

# **The Little Prince Study Guide**

## **The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Little Prince Study Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Chapter I.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Chapter II.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Chapter III.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Chapter IV.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Chapter V.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Chapter VI.....</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Chapter VII.....</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Chapter VIII.....</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Chapter IX.....</a>	<a href="#">14</a>
<a href="#">Chapter X.....</a>	<a href="#">15</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XI.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XII.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XIII.....</a>	<a href="#">18</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XIV.....</a>	<a href="#">19</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XV.....</a>	<a href="#">20</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XVI.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XVII.....</a>	<a href="#">22</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XVIII.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XIX.....</a>	<a href="#">24</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XX.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XXI.....</a>	<a href="#">26</a>
<a href="#">Chapter XXII.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>



[Chapter XXIII..... 28](#)

[Chapter XXIV..... 29](#)

[Chapter XXV..... 30](#)

[Chapter XXVI..... 31](#)

[Chapter XXVII..... 32](#)

[Characters..... 33](#)

[Objects/Places..... 36](#)

[Social Concerns And Themes..... 39](#)

[Techniques..... 40](#)

[Themes..... 41](#)

[Style..... 43](#)

[Quotes..... 46](#)

[Adaptations..... 47](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 48](#)

[Literary Precedents..... 49](#)

[Copyright Information..... 50](#)



# Plot Summary

Published in 1943, *The Little Prince* is a fantasy about a pilot, stranded in the Sahara, who meets a small boy from another planet. The boy, who refers to himself as a prince, is on a quest for knowledge. The little prince asks questions of the pilot and tells the pilot of life on his own very small planet. This story is told in a simple fashion, as children's stories typically are, but it is not really a children's story. It is a story of a grown-up who has *almost* forgotten what is important. It is the story of the pilot's reconnection to his own sense of imagination and wonder. It is the story of the re-opening of the pilot's heart.

The action of the story is preceded by the pilot's recollection of his first attempt at drawing. He describes both the drawing and the reaction it inspires in the adults to whom he shows it. The lack of enthusiasm for his work, coupled with the total failure of grown-ups to comprehend it, is so disappointing to the author he stops drawing altogether. When he finds himself stranded in the Sahara many years later, it is with some irony the first request he receives from the little prince, who has appeared out of nowhere, is: "If you please--draw me a sheep!"

From that point on, the pilot and the little prince become inseparable. As the pilot continues to fumble with his aircraft, in hopes of repairing it before his supply of water runs out, the little prince tells him of all the places he has been and about life on his own small planet. In one story, the little prince recounts his realization that his lovely flower, his single prize possession, is in fact one of millions just like it. It is only after a series of new experiences that the prince comes to realize that his flower is truly special--not so much because it is a rose, as there are many, many roses--but because it is *his* rose. It is the time and care he takes with "her" that makes her special to him.

The novel follows the prince through an encounter with a businessman, a snake, a king, a fox and more. In each encounter, we see the little prince confront the limitations of the so-called "grown-up" mindset. We see the prince learning about life from flowers and animals while the grown-ups he encounters show him little more than what to avoid. In the end, therefore, it is fitting that it is the pilot who learns more from the little prince than he is able to teach the boy, in spite of the fact that throughout the book the boy is asking most of the questions. This point is emphasized on at least three separate occasions, when the author points out that the little prince ". . . never in his life let go of a question, once he had asked it."

When the story ends, the little prince has chosen to leave earth and return to his planet. He does so by enlisting the help of a poisonous snake, the same snake he met earlier in his travels. He allows himself to be bitten and he prepares to leave his body. The pilot is distraught and tries to save the little prince. He fails.

The pilot then comes to realize that something his little friend told him in the very beginning of the book is true: If you love something, sometimes just knowing it exists is enough to make you happy. The pilot looks up at the stars and knows that somewhere



out there, the little prince is back at home, on his own little planet, tenderly caring for his beautiful flower. He wonders about the sheep they both feared might eat it. He thinks to himself how important it is to ask oneself that very question: has the sheep eaten the flower? The story ends as the pilot says to himself "no grown-up will ever understand that this is a matter of so much importance!"



# Chapter I

## Chapter I Summary

The story begins when the author is six-years-old. He draws a picture of a boa constrictor who has just swallowed an elephant. He shows his drawing to a group of adults all of whom believe it to be a drawing of a hat. The author then draws a second picture of a boa constrictor who has eaten an elephant. This time he shows the elephant, clearly, inside the boa constrictor. When he shows his second drawing to the adults they tell him to stop drawing and focus on important subjects like reading, writing and arithmetic. Thus, the author's career as an artist both begins and ends.

## Chapter I Analysis

The action of the story begins with the scene described above, but the foundation is laid with the author's dedication. It is here we discover the true nature of what we are about to read. The book is dedicated to the author's best friend, Leon Werth, *when he was a little boy*. The reader knows, even before the story begins, that his willingness to reconnect with the innocence and imagination of childhood will determine his ability to understand and appreciate the author's work.



# Chapter II

## Chapter II Summary

Chapter II begins when the author, now a pilot, has an accident that lands him in the middle of the Sahara Desert. He begins to work on his plane, in hope of fixing the engine before his supply of water runs out. He sleeps on the desert sand that night and when he awakens he hears a voice saying, "If you please--draw me a sheep!" The pilot tells the prince that he cannot draw, but the little prince says that doesn't matter. So the pilot shows the prince something he has drawn before: the boa constrictor from the outside, with the elephant not showing except as a bulge. The prince immediately recognizes it for exactly what it is and the pilot is encouraged. He then draws his best sheep and gives it to the little prince. But the little prince says it won't do. After a series of attempts, the pilot finally draws a box with breathing holes in it and tells the prince that the sheep is inside the box. This satisfies the little prince.

## Chapter II Analysis

This chapter introduces us to the little prince. It also continues the theme of chapter I: growing up changes people--and not for the better. It takes the pilot several attempts to reconnect with the imagination and innocence of childhood, which he does through the drawings he makes for the little prince. Finally, the pilot is able to give the prince what he wants: he draws a box with breathing holes in it. The little prince is delighted with the drawing because now he can imagine that the perfect sheep is inside the box.

This is the key to the entire book: imagination must be honored and nurtured. The saddest part of growing up is losing one's ability to imagine. With the arrival of the little prince, the pilot rekindles his own imagination and it changes his life.



# Chapter III

## Chapter III Summary

The pilot attempts to find out more about the little prince. He asks questions but the boy does not answer most of them. He is clearly much more interested in his sheep and his own thoughts than in answering questions about himself. When the little prince mentions how nice it is that his sheep has a box to use for a house at night, the pilot offers to draw a rope for the prince to use to tie up the sheep. The prince is perplexed at this, having no idea why anybody would want to tie up a sheep. After a short discussion on the subject, the little prince informs the pilot there will be no need to tie up the sheep because there is no place for the sheep to wander off to. Where he lives, everything is very small.

