

The Phantom Tollbooth Study Guide

The Phantom Tollbooth by Norton Juster

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Overview

Juster's story is about a boy who is not very interested in anything. Since most young people have, at some time or other, known someone much like the book's hero, Milo, who had too much time on his hands, or as the book describes it, "who didn't know what to do with himself," they should readily identify with the situation.

The Phantom Tollbooth is a book that makes learning fun. Like some young people, Milo does not care much for words or numbers. "I can't see the point in learning to solve useless problems," he says, "or subtracting turnips from turnips, or knowing where Ethiopia is or how to spell February." But meeting people who love learning, and who swear by its importance, makes him wonder.

As he uses words and numbers in his adventure, he begins to realize that learning is vital and necessary. What he is taught in school does make sense. He sees what can happen when people use too many words to say something—or not enough. He can also see what happens when people waste time, or make excuses. These experiences cause Milo to become aware of the importance of education and applying himself, and they can make learning come alive for readers as well.

About the Author

Norton Juster was born June 2, 1929, in New York City. The son of an architect, Juster himself earned a degree in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1952. He has maintained an architectural practice since 1960, and has also taught design at the Pratt Institute (1960-1970) and at Hampshire College (1970 to the present).

The Phantom Tollbooth, Juster's first novel, was widely acclaimed as a delightful book for both children and adults. He has written seven other books, not all of them for young adults, but The Phantom Tollbooth remains his best-known. In 1979, out of a growing interest in the past, he compiled *So Sweet to Labor: Rural Women in America, 1865-1895*.

This work contains letters, recipes, poetry, and other writings, all concerned with or written by farm women of the period.



Plot Summary

This is the story of Milo, a dull, disinterested boy who travels to another world known as the Lands Beyond. In the Lands Beyond, Milo begins to feel that everyone seems to know so much more than he does. Unfortunately, the Lands Beyond are out of balance, and everything and everyone is unhappy. Milo discovers that the cause of this unhappiness is the banishment of two princesses named, Rhyme and Reason. Milo undertakes a quest to release the princesses and put the Lands Beyond to rights again. Milo is aided in his quest by a watchdog named Tock and a Humbug. As his quest unfolds, Milo learns to learn, and to enjoy learning. After rescuing the princesses and returning to his own world, Milo is like a new person. He's happy, interested, busy, and ready to continue his pursuit of wisdom.

Milo is bored, because he does not think. Milo has never seen the point in the things he does, or the lessons he is taught, or the things he owns. Consequently, he is unhappy and dissatisfied.

One day, Milo comes home from school to find a mysterious package addressed to him. It contains a turnpike tollbooth with its attendant signs, coins, rule book and map. As he has nothing better to do, Milo puts the tollbooth together and drives his electric car through.

On the other side of the tollbooth, Milo finds himself in a different world. According to his map, he has entered the Lands Beyond. Almost immediately, Milo begins to notice strange differences between the Lands Beyond and his own world. Milo's first destination in the Lands Beyond is Dictionopolis, but he gets waylaid for a while in the Doldrums by not thinking. Fortunately, Milo meets the watchdog, Tock, who gets him thinking and back on the road again. Tock accompanies Milo, because he loves to ride in cars.

Milo reaches Dictionopolis, the city of words, on market day and sees vendors selling every word imaginable. Milo is introduced to the Humbug, a disagreeable but harmless character. Milo is falsely accused of creating havoc in the marketplace when the Humbug and the Spelling Bee have an argument that comes to blows. Officer Shrift, a very short and brusque policeman, throws Milo and Tock in prison for six million years.

In the dungeon, Milo and Tock meet the Which, Faintly Macabre, who tells them the history of this part of the Lands Beyond. Part of her story includes the quarrel of King Azaz and his brother, the Mathemagician, and the banishment of the princesses Rhyme and Reason to the Castle in the Air. The Which thinks that the absence of Rhyme and Reason is at the root of so many of the problems in the Lands Beyond. Faintly Macabre also tells Milo that Officer Shrift loves to put people in prison but does not care about keeping them there. She shows Milo the door out, and he and Tock leave the dungeon.

Out of prison, the King's advisors whisk away Milo and Tock to a banquet, where they eat an uninspiring meal of words. After the feast, Milo asks King Azaz about rescuing



the princesses. King Azaz, at length, agrees that Milo should go on a quest to free them and sends the Humbug along as a guide. King Azaz gives Milo a box of all the words he knows and warns Milo that there is a bigger problem than how dangerous his quest will be. However, King Azaz will not tell Milo the bigger problem until he has rescued Rhyme and Reason. Milo will go first to Digitopolis, where King Azaz's brother, the Mathemagician, reigns.

On the way to Digitopolis, Milo, Tock, and the Humbug meet many characters whose talents, jobs or behavior are out of balance. Several times, a character refers to the banishment of Rhyme and Reason as the time when things began going wrong in the Lands Beyond. Milo acquires other gifts from the people he meets that will help him in his quest.

