ground and says he cannot kill them. He sobs and Jeanne comforts him and tells him that he is forgiven.

## Analysis

The primary theme that is explored in this section of the novel is the idea that people cannot know God's plan. The children, who have learned that part of being a saint is being martyred, worry about their fate. Michelangelo tells them that while he does not plan for the children to die, it may be unavoidable. This suggests that Michelangelo is aware that he and the children cannot control their own fates and that what will happen will be according to God's plan. Later, when Michelangelo dies, Jacob questions God's plan saying that no amount of books saved could equal the loss of their friend. He wonders why God would let such a thing happen. After the children discover that there are copies of the Talmud in the donkey's packs at the inn, they feel both elated and sad. Jacob again wonders how God could allow them to feel two such opposite emotions at the same time.

The author uses an example from the Bible to explain the answer to God allowing bad things to happen and also uses a metaphor. The Bible story that Gidwitz uses is the story of Job, a faithful man who was severely tested, to suggest that what people perceive as bad things are merely things that people do not understand. Then, Gidwitz follows up this story with a metaphor in which life is a song and people are the characters in it. Because people are characters, they cannot know how the story will end, so they cannot know what is good and what is bad. He further explains that even though bad things happen, like the deaths of Jacobs parents, it does not make life any less beautiful in the same way that a song can be sad and beautiful at the same time.

The author also continues to include the theme of learning more about people before judging them. William and Jeanne show growth in terms of this theme when they react



to the king's promise to pay any Jews who convert to Christianity by thinking the notion is ridiculous. Where they once believed Jacob to be so different from them, they now believe that his soul is just as worthy of saving as theirs are. More growth is shown when the children decide together that it does not matter whether they say a Christian prayer or a Jewish one since they will be praying to the same God.

Gidwitz further enforces the idea of one God when Jacob reads from the Talmud. The story he reads teaches that people should treat others the way they want to be treated. Jeanne points out that Jesus teaches this same lesson, thus showing that there is little difference between the two religions. In fact, both Jacob and Etienne agree that Jesus was taught by a Jewish scholar named Hillel. And, in looking at the books in the satchel, Jacob discovers that some of the books are actually Bibles written in Hebrew, again showing there is little difference between the two religions.

The author brings in another reference to the Bible when Aron is saddened by the loss of so much wisdom in the burned books. Aron mutters, "My God...my God...why have you forsaken us?" (275) This quote alludes to a verse in the book of Matthew in which Jesus says from the cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46, NRSV) The author's use of this particular verse suggests the severity of the loss of so much wisdom.

In addition to showing growth in the characters of the children, the author also provides some additional hints about Michelangelo. When the children see him towering above the crowd at the book burning, they notice that his eyes look like fire. Then, when the narrator questions the nun about Michelangelo's death, she answers the question by saying that he burned, but does not confirm his death. This conversation also indicates there is more to the nun's identity as well since once again she seems to know more than she should.

Although the children have shown growth, they experience a brief setback in their friendship when they are frustrated after Michelangelo's death and the book burning. Their despair causes them to argue about what they should do next. William shows that he still worries about being an outsider when he suggests that Jeanne and Jacob do not care what happens to him.

The argument between the children also serves to move the story forward since it is during the argument that Jeanne remembers that William left his donkey and the satchels of books back at the Holy Cross-Roads Inn. The author has previously suggested that some of the books in the satchels might be Jewish books. The old tattered books that Jeanne and Jacob notice on the pyre remind the reader that William also saw an old book in the donkey's pack.

When the children arrive at the inn, the storytelling motif essentially comes to an end and the action of the book takes place in the present time with the narrator taking part in the children's quest.



The author slowly reveals the narrator's identity to be Etienne d'Arles, an inquisitor. His intentions are first revealed in a metaphor in which he compares himself to a fox and the children to rabbits. However, he does not tell the children who he is until he conspires to travel with them to Mont-Saint-Michel. Instead, the author offers glimpses into his thoughts and shows that he is conflicted about what he must do by having him hold his knife while the children sleep and his inability to rest due to his doubts. When he finally tells the children who he is, he thrusts the knife, which symbolizes his indecision, into the ground and breaks down in tears. Jeanne further proves her saintliness when she places her hand on his shoulder and tells him that he is forgiven.

## Discussion Question 1

What information does the author provide about the narrator prior to the revelation of his identity that might imply his intentions toward the children? Were you surprised by his identity?