## Chapter III Analysis

Two new concepts are introduced in this chapter: First, the idea of tying up the sheep and second, the realization that one can't go far if one is confined to a very small space. The tying up of the sheep represents control, and the smallness of space symbolizes shutting down or limiting one's exposure to outside influences. The adult, the pilot, suggests the rope to tie the sheep. The prince is baffled by the suggestion, not having the urge to control his sheep, only to love it. He is also saddened by the smallness of his planet. He understands that, "straight ahead of him, nobody can go very far . . . "

The author is telling us we must explore more than a single straight path in order to grow and develop and become what we are destined to be. This is the first glimpse of what the little prince discusses in later chapters: He left his planet because it was *too* small and he needed to learn about the world outside himself.





## Chapter IV

### Chapter IV Summary

The pilot discusses some of the differences in the way adults and children behave. He goes on to explain a bit more about the book he is writing and why he chose to write it. His purpose in writing the book is as much, he says, to remember the little prince as to write a book. He talks about having been discouraged from drawing when he was a child and reminds us that children understand what is important much better than adults do. He expresses his concern that he might be in danger of becoming too much like a grown-up so he makes a decision: in spite of his earlier choice to forego drawing and painting, he is now committed to drawing the artwork for this book.

### Chapter IV Analysis

The author bemoans the adult world of facts and figures. He compares that to the world of the little prince where feelings, imagination and curiosity are more important than figures. He tells the reader he has suffered grief in writing about the little prince. He is mourning both his friend and his own loss of innocence.



# Chapter V

## Chapter V Summary

This chapter provides the reader with some detail of life on the small planet inhabited by the little prince. It seems that the sheep he is so keen on acquiring is meant to eat little baobab bushes. Baobabs, apparently, if left unattended, grow so large that they threaten to take over the little prince's entire planet. Therefore, the prince spends a great deal of time removing the small baobab bushes as soon as he finds them. It is a matter of discipline. As the little prince points out, "When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care." The little prince tells the pilot of a lazy man who failed to curb his baobabs and the disastrous consequences of that failure. He then asks the pilot to make a drawing of a planet so overcome by baobabs, that it is uninhabitable. He wishes the pilot's drawing to be a lesson to all who follow. The pilot complies.

## Chapter V Analysis

The baobab tree story is a metaphor for what is important in life. First we care for ourselves, and then we must care for our environment. When a problem arises, we must act immediately to prevent unnecessary damage. If we fail to act when necessary, we suffer the fate of the lazy man whose planet is overcome by baobabs.



# Chapter VI

## Chapter VI Summary

The pilot discovers the prince's love of sunsets. The little prince tells the pilot he can see the sunset as many times a day as he likes, because his planet is so small that by merely moving a chair a few feet, he can be on the other side of the small globe. One day, he tells the pilot he saw the sun set forty-four times. The prince also confesses he is sad. When the pilot asks why, the little prince does not answer.

## Chapter VI Analysis

In this chapter the pilot learns of the prince's deep sadness. He tries to find out why the little prince is sad, but his new friend does not tell him. This chapter foreshadows future events by letting the reader know that the little prince left his planet for a reason and one day he will have reason to return.



# Chapter VII

## Chapter VII Summary

The pilot is focused on fixing his plane. Meanwhile, the little prince is deep in contemplation. When he decides to discuss his thoughts with the pilot, he asks if sheep eat flowers. The pilot answers, absent-mindedly. The little prince persists in asking a series of questions aimed at determining whether or not a flower's thorns might protect it. Eventually, out of frustration, the pilot answers glibly and tells the little prince he cannot talk about flowers and thorns and sheep when he's trying to do something of consequence. This gravely wounds, then angers, the little prince. He informs the pilot that loving a flower and protecting that flower are the most important things in the world and if anybody thinks it is of no consequence if the flower is eaten or not, then they are heartless and unfeeling. The prince sobs as he elaborates on the darkness that would befall him should his own beautiful flower be eaten. The pilot is overcome with guilt and sorrow for upsetting the little prince and does his best to comfort him. He turns his attention from engine repair to offering to draw a muzzle for the sheep, and a fence to protect the flower.

## Chapter VII Analysis

The message of this chapter is clear: what matters to the little prince is his love for his flower and his ability to protect her. He is wounded and insulted by the suggestion that a group of mechanical parts is of more consequence than matters of the heart.



# Chapter VIII

## Chapter VIII Summary

The little prince tells the pilot of his beautiful flower: How he first saw her emerge from the ground and thought she might be a strange kind of baobab. He tells the pilot all about her slow and meticulous grooming prior to showing herself and complains of her excessive vanity. He also confesses that his own limitations made it difficult for him to respond to her appropriately. He admits to feeling a little guilty about having left her. He says he was simply too young to know how to love her.

## Chapter VIII Analysis

The little prince's flower is symbolic of womankind. She is beautiful but hard to understand. She is moody too, but very easily assuaged with the right kind of attention. (Keep in mind this was written in 1943--stereotypes of women were the norm; therefore, this should not be interpreted to mean the author thinks less of women--only that he is aware of the qualities that make them different from men.)

While this chapter can be viewed as a metaphor for relationships between men and women, it also contains some specific lessons for relationships, in general. The little prince tells the pilot he was wooed by his flower's beauty and fragrance. He admits that he put too much attention on her words and not enough on her deeds. As he speaks to the pilot, he is describing a dynamic that occurs in almost every new relationship. Human beings are drawn to those who possess physical beauty. As such, they are easily led to believe what they are told, if the teller is attractive enough. This is true of men and women and of old and young. But in the end, what matters is understanding. Understanding takes maturity. This chapter ends as the little prince realizes he is now mature enough to properly care for his flower.



# Chapter IX

## Chapter IX Summary

This chapter takes the reader back to the preparations made by the little prince just prior to departing his planet to begin his journey. First, he cleans out his volcanoes (which tend to erupt now and again if not tended to.) Then he plucks the baobabs he can see. His final task is watering and covering his flower with the protective glass globe she had earlier insisted upon. But just as he is about to lower the globe over his flower, she speaks. Her words are of love and forgiveness. She does not rebuke him for leaving but says she understands and she will be fine.

## Chapter IX Analysis

The flower has finally come to understand the effect her behavior is having on the little prince. He has become sullen. She has failed to give love. Instead, she has focused on demanding this and that from him. She has been voicing her need for attention, praise, water, protection, etc. When she sees that she is about to lose the little prince, she stops making demands and apologizes to him. Both the flower and the prince learn through their interaction with each other. The lesson they learn is that caring for another requires being sensitive to the feelings of one another, which requires them to understand how they are different from each other and to accept those differences.