At Digitopolis, Milo meets the Mathemagician, who reluctantly agrees to Milo's quest to save the princesses. He also warns Milo that there is a bigger problem with his quest and refuses to tell Milo what that problem is until the quest is over. The Mathemagician gives Milo "a magic staff," or pencil, with which to solve any problem he encounters. Milo then enters the untamed wilderness of the Mountains of Ignorance, through which he must go to reach the Castle in the Air.

Milo, Tock and the Humbug make their way through the Mountains of Ignorance, encountering many nuisances and demons who threaten to end their quest. By teamwork, good thinking, and by using the gifts which Milo has accumulated on his journey, the three friends finally reach the Castle in the Air. They rescue Rhyme and Reason by making it back to the spot where armies of the kingdoms of Wisdom are massed. The demons retreat, and all is festival and celebration.

Having completed his quest, Milo finally learns the "bigger problem" to which King Azaz and the Mathemagician referred. His quest should have been completely impossible. It is time for Milo to return home, and he bids a sad good-bye to his new friends. As he leaves, he hears Azaz and the Mathemagician begin to quarrel, and hopes the trouble does not start up all over again. Milo drives back the way he came, goes back through the Phantom Tollbooth and enters his room only an hour after he left.

The next day after school, Milo returns to his room, eager to use the Phantom Tollbooth again to return to the Lands Beyond. He finds the Tollbooth gone with a note saying that he does not need it anymore. Milo is sad, but he is now so interested in his own world and eager to learn all he can, that his sadness can't last.



Chapter 1, Milo

Chapter 1, Milo Summary

The novel is the story of a boy named Milo, who is dull and unhappy because he does not know anything or even why he should try to change that. Milo travels to another world, where learning and the pursuit of wisdom is explicitly shown to be valuable. Milo undertakes a quest to rescue the princesses Rhyme and Reason and restore the balance to the world they once helped to rule. Along the way, Milo develops an appreciation for learning, and by the time he rescues the princesses and returns home, he is an altogether different boy, eager and ready to learn.

The story begins by introducing the reader to Milo. Milo is dissatisfied, bored, and uninterested in everything. One day after school, Milo notices a large, mysterious package in his room. On one side is a blue envelope addressed to Milo, "WHO HAS PLENTY OF TIME." Inside the envelopes are assembly directions and instructions for a small turnpike tollbooth, and the accompanying signs, coins, map, and book of rules and traffic regulations. Milo is mystified, but assembles the tollbooth, erects the signs, glances at the map (which appears to be of a country that Milo has never heard of before), and proceeds toward the tollbooth in his small, electric car. Following the directions on one of the signs, Milo picks a destination from the map ("Dictionopolis"), deposits his coin, and rolls past the tollbooth.

Milo and Tock travel together, eventually accepting the challenging quest of saving the princesses, Rhyme and Reason, whose banishment has left the Lands Beyond out of balance and in disarray. Along the way, Milo learns about the value of words in the city of Dictionopolis. Here, he also acquires another travelling companion, the Humbug, who is nearly always wrong, and nearly always dour. Yet, he's a loyal friend, despite his shortcomings.

Chapter 1, Milo Analysis

Milo is perpetually bored, but the reader should not blame him exclusively. The book's narrator tells the reader that it is because "no one had bothered to explain otherwise" that Milo regards seeking knowledge as "the greatest waste of time of all." From the first page, there is an implicit condemnation, not of Milo, but of the people and institutions that "made" Milo a bored, thoughtless, dissatisfied boy. It is interesting to note that Milo is not an unattractive character. Even at his most dissatisfied, most unhappy, and most grumbly, a reader sees too much of himself in Milo to really dislike him very much.



Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations

Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations Summary

Suddenly and surprisingly, Milo finds himself driving along a highway in an unfamiliar land. His first destination is called Expectations, where Milo meets the Whether Man. A happy, talkative man, the Whether Man explains to Milo that Expectations is where you have to go before you go anywhere else. Some people, the Whether Man explains, never get beyond Expectations, but anyone who is going anywhere must go through Expectations first. Milo is confused by the peculiar little man and tells him that he will find his own way from there. The Whether Man compliments Milo on his decision, since he (the Whether Man) is never able to make one himself.

Milo drives on past Expectations and soon falls to daydreaming. He is not paying attention to where the road is going, and he soon makes a wrong turn. Mile after mile, Milo becomes sleepier and sleepier and drives slower and slower into a country growing grayer and grayer. When Milo finally stops and asks himself where he is, he hears someone reply that he is in the Doldrums, where nothing happens and nothing changes. The speaker turns out to be a Lethargarian, or small, sleepy creature that lives unobtrusively and inactively in the Doldrums.