## Discussion Question 2

The children struggle with a very difficult theological question, which is why bad things happen. Do you agree with Master Bacon's or the troubador's explanation? Or, do both suggest the same answer?

## Discussion Question 3

What similarities between the Jewish religion and the Christian religion do the children discover? What is the author trying to say by including these similarities?

## Vocabulary

dutifully, malevolent, clad, ferociously, pyre, platoon, parchment, convert, wisdom, tumult, offensive, nuzzle, bellowed, satchels, slumped



# Chapters 25-27

## Summary

Chapter 25, The Second Part of the Inquisitor's Tale starts the next morning. The narrator is well-rested having slept with Gwenforte next to him and sleeping better than he has since his first assignment. He reflects that the children have truly forgiven him and seem to fully trust him again.

As they walk, Jacob tells about things he read in the Talmud, including the idea that people are like pomegranates and a discussion on the story of Cain and Abel. This leads to a discussion of how many lifetimes they saved by saving five books and all of the work that went into them.

They come to a hilltop where they can see Mont-Saint-Michel ahead. Gwenforte runs excitedly ahead. They reach a section of the road that is washed out and find Marmeluc there. He says he has been waiting for them and that most of France knew they would go there and that the king and his mother are on their way along with many knights to get the books back.

They go to an inn that lies in a town outside of Mont-Saint-Michel. The innkeeper, Clotho, feeds them. Jeanne invites him to join them, but he refuses.

In Chapter 26, The Third Part of the Inquisitor's Tale the children are sleeping at the inn. During the night Jacob and William hear sounds from where Jeanne is sleeping. They are later awakened when an army of knights approaches. Clotho leads them through the causeway so that they will not sink in quicksand. They turn to look back and see the knights charging toward them. When they do, the horses sink into the quicksand taking the knights with them.

Joinville begs the king to call the knights back saying it is a sign from God. Blanche refuses and says it is not a sign but a test. Louis finally calls a retreat after Joinville begs him.

Blanche angrily rides her horse toward the bay and begins to sink. Jeanne screams and Gwenforte runs toward Blanche and grabs her sleeve. The children lie down and hold on to each other to pull Blanche to safety. They struggle and are about to fail when the narrator throws himself to the ground and grabs on to Jacob to help them.

William tells Marmeluc to take the books to the abbey and Jeanne says that Michelangelo will be waiting for them. The boys remind her that he is dead and Jeanne says that Michelangelo is Saint Michael the Archangel.

William carries Blanche back to the king. Louis asks the children to bless him. He reveals that he knows Jacob is Jewish. He says that God has always worked miracles through unexpected people. He tells the children to keep the books and then leaves.



In Chapter 27, The Fourth Part of the Inquisitor's Tale, they all arrive at Mont-Saint-Michel where Michelangelo is waiting for them. Michelangelo laughs when William says he does not look like an angel. He also says that he will have to come up with a new form for himself since people saw him burn. Jeanne realizes that Gwenforte likes Michelangelo so much because he is an angel. Michelangelo says he spent a lot of time with Gwenforte before God sent her back.

Jacob suddenly becomes angry and demands to know why God put them through so much. He wants to know why God did not just make the things he wanted to happen just happen rather than involving them. Michelangelo explains that God does not work like that; He works through people.

Michelangelo addresses the narrator. The narrator says that because of the stories he gathered he knows he was wrong. He mentions the nun who he says knew a lot of the story. Michelangelo tells him that he only fears two beings in the universe and both of them appear as a little old woman.

Jeanne asks Michelangelo what happens next and he tells her that he does not know because it is up to them. He tells Jeanne her parents miss her and tells Jacob that Yehuda would like him to come and live with them. William looks uncomfortable and then Michelangelo tells him that he can go to Robert de Sorbonne's college. Or, he says, they can stay together and go around doing God's work. Jeanne says they may do that until they are martyred. Jacob asks when that will be and Michelangelo tells William that he knows the answer and asks what martyr means in Latin or Greek. William says it means "witness." Michelangelo reminds them that they are already witnesses.

Michelangelo then asks the narrator what he will do. He says he will follow the children and record the work they do.

## Analysis

This final section of the novel brings the children's quest to save the books to an end. In so doing, the author continues to explore the theme of God using unlikely people. Marmeluc returns to the story in order to warn the children that the king is headed their way. Marmeluc, a knight who initially pursued the children and Gwenforte, has been changed by their miraculous deeds and now protects them.