# Chapter X

## Chapter X Summary

The first stop on the prince's journey is a small planet ruled by a king. The king has no subjects. Naturally, when the little prince appears, the king is quite pleased. He explains to the prince all the orders he gives must be obeyed, but he also takes pains to make it known that if his orders are not followed, it is his own fault for issuing poor instructions. When the prince yawns, the king orders him to yawn more. When the prince says he cannot force a yawn, he is ordered to yawn sometimes, rather than on command. The king is very good and amiable. Still, he is a grown up, and as such he has a grown up flaw: he must control. Having no one and nothing on his planet over which to rule, he is very eager to persuade the little prince to stay on. He offers the prince a couple of choice posts in his court, but the little prince cannot be persuaded. He asks the king to order his departure and then the little prince takes his leave.

## Chapter X Analysis

This chapter begins a series of adventures the little prince has while seeking knowledge. In each case, the pattern is the same: The prince finds a planet inhabited by someone who has a certain grown-up quality that the prince does not possess. In communicating with each of the planet's inhabitants, the prince learns more and more about what is truly important to him. He also sees that becoming an adult is something of a hazard in and of itself. In this way, the little prince echoes the sentiments of the author in the first few chapters. As a child, the author wants to draw and paint, but he is discouraged by grown-ups who do not appreciate his imagination. The child grows up to become a pilot, but he maintains a strong belief that in doing so he has lost something he knows he will never get back. In this chapter, the little prince gets the same lesson the author learned by growing up--but the little prince learns it while still a child. He sees what he *will* lose when he becomes an adult.



# Chapter XI

## Chapter XI Summary

In this chapter the little prince encounters a man so conceited that he can hear only praise. He asks the little prince to praise him, and the little prince complies. But it is a boring way to spend a day and after a very short visit, the little prince takes his leave.

## Chapter XI Analysis

This is a simpler version of the prior chapter, with a different trait as its theme. Instead of controlling, as the king was compelled to do, the conceited man demands constant admiration. However, like the king who is compelled to rule others, the conceited man's need for constant praise and attention (known as *narcissism* in the language of psychologists) is very tiresome.





# Chapter XII

## Chapter XII Summary

The third planet the little prince visits is inhabited by a drunk. This "tippler" drinks to forget the shame of drinking. The little prince finds this absurd and does not spend much time there.

## Chapter XII Analysis

Here is another example of a metaphor so simple and elegant it is easy to miss the complexity of its content. When we attempt to hide from our problems, we make them worse, not better. The tippler drinks because he's ashamed. He's ashamed because he drinks. But something made him drink before his drinking began to shame him. It is this issue the tippler has never resolved. This adds a new twist to the theme begun in the chapter about the baobabs. In that metaphor, the reader is asked to consider how important it is to "nip things in the bud," so to speak. In this chapter we are given a more subtle, but related lesson: covering up or avoiding one problem will only force another to the surface--and often the second problem is worse than the first.



## Chapter XIII

### Chapter XIII Summary

The little prince meets a businessman obsessed with counting stars. This makes no sense to the prince, who wishes to know what the man *does* with the stars. When the man admits he simply counts them, the little prince is baffled. He goes on to explain that he too owns things: his flower and his planet. But unlike the businessman, who merely counts his possessions, the little prince actually cares for his. In this way, he tells the businessman, his ownership of them has meaning. But what meaning can come from simply counting stars? The businessman has no satisfactory answer to that question. So the little prince moves on.

### Chapter XIII Analysis

The businessman is interested in ownership--not control. He simply wants to *claim* things. There isn't anything he can do with the stars he claims, he just likes the idea they belong to him. This is yet another grown-up trait that defies explanation. The little prince questions the businessman, but can find no way to make sense of the man's need to own the stars.



# Chapter XIV

## Chapter XIV Summary

In this chapter the little prince meets the lamplighter. He is an archetypal adult, but instead of taking on the exaggerated qualities associated with success, this man is a simpleton. He has orders to light and extinguish a lamp and that is all he does. Since he began his job, the tiny planet he inhabits has increased the speed of its orbit such that the poor lamplighter must constantly either light or extinguish his lamp. It's a nonstop job and the lamplighter is exceedingly tired. While the little prince recognizes the absurdity of his situation, he also feels love for the lamplighter, who fulfils his orders without fail, no matter how tired he might be.

## Chapter XIV Analysis

The lamplighter is a different kind of grown-up from those the prince has encountered thus far. He is aware his orders do not fit his circumstance, but he does not have the ego or the intellect to address the issue. So he simply follows his original orders, despite the fact he is absolutely exhausted all the time. The prince's affinity for the lamplighter gives the reader an understanding of what separates adults from children, in both the mind of the author and that of the little prince. Adults, generally speaking, are very self-absorbed. Some are overly anxious to control others. Some feel the need to own a great deal of property. Others may use drink or some other form of escape to avoid responsibility (as we see in the first three occupants the little prince meets on their respective planets.) But the lamplighter is simple and good. He cares only that he does what he should. He does not think about himself at all. For this, the little prince loves him.



# Chapter XV

## Chapter XV Summary

When the little prince visits his sixth planet, he meets a geographer. The little prince asks the geographer what a geographer does and is treated to a thorough description. Expecting the geographer's expertise to have resulted in some exciting discoveries, the little prince asks him how many rivers and lakes and mountains are on his planet. But the geographer cannot tell him. It seems that while his credentials as a geographer are not in question, a lack of explorers makes it impossible for him to catalogue anything. A geographer, he explains to the little prince, cannot be bothered with exploring. That is too mundane a task for one as important as a geographer. So the little prince tells the geographer about life on his own planet and about his flower and his volcanoes. The geographer tells the prince that the flower is not important enough to be documented in his work because a flower is ephemeral. They discuss the meaning of this word and then the little prince departs for the seventh planet he will visit: planet Earth.

## Chapter XV Analysis

In this chapter the little prince comes in contact with the elitist mentality that characterizes certain well-educated adults. The author makes fun of the mindset that allows a man to feel important by virtue of his failure to contribute anything of value. The geographer is too important to explore, therefore, he has no information to write about. His own self-importance renders him useless in the context in which he lives, and yet, ironically, he finds a way to take pride in that. The geographer might symbolize a company CEO, one who has become so used to having others do all the work that when a crisis occurs and his assistance is needed, he has no idea what to do. Or he might represent a political leader who is caught in a crisis but is unable to provide any assistance because, while he knows how to *talk* about progress, he has no idea how to *achieve* it.



# Chapter XVI

## Chapter XVI Summary

This chapter consists of the author's assessment of the planet earth as it pertains to the general breakdown of adult types. He estimates there are over a hundred kings, almost 100,000 businessmen, three-quarters of a million tipplers and well over 300,000 conceited men. Yet the most impressive of them all are the lamplighters, who would perform (prior to the advent of electricity, of course) each day and night, like clockwork. Country by country, the lights would go on and then off again. And each day all the lamplighters would carry out their orders in precisely the same manner. He describes their daily ritual as one of great pageantry, using the visual image of a group of soldiers who dance together in perfect order, so that just as one set of lights goes out, another is immediately lit. It is, he says, *magnificent*.