Milo tells the Lethargarian that he thinks he is lost, and he is immediately reprimanded for thinking. Thinking in the Doldrums is strictly forbidden, as Milo soon reads in the rule book that came with the tollbooth. Milo objects that one can not think, but the Lethargarian points out that people don't think all the time, and that Milo himself was not thinking when he took a wrong turn into the Doldrums. As the Lethargarians explain how they live, by doing nothing and taking all day to do it, Milo begins to feel that he ought to stay in the Doldrums, since leaving and thinking and doing anything is feeling more and more difficult the longer that he is there. He asks if everyone in the Doldrums does nothing, and the Lethargarians warn him about the watchdog.

Before Milo can learn anything about the watchdog, the watchdog appears, barking, growling and shouting at everyone in apparent anger. The watchdog looks like a normal dog, except that his body is made of an enormous alarm clock. He questions Milo, who tells the watchdog that he is doing nothing, just "killing time." This infuriates the watchdog, who tells him that it is bad enough to waste time without killing it, too. The watchdog helps Milo remember where he was going and gives him the clue as to how to leave of the Doldrums. If Milo got to the Doldrums by not thinking, then thinking would get him out. The watchdog hops into Milo's car for a ride.

Milo begins thinking. It is difficult, at first, because he is terribly unused to doing it. However, as he thinks, the car begins to move. The faster his thoughts go, the faster the car moves. Milo and the watchdog escape the Doldrums and return to the bright highway where Milo first lost his way.



Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations Analysis

The reader begins to get a picture of the world that Milo has somehow entered. Words that would be only words in Milo's (and our) world are actual things and places and people in the world beyond the tollbooth. Expectations is a place, a Whether Man is racked by indecision, the Doldrums are a place you go when you aren't paying attention, and a watchdog is a dog with the body of a watch. Puns, wordplay, and the creation of "real" people, places and things out of words are the basis of the world that Milo has entered, and the book itself.

This chapter introduces a second major character, the watchdog. Gruff, serious, and slightly intimidating at first, the watchdog nevertheless helps Milo escape the Doldrums. He unexpectedly hops into Milo's car, because he loves automobile rides.



Chapter 3, Welcome to Dictionopolis

Chapter 3, Welcome to Dictionopolis Summary

The watchdog apologizes to Milo for his gruff behavior and introduces himself as Tock. Milo remarks that that is a strange name for a dog that always goes "tick tick tick." Tock tells the sad story of how his parents had their first child and named him Tick, only to discover that he said "tock tock tock." Then, when Tock was born, his parents were determined to get it right and named him for the noise they were sure he would make. Unfortunately, Tock did not follow his brother's path and made the noise "tick tick tick." Tock also tells Milo about his traditional job of watchdog. Time was invented to keep track of things. Watchdogs took on the job of making sure that no one wasted time.

Tock and Milo come to the gates of Dictionopolis. A guard asks for the reason for their visit. When Milo can't come up with a reason, the guard rummages in a suitcase to find a reason for him. "WHY NOT?" is engraved on a small medallion that he places around Milo's neck.

Milo and Tock enter Dictionopolis on market day. Five tall, thin men greet them with an abundance of words, each man giving a synonym to the word spoken before. When Milo asks if all those words mean the same thing, the men reply: "Of course." "Certainly." "Precisely." "Exactly." "Yes."

The men introduce themselves as the Duke of Definition, the Minister of Meaning, the Earl of Essence, the Count of Connotation, and the Undersecretary of Understanding. They are the king's advisers, and their job is to make sure that all the words that are sold on market day are the correct ones. The words are grown in the orchards of Dictionopolis. Milo is perplexed at the profusion of words used by the king's advisers and by the idea that words grow on trees. Milo and Tock head into the market, which Milo says looks very exciting.

Chapter 3, Welcome to Dictionopolis Analysis

The king's advisers (or, as they point out, another word would be "cabinet") use as many words as possible to say very little. Tock points this out at the end of the chapter, and Milo thinks that it's the wisest thing he'd heard all day.

Chapter 4, Confusion in the Marketplace

Chapter 4, Confusion in the Marketplace Summary

From all around the kingdom, the word growers come to market day to sell their wares. Milo and Tock walk around, admiring the "bagful of pronouns" and the "fresh-picked ifs ands, and buts." Milo picks out three very long, elegant words but hastily returns them, when he hears the price. Milo continues looking until he reaches a "DO IT YOURSELF" stall selling all the letters of the alphabet. The seller gives him an "a" to try, and Milo discovers that it tastes sweet and delicious.

As Milo continues to sample letters, the Spelling Bee flies up. The Spelling Bee has a habit of spelling words as he says them: "I can spell anything - a-n-y-t-h-i-n-g," the

Bee boasts. The Spelling Bee encourages Milo to give him a word to spell. Milo suggests "vegetable," and the Bee pretends to be stumped until the last second, when he shouts out the correct spelling with ease.