Another unlikely person who helps in their quest is Clotho, the innkeeper near Mont-Saint-Michel. He is an old hunch-backed man who seems more bothered by his customers than he is pleased to see them. He reluctantly offers them lodging and food and refuses to talk to them despite Jeanne's efforts to win him over with her kind ways. Yet, when the knights ride toward the inn, Clotho leads them to safety through the dangerous causeway. God uses this grumpy, physically handicapped man as a hero to keep the children from falling into the quicksand.





Finally, when Blanche is about to sink into the quicksand, it is the children and Etienne who save her. The children have little reason to save this woman who has been their enemy, but they do because they know it is the right thing to do. Their act of kindness is what allows the quest to come to a successful end since Blanche cannot continue pursuing them after they save her and the king is grateful for his mother being saved.

King Louis verbalizes the theme directly when he asks the children for a blessing, including Jacob, whom he admits that he knows is Jewish. He says, "Since days of old, God has always worked his miracles through those we least expect. The weakest, the poorest, the youngest" (336). This idea is a central belief in the Christian religion since the Bible is full of people who are slaves, tax collectors, women, and peasants that God chooses to carry out his work. Indeed, Christ, the very center of Christianity, is born a helpless baby to an unwed mother and a carpenter father. Even he seems unlikely to be a hero of any kind, let alone the Savior.

The narrator also includes the theme of people being unable to know God's plan with Michelangelo explaining to the children why they have been through so much and what they might do next. Jacob is angry by the fact that God has tested them with so many difficulties, and rightfully so considering he has lost his parents. He wonders why God could not just save the books in some miraculous feat rather than making them endure the things they have. Michelangelo tells him that God does not "work like poof!" (340). This explanation combines the theme of God's plan with the theme of God using unlikely people when Michelangelo goes on to say, "God works through people. Like you" (340).

The author suggests that while God may use people to do His work, people still have free will. He does this when Michelangelo tells the children it is completely up to them what they do next. They can choose to go their separate ways to the people who wish to have them as a part of their lives, or they can stay together and continue doing God's work.

The story wraps up in a satisfactory manner since Michelangelo indicates that each of the children has a good place to go; Jeanne can go to her parents who miss her, Jacob can live with Yehuda, and William can study at Sorbonne's university. Even Etienne's story has a happy ending since Michelangelo welcomes him rather than being angry with him for considering killing the children, which shows he has been forgiven for his mistakes.

The author finally reveals Michelangelo's true identity as the Archangel Michael, which explains several things that have occurred in the book. Gwenforte has been so comfortable with Michelangelo because he is an angel and because they spent time together before Gwenforte came back to life. Michelangelo's eyes glowing like fire at the book burning now makes sense since he is an angel. And, the reader may recall that the nun did not confirm Michelangelo's death in the fire, but instead stated only that he burned with the books.



The author also reveals the identity of the nun. Michelangelo tells Etienne that the nun is one of the two entities in the universe that the angel fears. Since the nun has spoken only in kindness through telling her stories, the author indicates that the nun is God, which explains how she could know so much when she was never physically with the children.

Gidwitz concludes the novel with an explanation of what it means to be martyred by again discussing the etymology of the word. The word “martyr” means “witness.” Michelangelo tells the children that they have always been witnesses for God, so they are already martyrs. Therefore, they do not have to die to be saints.

## **Discussion Question 1**

What does Michelangelo mean when he says the nun is one of the two beings he fears? Who is the nun? Why might the author say that both of the beings Michelangelo fears appear in the same guise?

## **Discussion Question 2**

Why do the children save Blanche? How does this help to end their quest successfully?

## **Discussion Question 3**

What does Michelangelo mean when he tells the children they are already martyrs?

## **Vocabulary**

heretics, rabbis, whorls, buffeted, imposition, accurate, transform, causeway, lurching, silhouetted, waddle, flailing, submerged, sopping, mascot



# Characters

## Jeanne

Jeanne is a peasant girl who is looked down upon by many because of her lowly station in life. However, Jeanne has an ability that sets her apart from others. Jeanne sees visions and fears that she will be burned as a witch because of them. When she is taken away from her village by the knights, she meets William and Jacob, with whom she forms a fast and indelible bond.

Jeanne is quiet about her ability and a bit afraid to share what she sees with others because Old Theresa instructed her never to tell others about her visions. She says little about them except when she is forced to or must do so to save a friend. Jeanne's visions allow her to identify the real king and to foretell the coming of the dragon. And, finally, it is Jeanne's visions that reveal the true identity of Michelangelo as the Archangel Michael.