## Chapter XVI Analysis

Once again we see the author mirrors the little prince's affinity for the simple versus the sophisticated. What is more, we see the irony of the fact that it is the simple lamplighter who performs the most significant task of any with whom the little prince has conversed. Of all the adults the little prince has met, it is only the lamplighter who thinks of others and, by doing so, contributes real value to the planet on which he lives.



# Chapter XVII

## Chapter XVII Summary

The little prince takes the advice of the geographer and decides to visit planet Earth. In this chapter he meets his first Earthling: a snake. The snake tells the prince that he normally kills whatever he touches, but that he can tell the prince is innocent and true and that he comes from a star. For this reason, the snake spares him. But he does tell the prince that if he should decide at some future date to go back from whence he came, he can ask the snake for assistance. The little prince understands quite well. This foreshadows the end of the story, when the prince will return to the snake for the poison that will release him from his earthly body.

## Chapter XVII Analysis

The little prince and the snake discuss loneliness. The little prince says it is lonely in the desert and the snake says it is lonely among men. The snake senses the prince's sadness, even though the prince does not speak of it. The snake also seems to know what the reader does not yet, which is that the little prince will come back to him and ask to be released from earth. The key to this is the snake's insight into the innocent and true nature of the little prince. It is reminiscent of a saying the reader has undoubtedly heard before: "He was too good for this earth." It seems whenever truly pure and innocent people die, this is how it is perceived: They were too good for this earth. And so the reader may understand at this point that if the prince is to stay pure, innocent and true, he must never be allowed to grow up on earth.



## Chapter XVIII

### Chapter XVIII Summary

The prince has a short conversation with an unremarkable flower. The flower tells the prince that as far as she knows there are only about six or seven men in existence and they are a bit hard to keep track of since they haven't any roots.

### Chapter XVIII Analysis

This is a comment on the transitory nature of man's character. An abandoned flower (again, a likely metaphor for woman) notes that men without roots are unstable and therefore have difficult lives.



# Chapter XIX

## Chapter XIX Summary

Here the little prince finds himself completely alone in the desert. He thinks that if he climbs the nearest peak he will be able to survey the entire planet. But this planet is much too big for that. Still, he does try to engage with whomever might be out there in the desert. He does so by saying "good morning" in a very polite fashion. As he speaks, his voice echoes throughout, giving the impression of people nearby. The little prince says a few more things, hears them echoed several times, and concludes that the people of Earth have no imagination because they merely repeat whatever is said to them.

## Chapter XIX Analysis

This is a lovely example of what happens when one enters a place that is nothing like the places one has previously been. The little prince does what anyone would do: he makes assumptions based on his own prior experience. He assumes the echoes he hears are the voices of other people--having never experienced this phenomenon before. He also assumes that anyone who merely repeats what another says lacks imagination. He is mistaken on the first point, but not on the second. His experience may be limited, but his thinking is sound.





# Chapter XX

## Chapter XX Summary

The little prince finds a rose garden and is surprised to learn that his flower is not unique. Yet at the same time he realizes that her need to be seen as unique is very strong--so strong, in fact, that should he fail to fulfill caring for her appropriately, she will wither and die. Saddened by the knowledge that his flower is not unique, and a little depressed about the relatively small size of his volcanoes, he decides that both disappointments mean he is not a very great prince. He lies down and cries.

## Chapter XX Analysis

The little prince is reconciling his understanding of the world with the reality of it. It is painful. He has to shift his thinking from the way he thought things were to the way they truly are. It is a hard lesson, for everybody, but especially for a little boy.



# Chapter XXI

## Chapter XXI Summary

This is one of the longest chapters in this book. It is also one of the most profound. In it the little prince meets a fox who teaches him the lessons of love. He teaches the little prince that to take responsibility for someone or something creates a bond that lasts forever. "One only understands the thing one tames . . .," he tells the prince. Then, he asks the little prince to tame him. He wants to form a bond with the prince so that the prince will not be just another human being, but a friend. The little prince hesitates because he hasn't much time to spare, but the fox convinces him to stay a while. Then the fox explains to the prince, exactly what taming is all about. They complete the taming process and become friends, but the little prince must leave the fox to continue on his journey. The friendship between the two has grown so much the fox is very sad to see the prince depart. When the prince is about to leave, the fox tells the prince a secret: "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye."

## Chapter XXI Analysis

This chapter elaborates the idea of love as an active thing--not just a feeling. Here the fox describes the process of taming. He begins by telling the prince: "First you will sit down at a little distance from me--like that--in the grass. I shall look at you out of the corner of my eye, and you will say nothing. Words are the source of misunderstandings. But you will sit a little closer to me each day."

As the fox continues to describe the process of taming, we realize that building trust and comfort in the presence of another is what creates a friendship. When one puts effort into allowing the friendship to develop at a natural pace, and takes care to be sensitive to the needs of the other, one is being responsible to that person. This helps the little prince to see that his rose, while she looks like any other, is actually unique after all. It is the prince's taming of her that makes her special.

The chapter ends with an important piece of insight from the fox, who tells the little prince that "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." The reader knows that the little prince understands the wisdom in this message, because he takes the time to repeat it several times, in order to ensure that he does not forget it.



## Chapter XXII

### Chapter XXII Summary

Here the little prince meets a switchman. The switchman operates the switch that moves the trains from one track to the next. The two converse briefly about how fast trains move, where the passengers are going, and what they're looking for. The switchman tells the prince that the passengers are mostly asleep and aren't really pursuing anything. Only the children have their noses against the glass. Only the children are looking out with curiosity and wonder.

### Chapter XXII Analysis

Several chapters in this book fit this particular pattern. In this chapter, as in other very short chapters, a central idea related to grown-up behavior is demonstrated and commented upon, rather quickly. It is part of the catalogue of grown-up oddities that the author wishes to make us aware of. In this case, the switchman points out how people on fast moving trains seem to be moving for no purpose. When the prince asks why this would be, and suggests that perhaps it is because they are not satisfied where they are, the switchman says, "No one is ever satisfied where he is." Or, as is often said in our culture, "The grass is always greener on the other side."



## Chapter XXIII

### Chapter XXIII Summary

The merchant whom the little prince encounters in this chapter is selling pills to quench thirst. He promotes them by saying that they save time. One pill per week replaces 53 minutes that would otherwise be spent finding and consuming water. When the little prince asks what one should do with this saved time, the merchant doesn't have a set answer. Instead, he tells the prince he may do whatever he likes with the time. The little prince responds by saying that he would spend his extra time taking a leisurely walk toward a fresh water spring.