As the Spelling Bee begins to tell Milo his history, a large, loud beetle-like insect approaches, roaring "BALDERDASH!" at the top of his voice. The Bee reluctantly introduces Milo to the Humbug, warning Milo not to believe anything the Humbug says. The Spelling Bee and the Humbug quickly begin quarrelling, and, as the fight becomes physical, the Humbug trips and falls into a word stall. One stall crashes into another, which crashes into the next, and so on. The market is in total confusion.

Chapter 4, Confusion in the Marketplace Analysis

This chapter introduces us to Milo's second companion through the rest of the novel, the Humbug. The Humbug is loud, given to shouting opinions and contradicting everyone (including himself.) However, he's not a bad fellow for all his roar and drama. Milo does not choose his companions in the book. Tock simply hops in his car for a ride, and the Humbug will be sent along with Milo in a later chapter. While neither companion seems very attractive at first, both become Milo's friends by the book's end.



Chapter 5, Short Shrift

Chapter 5, Short Shrift Summary

When the market stalls get jumbled together, the words get mixed up, and everyone's sentences are out of order. "Do going to we what are!" complains one of the vendors. As things are returning to normal, the entire police force of Dictionopolis (which is made up of one officer) arrives. His name is Officer Shrift, and he is exceedingly short, not even two feet tall and almost twice as wide. He is abrupt, loud, accusative, and does not listen to anyone's protestations of innocence. Officer Shrift abruptly arrests Milo and Tock for a variety of crimes, including sowing confusion and wreaking havoc. After changing into a judge's robe, Officer (or Judge) Shrift gives them a short sentence: "I am." Then he imposes a "small additional penalty of six million years in prison." Officer Shrift (who is also the jailer) takes them to prison and leads them down into a musty cell. He tells Milo and Tock that they can always talk to the witch, if they get lonesome and leaves them.

Milo and Tock are shocked by the severity and swiftness of their punishment. Milo resolves that if he ever gets out of prison, he will learn as much as he can about words, so as to avoid this kind of trouble ever again. A voice compliments him on his ambition. Milo and Tock look for the speaker and are surprised to find an old lady in the corner, knitting.

She introduces herself as Faintly Macabre, the Which. She's not a witch, as Milo had supposed. She is the king's great aunt, and once upon a time, her job was to choose which words were to be used for every occasion. At first, the Which's motto was "Brevity is the soul of wit," but as time passed, she became more stingy with words. Eventually, her motto was "Silence is golden." Of course, silence meant that no words were bought or sold, and Dictionopolis was ruined. The king had the Which thrown in prison, and here she has been ever since. Milo is sympathetic and resolves to get her out of prison, but Faintly Macabre tells him she cannot be released until the return of Rhyme and Reason. Milo and Tock ask for that story, and the Which begins.

Chapter 5, Short Shrift Analysis

Two important things happen to Milo in this chapter. The first is that he begins to appreciate that words, spelling, and word order are important tools to use correctly. The second is that he meets Faintly Macabre, who will tell him the story of Rhyme and Reason in the next chapter, the first step in what will be Milo's great quest.



Chapter 6, Faintly Macabre's Story

Chapter 6, Faintly Macabre's Story Summary

Faintly Macabre, the former official of Dictionopolis, tells Milo the story of the beginnings of the Lands Beyond. Once, the land was barren and filled with evil creatures and known as Null. One day, a ship appeared on the Sea of Knowledge, bringing a young prince who drove out the evil creatures from a small piece of land at the edge of the sea. The prince built a city that grew into a kingdom, and he called his kingdom Wisdom. The king continued to battle the evil outside his walls, and when his two sons grew up, he sent them out to establish their own kingdoms. One went south to the Foothills of Confusion and built Dictionopolis. The other went north to the Mountains of Ignorance and built Digitopolis. As the brothers' kingdoms grew, the darkness and terrible creatures were driven farther away.

The brothers were rivals, each believing that his kingdom was the more important. The one argued for the importance of words, the other for the importance of numbers. One day, the old king, their father, found a basket containing two abandoned baby girls. He named them Rhyme and Reason, and they were the joy of his old age. When he died, the old king left the kingdom of Wisdom and the care of the little girls in the hands of their brothers.

Rhyme and Reason grew to be beautiful, gentle and wise. Where their brothers quarrelled continually, the girls sought harmony. As King Azaz (of Dictionopolis) and the Mathemagician (of Digitopolis) grew in power and wealth, their conflict grew, as well. When they put the question of which was more important, words or numbers, to Rhyme and Reason, the young women announced that they were equally important. This answer pleased everyone except the two kings, who banished the princesses to the Castle in the Air. Since then, Wisdom has fallen into disrepair, and there is no one to set things right.

Milo suggests that he and Tock might rescue the princesses, if there were any way to get out of prison. Faintly Macabre assures him that Officer Shrift loves to put people into prison but does not care about keeping them there. So, Milo and Tock leave the prison and are instantly accosted by the king's advisors. They insist that Milo and Tock come to the king's banquet, taking them in their own vehicle, which "goes without saying" (so everyone must be quiet to make it run.)