Jeanne is a brave girl who values her friendship with Jacob and William. She is often the first to step out to right a wrong, such as when the knights threaten to kill Jacob when she first meets him. She also is not afraid to speak the truth, even in the face of people whose stations in life are above her. This is shown when she identifies the true king even when everyone else believes Joinville is the king.

## William

William is an enormous boy who is a monk and of African heritage. He is intelligent and talkative to the point that it annoys the other monks. His love of a good argument is what gets him expelled from his monastery after he argues with Brother Bartholomew about Saracens and then breaks a stone bench with his bare hands. William's special ability is his great strength, which he uses to defend his smaller friends.

William starts out the book believing that peasants are lazy, Jews are heathens, and women are sinners due to the things he has been taught by Brother Bartholomew. However, he shows growth throughout the book as his ideas change through his friendship with Jacob and Jeanne.

William sometimes feels left out because of the color of his skin. He is the only person of color in the monastery where he is raised. Later, when he tries to talk to some people on the road and help them with their cart, they are frightened of him because of his dark skin. And, when he sees Jeanne and Jacob together, he feels like their bond with each other is stronger than their bond with him, so he worries that they will leave him out.



## Jacob

Jacob is a Jewish boy who is quiet and seen as odd in his town because he prefers the company of adults to the company of other children. Jacob is intelligent and a natural healer as he is the only one who can figure out why Levi's son blinks the way he does. In fact, Jacob's healing powers are his special ability. He first performs a miraculous healing when he finds Aron the butcher injured after the fire and uses yarrow root to quickly heal the wound on Aron's head. Later, he uses his healing ability to save Haya after he is burned by the dragon. Jacob's knowledge of healing also allows him to defeat the dragon, whom he determines to merely have a terrible stomachache from having eaten cheese.

Jacob is a devout Jew and speaks openly about his faith when asked. Marmeluc has never met a Jew before, so when he asks Jacob about his religion, Jacob explains Jewish beliefs to him. He is also a defender of his people since he readily argues with his friend William when William calls Yehuda a heathen.

## Gwenforte

Gwenforte is Jeanne's dog. When Jeanne was a baby, Gwenforte killed a snake to save her. Jeanne's parents misinterpreted the situation and killed Gwenforte, fearing that she had harmed their baby. Gwenforte comes back to life at the beginning of the novel and travels with the children through their adventures. She often provides insight into a person or situation through her reactions. For example, she is immediately comfortable with Michelangelo even though the children are wary of the huge monk who turns out to be the Archangel Michael. She also serves to move the children forward when they hesitate since it is she who runs to follow Michelangelo from Abbot Hubert's office and later runs toward Mont-Saint-Michel.

## Michelangelo di Bologna

Michelangelo, whom the children first call Red, Fat, and Wicked, is initially portrayed as an evil monk who comes to take Theresa away to be burned at the stake. Jeanne fears he will burn her as well. However, it turns out that Michelangelo has been following the children to save them rather than to harm them. He catches up to them just as Abbot Hubert is going to kill Gwenforte and then have them burned at the stake. He saves the children and draws them into the quest to save the Jewish books from being burned. He is burned with the books, but the author later reveals that he is not dead. He is really the Archangel Michael and spent time with Gwenforte before God sent her back to earth, which is why the dog is immediately comfortable with him.



## King Louis

King Louis is a product of his upbringing and the society he lives in. He has been taught to believe that peasants and Jews are bad, so he speaks about them as though they are, even after having met Jeanne and Jacob. However, he is not a bad person since he does seek to protect the Jews in his kingdom, which he does when he sees a merchant strike a Jew as they travel through the streets. King Louis's mother is the one who orders the burning of the books and he simply goes along with it.

## Blanche

Blanche is King Louis's mother. She is fanatical about the rooting out of heresy and orders the burning of the books in order to destroy Jewish wisdom. She is so convinced that she is right about God wanting the books burned that she charges forward into the quicksand to retrieve the books from the children believing that God will help her. However, it is the children who save her and she is forced to walk back to the palace in defeat.

## Abbot Hubert

Abbot Hubert is the abbot at Saint-Denis that William is supposed to deliver books to. William believes the abbot is a good and pious man, but it turns out that he is wrong. Abbot Hubert is the one who ordered Gwenforte to be killed. When he has the children in his office, he tries to kill Gwenforte and plans to kill the children, but Michelangelo stops him.