### Chapter XXIII Analysis

This is another very short chapter, like the one before it. Irony is the essence of this chapter. The merchant invents a pill to replace an activity that is enjoyable. But what is the point of having extra time if it is not to be spent doing what one enjoys? This is analogous to earning a lot of money performing tasks one despises. While it might make one rich, if one can't do what one likes with one's time, what is the point of having so much money?



# Chapter XXIV

## Chapter XXIV Summary

The pilot has been listening to the prince tell of his meetings with the various characters he has encountered. When the story of the merchant ends, the pilot is drinking the last of his water supply. He has not repaired his engine and he is beginning to worry about his fate. The little prince says he is also thirsty and reminds the pilot of the wisdom imparted to him by his friend, the fox. He tells the pilot that the beauty of the desert is in the well that cannot be seen. And so the two of them begin to walk in search of the well. The following morning, they find one.

## Chapter XXIV Analysis

This chapter furthers the relationship between the pilot and the little prince. At first, the pilot is focused on what he does not have: water and a plane that can fly. But with the assistance of the little prince, he begins to appreciate what he does have. Together they gaze at the stars and the little prince reminds the pilot that just as the desert is beautiful because of a well that cannot be seen, the stars are beautiful because of a lovely rose that cannot be seen. He repeats the fox's secret: What is most important is invisible. When the day ends, the pilot realizes the wisdom of the fox. He carries the sleeping body of the prince across the desert and as he looks down at him he notices that while his body is nothing but a shell, the essence of him is so much more than that. Yet the essence of the little prince cannot be seen.



# Chapter XXV

## Chapter XXV Summary

The prince and the pilot find a well just like the kind one might find in a village. There is a bucket and a pulley and everything looks like it was waiting for them to arrive. They drink from the well and the pilot asks the little prince some questions. The prince doesn't answer, directly, but he flushes quite often leading the pilot to believe the things he is suggesting to the prince, are true. In the end, the pilot feels sad again. He seems to know the prince is planning to return home.

## Chapter XXV Analysis

The prince's plan to return home becomes apparent to the pilot and this makes the pilot very sad. He actually admits to the prince he is frightened. But the little prince attempts to reassure him by telling him to return to his plane and work on its engine. He says that he will wait for the pilot, at the well, and the pilot should return the following day. Despite the prince's instructions, the pilot is already feeling his loss. Like the fox that was tamed by the little prince, the pilot has been tamed too.



# Chapter XXVI

## Chapter XXVI Summary

When the pilot returns to the well the following day, he sees the little prince perched upon a stone wall. He approaches and is surprised to hear one side of an apparent conversation. Poison is mentioned. It is not until the pilot gets close to the wall that he realizes the prince has been conversing with the snake. The snake slithers off and the prince and the pilot have their last meeting. It is bittersweet. The little prince tells the pilot it is time for them both to return home. He reminds the pilot of what is important. Then he tells the pilot not to watch him go, for is too far and his body is too heavy to go with him. He will leave it, like an old shell. But despite the prince's assurance that the pilot will always be able to look up at the stars and know his friend is out there somewhere, on a very small planet, caring for his beautiful flower, the pilot is still very sad.

## Chapter XXVI Analysis

When this chapter begins, the pilot is on his way to tell the prince that his engine has been repaired and he can fly home. The little prince already knows this. In this final meeting between the prince and the pilot, we see the completion of the role reversal that was hinted at in their first meeting. The child has been imparting subtle bits of wisdom to the pilot throughout the story, with each character he describes he provides a specific example of adult behavior that stifles, stymies, stunts and essentially prevents children from growing up to be the most creative, beautiful, original and magnificent creatures nature intended. This is the underlying message behind each of the scenarios the little prince takes the reader through as he tells the tale of his journey to the pilot.



# Chapter XXVII

## Chapter XXVII Summary

The pilot is home. It has been six years since his meeting with the little prince. He tells how well received he was upon his return home and how pleased everybody was to see him. He talks about the little prince and what he learned from him. He understands, now, how important it is to be able to look up at the stars and ask the question, *did* the sheep eat the flower, yes or no?

## Chapter XXVII Analysis

The question of the flower is a metaphor for a sense of wonder. When one is capable of wondering, without having to necessarily *know* something, he is actually more free than one who is bound by a strong and inescapable need to have answers. It is a commentary, once again, on adult versus childlike behavior. The pilot realizes that the question of the little prince, his flower and his sheep, is infinitely more promising than a finite resolution. When one knows, one loses the sense of wonder.

"Look up at the sky. Ask yourself: Is it yes or no? Has the sheep eaten the flower? And you will see how everything changes . . . "





# Characters

## The Pilot

The pilot wanted to be an artist when he was a little boy. He was discouraged by adults who failed to appreciate his unique artistic sensibilities. And he knows, instinctively, by growing up, he has lost sight of something important. The pilot is one of two protagonists in this story. The other is the little prince.

## The Little Prince

The little prince lives on a very small planet with a flower, which he cares for. He also maintains his planet with regularity. His chores include sweeping out his two small volcanoes (one is apparently dormant, but one never knows), caring for his lovely flower, and pulling up baobab sprouts that threaten to overtake his planet if allowed to grow. He is in the desert, on his way to the very place where he first arrived on earth, when he encounters the pilot. The Flower

The flower is a lovely rose whose seed is somehow blown onto the very small planet on which the little prince lives. She begins to grow, seemingly from nothing. At first the prince is concerned that she might be a type of baobab. But after watching her very closely, the little prince concludes that she is unlike any other flower. She takes great pains to present herself to the prince in a most favorable light and her demands for attention, water, and protection from the wind, etc. charm the little prince, at first. He does whatever she asks and is very attentive to her needs, but eventually, this grows a bit tiresome. In fact, it is her constant need for something that eventually causes the little prince to feel quite inadequate. This feeling of inadequacy is part of what prompts him to leave his very small planet to explore the galaxy.

## The King

The king is the first of a series of characters that the little prince meets on his journey to other planets. Each of the characters in the series represents a characteristic of adult behavior that the little prince finds confusing and disturbing. The king represents the need to control and dominate others.

## The Conceited Man

Like the king, this man demonstrates a specific quality associated with adults: he demands admiration from others.



## **The Tippler**

This character represents the drunkard. When one fails to deal with one's demons, one is haunted by them. Sometimes people try to escape from reality into drugs and/or alcohol. The tippler personifies such a person. The lesson here is clear: if you drink to escape from life, you will find that in the end, you will need to escape the drink, or you will have no life worth living.

## **The Business Man**

This character is so busy counting that he cannot even keep his own cigarette lit! He is so obsessed with counting what he owns that he hasn't a moment to spare actually enjoying it.