Chapter 6, Faintly Macabre's Story Analysis

This chapter sets out both the central theme of the book, as well as the central conflict of the plot. The book's theme is that knowledge, learning and thinking are essential goods that stand in direct contrast to the evils of ignorance, confusion and stupidity.

Thus, the kingdom of "Wisdom" is carved out of the darkness of "Ignorance" and "Confusion."

The conflict that moves the plot forward is that the princesses Rhyme and Reason have been banished by learned but selfish kings, and nothing in the kingdom of Wisdom will be quite right until the princesses return. The rescue of the princesses will be Milo's quest for the rest of the book.



Chapter 7, The Royal Banquet

Chapter 7, The Royal Banquet Summary

The king's advisors lead Milo and Tock to the palace, where all the other guests (including the Humbug, Spelling Bee and Officer Shrift) have already gathered. King Azaz the Unabridged greets Milo gruffly, and Milo is responsible for picking the menu. Milo suggests a light meal, and waiters bring out platters filled with beautiful shafts of light. Milo then suggests a square meal. The waiters bring out plates of steaming squares of all shapes and sizes that, unfortunately, taste awful.

The king announces that it is time for speeches. Milo begins in a traditional way, thanking the king and fellow guests, but the king cuts him off in mid-sentence. The Humbug's speech is "Roast turkey, mashed potatoes, vanilla ice cream," and the other diners give similar speeches. When everyone is served again, Milo's unappetizing words are brought to him. The king says that he should have chosen better, and Milo replies that he did not know he would have to "eat his words."

Finally, for dessert, the king orders pastries from the half-bakery, where half-baked ideas come from. The guests consume such half-baked ideas as "THE WORLD IS FLAT" and "NIGHT AIR IS BAD AIR." Tock advises Milo to avoid eating too many of these, because they can make one terribly sick.

Chapter 7, The Royal Banquet Analysis

This chapter does almost nothing to move the plot forward, but it is chock full of word play. Everything that Milo says turns out to be wrong, because words are terribly literal in the Kingdom of Dictionopolis.



Chapter 8, The Humbug Volunteers

Chapter 8, The Humbug Volunteers Summary

Everyone is stuffed after the feast. As King Azaz begins to give a speech, everyone except Milo, Tock and the Humbug (who has fallen over backwards from overeating) rushes from the room. When Milo points this out, the king becomes sad and says he does not know what to do. The Humbug offers a slew of unhelpful suggestions, but Milo quietly suggests letting Rhyme and Reason return from the Castle in the Air. The king admits that this would be nice, but it is impossible.

The Humbug begins agreeing with both sides of the conversation, affirming that it is impossible with the king. He then asks "why?" Eventually, both Milo and the king demand that the Humbug explain how the rescue of Rhyme and Reason could be accomplished, which the bug does. The Humbug describes each extraordinarily dangerous stage of the journey, the nearly impossible task of rescue, and the well-nigh hopeless process of return.

At the end of the Humbug's description, Tock asks who will make the journey. The king says that is an important question, but not the most important problem. When Milo asks what the most important problem is, the king says that he cannot tell until Milo has returned from the journey. Without really consenting, Milo finds that the king has decided to send him on the quest. The king also sends the protesting Humbug along as a guide and gives Milo a box of all the words he knows. It is apparent that Tock will also accompany Milo. They all pile into Milo's car and begin their journey.

Chapter 8, The Humbug Volunteers Analysis

This chapter moves the plot forward, when King Azaz agrees to send Milo, Tock and the Humbug on the quest to bring back Rhyme and Reason.



Chapter 9, It's All in How You Look at Things

Chapter 9, It's All in How You Look at Things Summary

Milo, Tock and the Humbug leave Dictionopolis and soon are driving through open and beautiful country. They pass a sign that says, "THIS IS THE SCENIC ROUTE: STRAIGHT AHEAD TO POINT OF VIEW." They stop, as the road comes to a gorgeous lookout. Milo says the view is beautiful, and a voice answers that it's all in how you look at things. Milo finds himself facing a person suspended in mid-air, whose feet are nearly level with Milo's eyes.

The boy tells Milo that if a person likes deserts, then this view might not be beautiful. Milo asks how the boy got up in the air, and the boy explains that everyone in his family grows this way. They are born with their heads at the height they will be when they are grown, and their feet grow down until they reach the ground as adults. Milo explains that he and his family are born with feet on the ground, and their heads get higher as they grow. The boy thinks this sounds silly, because then Milo's point of view will be constantly changing as he grows.

The boy tells Milo that, while his family always sees things from the same point of view, there are other ways to look at things. For instance, the boy tells Milo what he had for breakfast, he tells Tock that he is always worried about wasting time, and he tells the Humbug that he is almost always wrong. Milo asks how the boy could know these things. The boy replies that he is Alec Bings, and he sees through things. Alec sees what is inside and behind, but he cannot see what is right in front of his nose. Alec says that his father sees to things, his mother looks after things, his brother sees beyond things, his uncle sees the other side of the question, and his sister sees under things.