## Narrator/Etienne d'Arles

Etienne is the narrator who gathers the stories told at the inn. His identity is not known until the last few chapters of the book when the author reveals that he is an inquisitor sent to gather evidence about the children. Through the stories he hears and his meeting with the children, he decides that they truly are saints and decides not to turn them.

## The Nun

The nun tells a good portion of the children's story. She is described as a little old woman with sparkly blue eyes and a mischievous smile. She seems to know a great deal more than she should. At the end of the book Michelangelo tells Etienne that she is one of the only two beings in the universe that he fears, which indicates that the nun is actually God.



## **Rabbi Yehuda**

Rabbi Yehuda is Jacob's cousin and a famous Jewish writer. He is also Michelangelo's best friend. He and his wife provide the children with shelter after they run from Abbot Hubert's office.

## **Marmeluc**

Marmeluc is one of the knights who is initially sent to burn the grove and take Jeanne away. Through his dealings with the children and Jeanne's healing of his brother, Marmeluc comes to believe in them as saints.



# Symbols and Symbolism

## The Burned Books

The burned books symbolize the loss of a great deal of Jewish wisdom. William talks about the way that the destruction of a single book is like the loss of several lives. He says this because the work of many people goes into creating a book, particularly in medieval times when books were copied by hand.

## Gwenforte's Death

Gwenforte's death is a symbol of needing to learn more about a person or a situation before jumping to conclusions, which is one of the author's central themes. Because Jeanne's parents did not look beyond the blood on Gwenforte's coat, they assumed she had harmed Jeanne when she had actually saved her.

## Etienne's Knife

Etienne's knife is a symbol of his indecision about what to do with the children. He holds the knife while the children sleep and he thinks about his situation and what he believes. Later, when he reveals to the children who he is and decides that he cannot kill them, he thrusts the knife into the ground showing that he no longer has any doubt.

## Etienne's Change

Etienne's change from an inquisitor sent to capture or kill the children to a man who believes in the miracles they have performed and that they are saints represents being open to a change of mind. After learning all of the facts surrounding the children and meeting them, Etienne opens himself up to believing in them even though it may not be in his best interest.

## Michelangelo and Yehuda's Friendship

The friendship between Michelangelo and Yehuda symbolizes the idea that people from very different backgrounds can still be friends. Michelangelo is a monk and Yehuda is a Jewish rabbi, but they still consider one another best friends and each respects the wisdom of the other.



## **Gwenforte's Reactions to People and Situations**

Gwenforte's reactions symbolize making the right choice. Gwenforte is often the first one in the group to make a decision about what to do next or who to trust and she is always right. She races after Michelangelo when he saves the children from Abbot Hubert even though the children still think he is evil. She also recognizes Blanche as a villain since she barks and growls at the woman.

## **Cheese**

For Jeanne, the smelly cheese she tastes symbolizes life. She says it is very strong and not necessarily good at times, but that it changes and gets better.

## **Light**

The light in the lord's great hall represents and reveals truth. The author describes the light in the hall as showing the truth about the people there, such as the way a travelling preacher looks "cruel and frightening" in the light (160).

## **William's Belt**

William's belt symbolizes his heritage. It is the only thing he has from his African mother, so he keeps it safely hidden in his mattress.

## **Troubadour's Song**

The troubadour's song represents the way that people do not know God's plan because they are like characters in a song sung by a troubadour. The troubadour tells the group at the inn that God is a troubadour and that sometimes the song will be about troubling things, but it can still be beautiful.





# Settings

## Holy Cross-Roads Inn

The Holy Cross-Roads Inn is where the narrator sits to gather stories about the children. The children meet at the inn when Jeanne is brought there by Sir Fabian and his knights, William stops there for the night on his way to Saint-Denis, and Jacob wanders there after his village is burned. Later, they will again find themselves at the inn when they return to get the books that William left with his donkey, which he left in the stable of the inn.

The name of the inn is significant since it does represent a crossroads for both the children and for the narrator, who is revealed to be an Inquisitor. For the children, the inn represents the crossroads at which they will either succeed in their quest to save at least a single copy of the Talmud or they will fail. For the narrator, he is literally at a holy crossroads in which he is uncertain whether or not to believe the children are saints. And, if they are saints, he must struggle with the possibility of allowing them to be martyred so that he can say he discovered them and redeem himself.