## **The Lamplighter**

The lamplighter is the one grown-up the little prince loves. This is because the lamplighter does his job, without concern for himself. He is simple and good. He knows the orders requiring him to light and put out lamps every minute are not good orders. However, he hasn't the intellectual prowess or the sense of self-importance necessary to intervene in order to amend his instructions. He simply does his job. This makes him a sympathetic character, despite his absurdity.

## **The Geographer**

This character represents the intellectual high-brow who learns a great deal but cannot seem to find any practical application for all his book learning.

## **The Snake**

The snake is the first wise animal the little prince meets. He knows the prince is innocent and true and that he comes from a star. The snake also tells the prince that when he is homesick for his own planet, he can return to the snake and the snake will poison him so he can leave the earth and return home.

## **The Little Flower and the Other Roses**

These characters are in short back-to-back chapters that serve merely to provide information to the prince. He learns from the first little flower that there are not many men in the desert and from the rose garden he learns that his own flower is not as unique as he had thought.



## **The Fox**

The Fox is a pivotal character because he is the one who teaches the little prince the lesson about being tamed. He helps the prince understand why his flower is unique-- despite the fact that she is a common rose. He also teaches the prince the true meaning of friendship. This is the lesson the little prince imparts to the pilot at their final meeting.

## **The Switchman**

Like the king and businessman, the switchman demonstrates one of the dilemmas adults seem to be cursed with: moving too fast with no sense of purpose and being dissatisfied with wherever one is at the moment.

## **The Merchant**

The merchant is the final character the little prince meets. He is selling pills that quench thirst. He promotes his pills by saying they will save time. But the prince rather enjoys the process of seeking and consuming fresh spring water, so he is not impressed with the merchant's wares.



# Objects/Places

## The Galaxy

This is the background for the little prince's journey. He moves from one small planet to another, meeting a variety of characters. Each of the characters he meets inhabits a small planet of his own. The characteristics of each inhabitant are what distinguish one small planet from the other. They are described, individually, in the Character section.

## The Planet Earth

The little prince learns of planet Earth from the geographer. When the prince asks him what planet he should visit next, the geographer advises him to visit Earth. "It has a good reputation," he tells the little prince.

## The Sahara Desert

It is in this desolate stretch of Africa, largely unpopulated and mysterious, that the pilot meets the little prince. It is also here that the prince landed one year prior to meeting the pilot. And it is here that the prince reconnects with the snake for the poisonous encounter that will end his life on Earth, and return him to his own small planet.

## The Prince's Own Small Planet a.k.a Asteroid B-612

The prince's planet is so small that he can literally walk from one side of it to the other in a matter of minutes. It has two volcanoes on it: one is dormant, one is active. He meticulously cleans both because "one never knows." It is apparent from the conversations the prince has with the pilot that the active care and maintenance of his planet is of particular importance to the little prince. In addition to being his responsibility, the little prince has grown to love his planet. This is significant to the story thematically, as we see in the little prince's encounter with the fox, which reminds us that what we care for becomes an object of our affection.

## The Planet of the Lazy Man Who Was Overrun By Baobabs

The lazy man and his planet are not much more than an afterthought in the book, but as they pertain to a specific lesson that is an important part of the story, they are worth mentioning here. When the little prince first asks for a sheep, he does so in order to procure an animal that will eat little baobab bushes. This is important, because if left unattended, little baobabs become quite large. The search for a sheep, therefore, is a practical matter. When the little prince tells the pilot about the lazy man whose planet is



overrun by baobabs, it is to remind us how important it is to act at the appropriate moment. Had the lazy man not neglected his baobabs, his planet might be as nice as the planet the little prince inhabits. As it is, it's a complete disaster, and to prove it to all who might be interested, the little prince has the pilot draw a picture of this lazy man's planet--which is nothing more than a round thing covered in baobabs. This, according to the little prince, should serve to warn all who follow to be *very* careful about tending to their respective planets.

## **The Well in the Desert**

This is where the prince and the snake meet to plan the prince's departure from the planet Earth. It is also where the prince and the pilot have their final meeting. The well is not what one would expect in a desert. It is not a mere hole in the sand; it is a well with a pulley and a wall around it. There is a bucket also. In fact, it looks very much like it belongs in a village, but there is no village in the desert. The pilot remarks on this, but there is nothing unusual about it to the little prince.

## **The Box With the Sheep In It**

This is the first drawing the little prince accepts from the pilot. Several drawings of sheep were rejected by the prince for being too old, or too sick or some other thing. But the box with the breathing holes for a sheep is accepted immediately. This is symbolic of the theme carried throughout this story: imagination must be allowed to flourish. It is not the sheep that satisfies the prince; it is the box. The box allows the prince to create the perfect sheep, using his own imagination.

## **The Rose Garden**

It is here that the prince realizes that his own beautiful flower is actually one of many just like it.

## **The Drawing of the Boa Constrictor From the Outside**

This is the pilot's first attempt at drawing, when he is only six-years-old. Unfortunately, for him, the adults in his company failed to see that the boa constrictor had swallowed an elephant. They saw a hat, instead.

## **The Drawing of the Boa Constrictor From the Inside**

This is the pilot's second attempt at drawing, when he is still six-years-old. Unfortunately, for him, the adults in his company don't wish to see that the boa constrictor has swallowed an elephant. They seem to prefer the hat. They suggest that the young man focus on math or reading instead of art. The reaction to the two

drawings, taken together, leaves the young man dejected and unsure of his artistic abilities. As a result, he gives up art altogether and takes to flying instead.



## Social Concerns And Themes

Deceptively simple and apparently a story for children, *The Little Prince* addresses most major social concerns of Saint-Exupery's day and of modern times. The lack of childlike simplicity in a sophisticated and materialistic civilization is portrayed from the very first page, when the author shows a drawing of a boa snake that had eaten an elephant to uncomprehending adults, who believe it to be a hat. Adults, especially the materialistic generation, continue to judge by appearances; the Turkish astronomer who discovered B612, the Prince's planet, is rejected by the scientific community until he appears in Western clothes.

Adults are enamored of statistics and numbers, and prefer to know how much money a person makes rather than know the sound of his voice. Such adults are reflected in the businessman who counts stars which he claims to own, to prove his wealth. Even the problem of drug addiction and alcoholism appears in the drunkard, who drinks to forget that he is ashamed to drink. The compartmentalization of knowledge, too prevalent in today's world, is evident in the geographer, who is not an explorer, and therefore cannot know what is really on the earth's surface. The world of authority and power comes to life in the king who considers everyone his subject, a universal image, but only too true in occupied France in 1943.

On the more positive side, Saint-Exupery shows the world of love within people, symbolized by the special flower chosen and protected by the Prince, no doubt also the classical symbol of feminine beauty in the form of a rose. There is the story of friendship in the person of the fox who needs to be tamed before he can become a friend, and who explains to his little friend the necessity of ritual in all relationships, the importance of the invisible, and of responsibility toward those with whom one has created a relationship, or "tamed."