Milo asks if he could see things from up where Alec does. Alec tells him that he could if he tried very hard to see things as an adult does. Milo tries and rises into the air for a moment before falling back down. Alec recommends that he keep his own point of view and offers to show the travelers the rest of the woods. Alec skips off and Milo, Tock and the Humbug follow.

Chapter 9, It's All in How You Look at Things Analysis

There is obviously more word play in this chapter, specifically about views and seeing. Milo is adding to the knowledge gained on this trip. He has learned that thinking gets you somewhere, while not thinking gets you nowhere. Words are important to understand and use correctly. Everyone has a point of view, and it is important to know your own, as well as try sometimes to see things from someone else's.



Chapter 10, A Colorful Symphony

Chapter 10, A Colorful Symphony Summary

Alec leads Milo, Tock and the Humbug running into the forest, but, because he cannot see what is right in front of him, the group soon becomes lost. Alec denies that they are lost, because "being lost is never a matter of not knowing where you are; it's a matter of knowing where you aren't." Alec tells Milo to ask the giant if they are lost.

Milo sees a small house with a sign that says "THE GIANT" and knocks on the door. An ordinary man comes out, identifies himself as the smallest giant in the world, and cannot tell Milo whether he is lost. Milo goes around the corner of the house, where a sign says "THE MIDGET." A man, who looks identical to the giant, answers and identifies himself as the world's tallest midget. He, too, cannot tell Milo whether he is lost, and sends him around the corner to the fat man. Again, an identical man answers, calling himself the world's thinnest fat man, and again, Milo is sent to the next door. By now, Milo thinks he has this figured out, and asks the next man if he is the fattest thin man in the world. When the man affirms this, Milo says that he thinks all four men have really been the same man four times. The man shushes Milo and tells him that he does this to be extraordinary. To a fat man, he is skinny. To a small man, he is a giant. No one, he says, would ask his opinion if he were only an ordinary man. Milo tries, once again, to ask if his party is lost and gets no satisfactory answer.

Milo asks Alec if many people live in the forest. Alec answers that many people live in the wonderful city of Reality. When Milo asks if the beautiful, shining city he sees ahead of them is Reality, Alec tells him that it is only Illusions and not really there at all. Alec tells Milo that they are standing right in the center of Reality at that moment. Milo, Tock and the Humbug look around. Although they can see crowds of people all looking down and hurrying by, they cannot see any city. Alec tells them that once there was a city, but as people hurried more and more and paid less and less attention to the city, it slowly disappeared. As no one is looking, none of the citizens even realize that their city is gone.

It is nearly sunset, and Alec leads Milo and friends to a different part of the forest, where a thousand musicians are playing. Milo hears nothing, and Alec explains that you don't hear this concert, you watch it. The orchestra is playing the sunset, and there would be no color in the world if this orchestra didn't play it. When darkness falls, Milo meets the conductor, Chroma the Great, who conducts the orchestra all day, every day. Milo asks what would happen if the orchestra stopped playing, and Chroma stops the musicians and shows Milo a world that looks like a coloring book that has never been used. Chroma lets the musicians play on, and asks Milo to wake him at 5:23 the next morning, so that he can conduct the sunrise. Milo agrees, and everyone settles down to sleep.



Chapter 10, A Colorful Symphony Analysis

There are more lessons for Milo about point of view. The man who styles himself as either a giant, midget, fat or thin man, depending on the point of view of the viewer, reminds Milo that the same thing can look very different from different points of view.

The cities of Reality and Illusion are two lessons about attention. In Reality, people became so busy and focused on efficiency that everything else in their world disappeared. Illusion is not there at all, but that does not stop some people from living there. This is another example of how this world is "out of joint" and will be until the return of Rhyme and Reason. Milo will get into some trouble with the orchestra that plays all of the world's color in the next chapter.



Chapter 11, Dischord and Dynne

Chapter 11, Dischord and Dynne Summary

Milo wakes alone the next morning at 5:22, just in time to wake Chroma for the sunrise. Milo thinks it would be wonderful to begin to conduct the orchestra himself, just to surprise everyone and just for a few minutes. Milo stands on the conductor's podium and crooks a finger at the orchestra. In response, a single piccolo plays a single ray of sunshine into the air. Milo continues and so does the color. When Milo tries to stop in order to wake Chroma, the orchestra plays on, and the colors become more and more vivid and out of place. Flowers become black, rocks become chartreuse, and Tock looks ultramarine. The musicians begin to play faster, and time begins to move faster, until a whole week has passed in what seems like a few minutes. Milo drops his hands in despair, and the orchestra stops playing. Tock's clock reads 5:27, and Milo wakes Chroma, who thanks him and begins conducting the sunrise. No one (except Milo and a few people who were up at 5:22am) ever knows about the missing week.