## Saint-Denis

Saint-Denis is the destination of the children after they meet at the inn. William has been instructed by his abbot to go to Saint-Denis to deliver some books to Abbot Hubert. Jacob is on his way to Saint-Denis to meet with his parents at his cousin Yehuda's house. Jeanne has nowhere else to go, so the boys convince her to come with them.

Saint-Denis is the monastery where Michelangelo di Bologna is the prior. When the children arrive at Saint-Denis they discover that Michelangelo is actually a good person who has been trying to help them while Abbot Hubert is bad and ordered Gwenforte to be killed.

## Yehuda's House

The children end up at Yehuda's house after Michelangelo saves them from Abbot Hubert. Yehuda's house is small and cozy and the children feel welcome and comfortable there. While at Yehuda's house, the children learn that Michelangelo believes they are saints and that he is a good person who wants to help them. They also discover that Michelangelo, a monk, and Yehuda, a Jewish rabbi, are best friends. It is at Yehuda's house that the children learn of their ultimate quest to stop the burning of Jewish books in Paris.



## Mont-Saint-Michel

Mont-Saint-Michel is the final destination the children travel to in their attempt to save some copies of the Talmud. When they arrive at Mont-Saint-Michel they discover that Michelangelo is not dead as they had supposed after seeing him burned in Paris, but is instead alive and the Archangel Michael.

## The Causeway

The causeway leading to Mont-Saint-Michel is the site of the final battle in the children's attempts to save the books. Here they discover the land is flooded and unsafe to cross. When the king and his army approach, an innkeeper leads them safely across the causeway while several knights sink to their deaths in the quicksand. When Blanche attempts to cross the quicksand, she sinks in and the children save her. Because they save Blanche, the king gives up his pursuit of them and allows them to leave with the books.



# Themes and Motifs

## Storytelling Motif

Gidwitz uses a storytelling motif similar to that of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in which Chaucer's characters share stories as they travel as part of a storytelling contest. In *The Inquisitor's Tale*, characters tell stories about the three children while gathering at an inn where the narrator sits hoping to collect information about the children.

Each chapter of the book is told from the perspective of one of the storytellers, with several of them having more than one chapter. Each storyteller brings his or her unique voice to the telling of the overall plot concerning the children and their quest to save Jewish books. To differentiate between when a story is being told and when the book has returned to the present time and the gathering at the inn, the parts that take place in the present time are in bold face type.

## God Uses Unlikely People to do His Work

The author uses the theme of God using unlikely people to do His work as the story of the children and the question of whether or not they are saints plays out. The three main characters seem to be very unusual people for God to use since Jeanne is a peasant, William is a person of color, and Jacob is Jewish, not to mention that they are still children. However, they are successful in defeating a dragon, saving Jewish books from burning, and changing the hearts of at least three people along the way (Marmeluc, King Louis, and Etienne).

King Louis confirms this theme after the children save his mother and he asks them for a blessing since he now believes they are saints. Jacob is astonished to discover that the king has known all along that he is Jewish, yet he still believes that Jacob is worthy of being a saint. The king responds that God has always used the people one would least expect to do his work.

Michelangelo also confirms the theme when he explains to Jacob that God uses people to do his work and does not work in a magical sense with instantaneous results.

## People Cannot Know God's Plan

The theme of people being unable to know God's plan is most evident in the way that Jacob often questions why things happen. When Michelangelo appears to die on the pyre, Jacob wonders why God would allow such a thing. And, when their quest comes to an end, Jacob wonders why God would put them through so much to achieve His goals.



Master Bacon and the troubadour present two ideas about why people cannot understand what God has in store. Master Bacon uses the story of Job from the Bible to explain that people cannot understand God's ways because they were not present when God created the world. He says that it is impossible to know what is good and what is bad if one is not present when the thing is created.

The troubadour offers another take on the question of God's plan when he says that God is a troubadour and life is his song. Since people are characters in the song, they cannot understand the overall story. He goes on to say that there may be terrible things that happen in the song, like the deaths of Jacob's parents, the song can still be beautiful overall.

## People are Sometimes Persecuted for their Differences

Throughout the novel, the author explores the theme of people being persecuted for their differences. The children are all excellent examples of the theme since each of them comes from a group of people that is persecuted.

Jeanne is a peasant and the peasant class in medieval Europe is looked down upon for their lack of money. Brother Bartholomew teaches his students that peasants are lazy and that they lie. Sir Fabian and his knights believe peasants are filthy people who enjoy filth, so it is not difficult for them to believe that Jeanne would hide in a manure pile, though she never would. King Louis says that he believes peasants are "filthy," "unruly," and "ignorant" (229).