The cosmos, the world of outer space, was very important to Saint-Exupery, who in all his works speaks of the splendor of the clouds, the stars, and the sky, of a new vision of the earth. Little wonder then that his hero would come from another world. It was to return to his unearthly world that the prince made friends with the serpent, the eternal symbol of death.

Saint-Exupery points out the importance of the invisible, the world of the spirit beyond this visible world, where people will live in peace and harmony.

A true humanist, his ultimate concern was with human brotherhood and happiness.



## Techniques

Simplicity and immediacy are the characteristics that endear this short story to all readers. There is a great deal of dialogue, with many repetitions, especially on the part of the Prince, who as a true child never lets go of an idea once he has taken hold of it. His words reveal him to be a child, yet a child who has the wisdom of unaffected simplicity. The various scenes in which animals, flowers, and people interact with him are brief and to the point. Often satiric of abuses in society, the passages stand on their own, without any need of explanation.

The narrator-pilot speaks as an adult, yet as a father figure and friend to the Prince who is so in need of human companionship that he has left his planet in search of people. The use of allegory is direct and unaffected, so that the reader is aware of talking flowers and foxes, but not annoyed.

The dialogue between the Prince and the narrator has been interpreted as a mirage, a narcissistic monologue of the author with himself, according to Luc Estang. One can indeed recognize the author in search of his own identity, and in search of the meaning of life in his development of the Prince, whom he has created, however, as a character who lives in his own right.





# Themes

## Celebrating One's Uniqueness

*The Little Prince* is a reminder of how important it is to be true to one's self. It is filled with examples of "grown-up" characters whose exaggerated focus on a specific thing or a concept causes them to lose their originality and live as rats on a treadmill. Each of the characters the little prince meets while traveling the galaxy represents an adult whose innate talents are impossible to discern. Each has put such focused energy toward a single-minded purpose that he cannot now be seen as anything but a caricature. There is no way to tell what hidden talents or passions any one of them might have developed if they had been less narrow-minded in their approach. But as it is, each is consumed with such a small part of the adult world that they are stunted in their humanness and are nothing but bores to the little prince.

The businessman is so busy counting the stars he owns that he cannot do anything else with them. The little prince's reaction to the businessman's habit of counting his stars is, "It is entertaining. It is rather poetic. But it is of no great consequence." What the little prince has come to realize is that if he cares for something, like his flower and his volcanoes, then by virtue of that care, his ownership of them is meaningful. But for the businessman, who spends all his time counting stars simply to validate his ownership of them, there is no value to be gained, because the businessman is of no use to the stars.

The author's own experience in forgoing his dream to be an artist emphasizes this point. The main theme of this work, then, is to urge us to preserve our uniqueness and to pursue what moves us.

## What is Truly Important Cannot Be Seen

This theme is introduced early on when the pilot tells of drawing the boa constrictor from the outside. None of the adults can see it for what it is, because although the boa constrictor's body is bulging, the boy has not taken the pains to draw the elephant inside. It is the imagination, which requires a connection to the heart, that allows the little prince to see on first glance, what the adults are unable to see.

This theme resurfaces throughout the story of *The Little Prince*. While others may focus on facts and figures, the prince and his wise friend the fox understand that friendship is one of the most important things in the world and it cannot be measured with a ruler or confined to a physical object. "It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." This tells us that love and friendship are part of the secret world that adults, who are too focused on facts and figures, often miss.

A third example of this theme can be found when the prince and the pilot leave the pilot's stranded aircraft in search of a well. The prince tells the pilot, "What makes the desert beautiful, is that somewhere it hides a well . . ." The prince and the pilot now



both understand that wonder, faith, and hope are as important as love and friendship-- and like love and friendship, wonder, faith and hope, are found in the heart.

There is a natural balance in the universe. What brings joy will also bring pain. When the prince describes the beauty of the desert by saying the unseen well makes it beautiful, he is also describing a contrast between one extreme and the other. This contrast includes the opposite ends of the spectrum that represents the desert in its entirety. Just as the desert has sand and wind and seemingly unending dryness, it also holds the promise of a well. Likewise, friendships the prince forms during his journey, while bringing joy and companionship, also bring sadness when the prince must move on. It is the joy that friendship provides that makes it sad when the relationship ends. One cannot have one without the other.

Likewise, one cannot have love without responsibility. The little prince learns that by caring for his rose he loves her in a very special way. This makes her a unique flower, for him. He also learns that by working with the fox to tame him, he is creating a special bond. He learns that to build the trust that friendship depends upon, he must move slowly, pay attention, and proceed with care for the feelings and sensitivities of his new friend.

Each of the themes, above, is a lesson that must be learned so the little prince may mature without losing his individuality and become like other "grown-ups."



# Style

## Point of View

*The Little Prince* is told in the first person point of view. The author knows only what his character, the pilot, has experienced first-hand and what the little prince has told him. At times the author speaks of his encounters with the little prince. At other times he tells of events that happened to him separately. At others, he narrates an inner dialogue, but in each case, he is telling the story from the first person viewpoint.

When the story begins, the author (the pilot) tells us about his life before he became a pilot. He explains the reaction he inspired in adults with his drawings. While he cannot know the real thoughts and feelings behind the actions of those he refers to, he is able to provide insight into the characters he describes by quoting them. He also makes a few of his own comments to clarify how he wishes them to be perceived. This first person viewpoint thus allows the author to tell the story, and comment on it, simultaneously.

This particular viewpoint also allows the author to change his presentation to a narrative rather than dialogue format whenever he chooses. If he wishes to explore his thoughts and feelings, for example, as he does in several chapters, he can easily do so because the reader is already aware of the fact that the voice he/she is hearing, is always that of the author.

## Setting

Written in the 1940s, *The Little Prince* takes place partly in the Sahara Desert and partly on a number of very small planets that the author has created for demonstration purposes. It is therefore, a metaphorical tale. Saint Exupery combines fantasy and philosophy to enlighten and educate his adult readers while cloaking the entire lesson in the context of a children's story.

The travels through the galaxy that the little prince takes, as he searches for knowledge, provide the reader with an interesting backdrop. Each of the planets the prince visits, prior to Earth, is inhabited by a single person with a single purpose. This overly simplistic set-up is actually very effective in showcasing the specific personality traits each planet's owner exhibits.

The little prince has a planet of his own as well, yet he has more than one purpose. He has volcanoes to clean out, a rose to care for, baobabs to curtail and sunsets to ponder. He performs basic maintenance but he also carves out time to love and wonder. His rose and his sunsets are the objects of his love and wonder. Had he nothing but



volcanoes to clean and baobabs to curtail, he'd be much more like the other planet's inhabitants.