Milo, Tock and the Humbug say goodbye to Alec. Alec gives Milo a small telescope as a goodbye gift. Alec tells Milo that it will allow him to see things as they are and not just as they appear to be. Milo and his friends get into his car and drive on.

The group soon sees a carnival wagon parked on the side of the road, bearing the sign "Kakaphonous A. Dischord, Doctor of Dissonance." Milo knocks cautiously on the door and instantly hears the sound of a whole set of dishes falling to the floor and smashing. The door opens, and a man looks out. He asks Milo if he has ever heard the sound of a whole set of dishes falling before. Milo replies that he had not, until just then. The man invites Milo and his friends inside.

The inside of the wagon looked like an old-fashioned apothecary shop, full of bottles and books. The man asks if they have ever heard the sound of a blindfolded octopus unwrapping a cellophane-wrapped bathtub, and just such a sound fills the air. The man appears to be a doctor in his white coat and stethoscope, and Milo asks if he is. The man tells him that he is Kakaphonous A. Dischord, Doctor of Dissonance, while the sound of explosions and crashes ring through the air. The Humbug asks what the A. stands for. Dr. Dischord replies "AS LOUD AS POSSIBLE."

Milo and the others soon find out that Dr. Dischord makes loud, unpleasant noises, for anyone who orders them. He makes "noise pills, racket lotion, clamor salve, and hubbub tonic." Dr. Dischord says business has become very good since most people moved to cities and need all the attendant noises that go with that. He offers Milo and his friends a little medicine to help them never hear a beautiful sound again. Everyone refuses, and Tock points out that there is no such sickness as lack of noise. Dr. Dischord agrees and says that he will give the medicine to the Dynne for his lunch.



Dr. Dischord opens a bottle, and a blue smog comes out. It grasps the beaker of medicine and drinks it down, complimenting Dr. Dischord on the concoction. Dr. Dischord tells Milo of how he found the awful Dynne as an orphan and brought the Dynne up to be his assistant. Milo asks what a Dynne is. Dr. Dischord asks Milo what his parents tell him to stop when he is playing noisily in his room. Milo admits that they tell him to stop that "awful din."

The Dynne is going out collecting noise that day. He finds all the unpleasant and horrible noises he can and brings them back to the doctor to mix into his medicines. Dr. Dischord asks Milo which direction they are headed. Milo tells him that they are going to Digitopolis. The Dynne looks horrified, and Dr. Dischord tells Milo that they will have to go through the Valley of Sound. Milo asks what is so awful about that, and the doctor tells him he will find out soon enough.

Chapter 11, Dischord and Dynne Analysis

Milo has his own experience as the sorcerer's apprentice when he tries to conduct Chroma's orchestra and loses control of the musicians and the colors they create. Dr. Dischord and his noisy assistant, the awful Dynne, may be seen as another way in which this world is slightly out of joint because of the absence of Rhyme and Reason.



Chapter 12, The Silent Valley

Chapter 12, The Silent Valley Summary

Milo and his friends drive into the valley, wondering what about the pleasant scenery could have so upset Dr. Dischord and Dynne. As they pass a stone gate, Milo notices that something is different and tries to say so, but he cannot make a sound. Indeed, nothing makes any sound, not Tock's clock, not the movement of their bodies, nothing.

As they drive on, they find themselves amid a group of people holding signs like "DOWN WITH SILENCE." The people are pulling a large cannon. Using signs and blackboards, they tell Milo their story.

Many years ago, the people of the Valley of Sound lived in peace and happiness with their ruler, the Soundkeeper. Every sound was given by the Soundkeeper and collected at day's end to be recorded and filed. Over time, more people came to the valley with more sounds, some beautiful and some not. There were so many sounds that people stopped listening to them all, and, thus, fewer sounds were left at the end of the day to be collected. Those that were left were hardly worth keeping. The cause of the trouble was unknown, but many people believe that it began around the time that Rhyme and Reason were sent away. The Soundkeeper allowed Dr. Dischord to try and help, but he cured everything but the noise. The Soundkeeper became furious and decreed that there would be no more sounds in the valley.

The citizens of the Valley of Sound ask Milo (in writing) for his help in attacking the fortress where the Soundkeeper lives. They ask Milo to go to the castle and bring back a sound with which to arm their cannon. Milo agrees. Milo goes to the castle and is delighted to find that he can talk again. The Soundkeeper invites him in. She is listening to her favorite program, called "fifteen minutes of silence." She tells Milo all about quiet and silence in great detail. The Soundkeeper offers to show Milo the vaults where all the sounds are kept. She shows him the recording system that makes a note of each sound that is made. Milo asks if he could take a sound as a souvenir, and the Soundkeeper says "no."