William is a Saracen, which can mean either a Muslim or someone who looks foreign, which he does in medieval Europe since he has dark skin. William's skin color has always made him feel like an outsider, and it is a feeling he has difficulty shaking since he worries throughout the book that Jeanne and Jacob will leave him out. He is quick to assume that people will persecute him because of his ethnicity as is evidenced by the fact that he assumes Sorbonne will ask him if he is a Saracen before considering him as a student at the university.

Jacob is Jewish and Jews are considered heathens by many people in medieval Europe. Jews are considered unethical in their money lending practices, as is shown by the way King Louis talks about them giving out usurious loans and making money lending a criminal act. He compares the Jews to peasants and uses the same adjectives to describe the Jews. William and Jeanne are both initially taken aback by Jacob's Jewish faith and believe that God would want him to convert. However, as they get to know him and to know more about the Jewish religion, they realize that Jews and Christians worship the same God. Many people question whether Jacob could be a saint since he is Jewish, including Jacob himself.

The author suggests that perhaps prejudice is a learned behavior in that William initially believes at least some of what Brother Bartholomew teaches about women, peasants,



and Jews until he actually meets a female peasant and a Jew and becomes fast friends with them. In addition, Michelangelo tells Jacob that he thinks King Louis has been taught to hate peasants and Jews.

## Learn About People Firsthand Before Jumping to Conclusions

Throughout the novel the author suggests the idea that it is important to learn about people for one's self rather than jumping to conclusions about them. The children's reactions to one another when they first meet are examples of this theme.

Jeanne is leery of William because he is a giant monk. She assumes that he is just like Michelangelo di Bologna, another giant monk, whom she fears because she believes he took Theresa away to be burned at the stake. William is uncomfortable in the presence of a female peasant and a Jew because of what Brother Bartholomew has taught him about women, peasants, and Jews. Jacob is not happy to be with two Christians because of the fact that Christians burned his village. However, once the children start talking to each other, they learn that they are not so different and they grow to genuinely like and trust one another. Though it is suggested a few times in the book that they could split up and go their separate ways, they always choose to stay together.

Michelangelo is another good example of this theme. Jeanne assumes from the beginning that he is a bad man and refers to him as Red, Fat, and Wicked. She saw Michelangelo take Theresa away and believed others when they said he was taking the woman to be burned for witchcraft. However, when she meets Michelangelo, she learns that he is a good person who took Theresa away to protect her. Likewise, Michelangelo pursues the children not to harm them, but to help them. In the end, the children learn that far from being evil, Michelangelo is really the Archangel Michael.



# Styles

## Point of View

The Inquisitor's Tale is told from several different points of view because there are several different people sharing stories about the children while gathered at the inn. Each story teller recounts their share of the story in the past tense. For the most part the story is told with a limited perspective since the story tellers do not share any insight into the thoughts of the children, but sometimes observe their emotions based on what they see. However, the nun, who is really God, is the exception. Her point of view is omniscient.

When the individual stories are interrupted by the narrator or someone else who is at the inn, the novel changes to present tense and the narrator speaks using the first person perspective. Once the children arrive at the Holy Cross-Roads Inn for the final time, the remainder of the novel is from the narrator's perspective and stays in present tense.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the book varies depending on who the story teller for the chapter is. For example, when the jongleur is speaking, the author writes his speech using an accent and uses less complex words than he does when an educated character like Brother Jerome is speaking.

The author writes to the middle school level, but introduces a number of terms that may be unfamiliar to young readers, such as "martyr" or "troubadour." However, these terms provide an opportunity for learning about medieval times or higher level concepts. The author does delve into the etymology of some words to show how knowing the origins of a word can change one's perception of them.

## Structure

The novel consists of a Prelude and 27 chapters. Each chapter is titled to indicate who the storyteller is for that chapter. For example, the first chapter is called "Chapter 1: The Brewster's Tale" to let readers know that the story is being told from the perspective of Marie the brewster.

When the stories are interrupted and the perspective changes to the narrator, the type changes to bold face to indicate the change.



## Quotes

Just as peasants can be popes and Jews can teach us the Bible and women can be disciples of Jesus, Muslims can save your very life!

-- William (chapter 3)

**Importance:** William says this when he is arguing with Brother Bartholomew, who has a very narrow view of the world and the people in it. Brother Bartholomew teaches his students that virtually anyone who is different from them is evil, including peasants, women, Jews, and Saracens. William disagrees with the monk, which gets him expelled from the monastery. This quote is an example of the author's theme of people being persecuted for their differences.