Essentially then, while the setting defines the possibilities open to the inhabitants, the setting itself is defined by the personality that inhabits it. On the lamplighter's planet there is nothing to do but light and extinguish the lamps. The king can do nothing but issue orders. And the Sahara is dry and seemingly harsh and unfriendly--yet the well that cannot be seen at first, does indeed exist, for both the prince and the pilot--for both of these personalities have within them hope and wonder.

## Language and Meaning

The use of very simple language makes this book even more powerful as a tool for understanding the psychology of adults versus children. One key to the author's rationale for using such simplistic language may be found in the following bit of wisdom from the fox: "Words are the source of misunderstandings."

With no pretense or requirement for an understanding of complex jargon, the author conveys profound insights into the psychology of human beings who have conformed to the narrow expectations of the "grown-up" world. Stifling of one's originality, the fear of not knowing, the need to own things, are all seen through the eyes of a child. While the language of the book is very plain, the content is complex and profound. It brings to mind another saying, "You can't judge a book by its cover."

In addition to very simple language, the author uses the technique of repetition to bring home his most salient points. He repeats, several times, that the prince is not one to let go of a question once it is asked. He also refers to "matters of consequence" regularly. Using that phrase in a setting in which the matters discussed are clearly of no consequence to the little prince, brings home the irony of the geographer's dilemma: Here is a man whose profession is so specialized that he is totally useless.

## Structure

*The Little Prince* is divided into twenty-seven chapters. Some are quite small--not more than a paragraph or two in length. When the story begins, a couple of very short chapters set up the author's frustrations at having prematurely given up his career as a painter. They also set the tone for the book: Frustration creates encounters with unimaginative grown-up thinking, which is destined to be part of whatever else transpires.

Once the background for the pilot's story is set, the little prince arrives in the desert and the chapters are a little longer. The longer structure is usually used to take us from the inception of an idea to its conclusion. For example, the first encounter with the prince



begins with a request for a drawing of a sheep and concludes with the presentation of the drawing to the prince.

As the story unfolds, some chapters merely add a new bit of information, while others take the story to another level. Chapter XVIII, the shortest of all, contains nothing more than a very brief encounter with a nondescript flower. Yet a very explicit idea is advanced here. When the flower tells the little prince, "They have no roots and that makes their life very difficult," she is referring to men. She is saying that people with no ties, no responsibilities, nothing that they have *tamed*, have difficult lives. So, while this is a very short chapter in terms of length, it is rather large on meaning.

In all cases, however, whether the chapters are long or short, some idea or another is put forth for consideration. When the idea is a simple one, the chapter is short; when the concept being presented is more complicated, the chapter is longer and contains the detail necessary to elaborate on the issue raised.



## Quotes

"If you please--draw me a sheep!" Chapter II, pg. 9

"Straight ahead of him, nobody can go very far . . ." Chapter III, pg. 16

"When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care." Chapter V, pg. 21

"It is entertaining. It is rather poetic. But it is of no great consequence." Chapter XIII, pg. 47

". . . never in his life let go of a question, once he had asked it." Chapter XV, pg. 54

"One only understands the thing one tames . . ." Chapter XXII, pg. 67

"It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye." Chapter XXI, pg. 70

"No one is ever satisfied where he is." Chapter XXII, pg. 73

"What makes the desert beautiful," said the little prince, "is that somewhere it hides a well . . ." Chapter XXIV, pg. 75

"Look up at the sky. Ask yourselves: Is it yes or no? Has the sheep eaten the flower? And you will see how everything changes . . ." Chapter XXVI, Pg. 91

"And no grown-up will ever understand that this is a matter of so much importance!" Chapter XXVI, pg. 91

# Adaptations

Saint-Exupery's works have been popular on stage and screen since he first wrote them. His first major work *Night Flight* (1932) was made into a film by United Artists in Hollywood, and into an opera *Volo di Notte* in Florence in 1939, with original music by Luigi Dallapiccola. *Southern Mail* (1934; *Courrier Sud*, 1929) became a screenplay by Billom in 1937. *The Little Prince* has appeared in numerous film versions and adaptations. Most films of *The Little Prince* fail to transmit the unique style and tone of Saint-Exupery. One of the Hollywood productions (1974) starred Richard Kiley as the Aviator, Steven Warner, Bob Fosse, and Gene Wilder, with a score by Lerner and Lowe. A five-part, animated series for younger children (1986), directed by Jameson Brewer, is recommended by the National Educational Association.

Audio recordings of *The Little Prince* have always been very popular, among the best, Gerard Philippe's interpretation.

Sister Irma M. Kashuba, S. S. J.



## Topics for Discussion

What is the relevance of the pilot's early drawings and what do they say about him?

Why does the little prince feel the need to leave his planet? What does he hope to find? Does he find it?

What does the prince learn from the fox? How can those lessons be applied to life, in general?

What does the pilot learn from the prince? How does the pilot change as a result of his encounter with the prince?

What does *The Little Prince* teach us about friendship and love?

The prince learns many things from the flowers he meets, and the animals. But with the exception of the pilot, the grown-ups the prince meets show him only what to avoid. Discuss the significance of that, and how you think the pilot is different from the other grown-ups.

Discuss the symbolism of the baobab trees. What lesson does this teach the reader?



## Literary Precedents

One must turn to the Bible and medieval sources to find the direct precedents of *The Little Prince*. As a parable, the story recalls Biblical style and imagery. The serpent is the symbol of death. The pilot, like the Israelites of old, is lost in the desert. The memory of the Prince will be for the fox like golden wheat fields. About to die, the pilot and Prince seek for water, and find a well, a true fountain of living water. Trees, such as those in the Garden of Paradise, are found throughout the book. The Prince will return home by the light of his star.

The medieval folklore tradition is also present in this short work. It is an allegory, not unlike *The Romance of the Rose* (1240-1280) or the romances of chivalry. Flowers, trees, and animals act and speak, as in fables. The fox of the famous *Roman de Renard* (12th century) has the same wit and ruse as his modern counterpart. He may also be inspired by the small desert foxes, known as "fenechs," which Saint-Exupery came to know in his travels. The ancient tale of Icarus also comes alive in the Prince and the aviator who seek to fly. Finally, both Biblical and medieval proverbs live in the words of the Prince, the flower, and the fox: "One sees only with the heart"; "You are forever responsible for what you have tamed"; "The essential is invisible."

Hans Christian Andersen was Saint-Exupery's favorite author when he was a child, and his influence is evident in *The Little Prince*. The fairy-tale quality is everywhere present in this short story, in the Prince who flies from his own planet to earth; in the story of the serpent who brings death, but at the same time life; and in the meeting with the fox. The transformation from death to life in the desert, the echoes of extra-terrestrial beings, suggest the world of fairy tales, and the influence of the invisible.

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