Because, she realized, if she was going to be burned at the stake for magic—well, they would be, too.

-- The Nun (chapter 8)

**Importance:** The nun is the storyteller for the chapter of the book in which this quote occurs. This quote shows the point at which Jeanne begins to trust her new companions, Jacob and William. They have just shared their stories and why they have each left their homes. When Jeanne learns that each of them has a special ability too, she realizes they are all more alike than different and that she can trust these boys.

Where is my ass?

-- William (chapter 8)

**Importance:** This quote occurs when William realizes that he has left his donkey and the books he is to deliver to the Abbot Hubert at the inn. The quote is important not only because the donkey and books being left behind is important to the resolution of the children's quest to save copies of the Talmud, but also because it is an example of the humor the author infuses the book with. Gidwitz inserts moments of levity that appeal to his target audience to keep them entertained and to lighten the mood of a book that deals with some otherwise heavy themes.

God cured him. God made the plants and gave them their magic. I just used them.

-- Jacob (chapter 12)

**Importance:** Jacob says this to Marmeluc after curing Hays of the burns he suffered from the dragon. Jacob's explanation to Marmeluc shows that he believes his healing gift comes from God.

But after the story, I saw how he looked at them. Like he was worried that they had created some sort of bond that he could never break into.

-- The Chronicler (chapter 13)

**Importance:** This quote occurs after William has been separated from Jeanne and



Jacob while they battled the dragon. William is used to being an outsider because of his skin color and it is an insecurity he carries with him throughout the book. He worries that the time Jeanne and Jacob spent together and without him will have made their bond with each other stronger than their bond with him and he will again be an outsider.

Why did Gwenforte seem so comfortable with Red, Fat, and Wicked?  
-- The Nun (chapter 15)

**Importance:** The nun is telling the story at the time this quote occurs. She tells about how Gwenforte immediately feels comfortable around Michelangelo and lays at his feet in Yehuda's house. The children have believed that Michelangelo is their enemy up to this point, yet Gwenforte immediately accepts him as a friend. Gwenforte's reaction to Michelangelo is one of the first indications that Michelangelo is more than a monk.

I think he has been taught to hate the idea of Jews and peasants. By his mother, by the church, by his lords—who benefit from exploiting their peasants and confiscating the Jews' money on the flimsiest pretenses.

-- Michelangelo (chapter 19)

**Importance:** Michelangelo says this to Jacob when Jacob questions whether or not God might be telling King Louis to hate the Jews. Michelangelo's explanation indicates that prejudice is a learned thing and is not usually based on a person's real experiences with someone who is different, which is in keeping with the author's theme of learning about people before judging them.

I think we should pray,' Jacob whispered. 'A Jewish prayer or a Christian one?' William asked. 'I don't think it matters,' Jacob replied."

-- William and Jacob (chapter 21)

**Importance:** This quote occurs as the children stand waiting to carry out their plan to save some of the books from being burned. The fact that both William and Jacob have put aside their religious differences and believe it does not matter if they say a Jewish prayer or a Christian prayer shows growth in their acceptance of one another's differences.

You weren't there! So how can you know what's good and what's bad? How can you understand God's plan? It's greater than you!

-- Master Bacon (chapter 23)

**Importance:** Master Bacon says this to Jacob when he questions how God can allow bad things to happen. This quote represents the author's theme of people being unable to know God's plan.

And so I learned your story. And as I learned, something strange happened to me. I began to believe.

-- Etienne, the Narrator (chapter 24)





**Importance:** Etienne, the narrator, says this to the children when he reveals that he is an inquisitor and has been collecting their story as evidence to use against them. However, he has had a change of heart and now believes that the children truly are saints.

It is a sign from God! This is not His will! Call them back!  
-- Joinville (chapter 26)

**Importance:** Joinville says this as he and the king watch the knights sink into the quicksand when they try to pursue the children across the causeway. Joinville, like Etienne, has come to believe that the children are saints and believes that it would be wrong to capture them, so he begs the king to call the knights off.

Since days of old, God has always worked his miracles through those we least expect. The weakest, the poorest, the youngest.  
-- King Louis (chapter 26)

**Importance:** King Louis says this to Jacob after revealing that he knows that Jacob is Jewish. This quote is a statement of the author's theme that God uses unlikely people to do His work.