The Soundkeeper shows Milo the room where they used to invent new sounds. She explains that one must decide what a new sound looks like, make that, grind it up, and throw a bit of the sound around the air whenever you need it. She demonstrates with a bass drum, making big, fluffy cotton balls appear. Milo claps his hands and makes pieces of paper fall. Music is woven on looms. The Soundkeeper becomes so enthusiastic about sound that Milo asks why she can't let everyone have sound again. The Soundkeeper angrily says that people only use sounds to make ugly noises, and she won't ever let the sounds out again. Milo is about to protest, about to say, "But..." when he stops himself, and keeps the word right on the tip of his tongue. The Soundkeeper ushers him out, making sure that he hasn't slipped a sound into his pocket. Milo leaves in silence.



Chapter 12, The Silent Valley Analysis

This chapter gives another example of how things have gone awry since the imprisonment of Rhyme and Reason. Both the Soundkeeper and the citizens of the Valley of Sound have valid complaints. However, because they are no longer ruled by Reason (and Rhyme), the situation has gotten out of control.



Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions

Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions Summary

Milo brings the small sound, "but" out to the citizens of the Valley of Sound and gently drops it from the tip of his tongue into the cannon. The cannon is fired at the Soundkeeper's fortress and destroys it. Every sound in the vault comes hurtling out all at once in deafening confusion. As the sounds disperse, everyone is able to go back to their normal, noisy way of life, except the Soundkeeper, who is sadly sitting in the midst of the rubble of her castle. She admits that she was foolish to try to improve sound with silence. Dynne comes from over the hill with all the escaped sounds, which the Soundkeeper is delighted to be able to catalogue and store again. The Soundkeeper gives a gift of sounds to Milo to take on his journey to rescue Rhyme and Reason.

Milo, Tock and the Humbug resume their drive toward Digitopolis. The Humbug remarks that nothing can go wrong now and suddenly jumps from the car to a little island off shore. Tock says that they have plenty of time and jumps the same way. Milo says the day couldn't be finer and makes the same jump as his friends.

The island (which looked quite beautiful from the road) is a dead and desolate place, and the three friends don't know where they are, or how they got there. Milo asks an approaching stranger where they are. The stranger replies by asking who he (the stranger) is. As the stranger describes himself ("as tall as can be, and as short as can be") at length, Milo determines that he is Canby. Canby is delighted and explains to Milo that he is on the island of Conclusions. Milo and his friends jumped to Conclusions, when they decided something without having any good reason to do so. Canby tells them that they can swim back through the Sea of Knowledge to the shore they jumped from. Milo, Tock and the Humbug swim back to the car and resume their journey.

Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions Analysis

When Milo and his friends make their unfortunate remarks and jump to Conclusions, Canby tells them that they can swim in the Sea of Knowledge all day and not become wet. As the three friends swim back to shore, both Milo and Tock become quite wet, while the Humbug stays dry. Milo and Tock disprove Canby's statement, because they are both learning to absorb knowledge (or "absorb Knowledge"). The Humbug stays dry, because he is apparently still incapable of learning. Milo's remark that he will avoid jumping to Conclusions, because it wastes too much time, proves this point even further.



Chapter 14, The Dodecahedron Leads the Way

Chapter 14, The Dodecahedron Leads the Way Summary

As the friends approach Digitopolis, the road divides into three roads. A sign gives the distance to Digitopolis in miles, rods, yards, feet, etc. A strange person with 12 faces approaches and introduces himself as the Dodecahedron. His 12 faces are each different, and he uses them as needed situations arise. He uses a happy face for happy times, a sad face for sad times, and so on. Milo asks which of the three roads they should take to get to Digitopolis, and the Dodecahedron replies with a series of complicated math problems. Tock patiently figures out the first problem, while the Humbug shouts out incorrect answers. Milo feels more and more confused. Tock's answer shows that all three roads are the same length. So, each road is the right (or wrong) way to go.

The Dodecahedron leads the group to Digitopolis, which is not a city, but a mine where all the numbers in the world are dug out of the earth. The mine belongs to the Mathemagician (King Azaz's brother and rival,) who shows Milo and his friends the valuable and beautiful numbers that are dug up every day. The Humbug asks if they dig up any diamonds or rubies, and the Mathemagician shows him an enormous pile where they throw the jewels that just get in the way of mining for numbers. The Mathemagician invites Milo and his friends to lunch.

Chapter 14, The Dodecahedron Leads the Way Analysis

Milo shows the same ignorance about and lack of appreciation for numbers that he did for words at the beginning of his visit to Dictionopolis. This time, the reader already expects Milo's assumptions to be proven wrong, and the value of numbers to be shown in following chapters.



Chapter 15, This Way to Infinity

Chapter 15, This Way to Infinity Summary

The Mathemagician's miners bring a pot of stew for lunch, and Milo and his friends eat bowl after bowl, curiously becoming hungrier and hungrier after each helping. The Mathemagician tells them that it was subtraction stew, and everyone in Digitopolis eats when he is full. The Mathemagician uses his staff (which resembles a giant pencil) to erase the cave, and Milo and his friends find themselves with the Mathemagician in his workshop. The circular workshop is filled with tools for measuring, a huge pad of paper for working problems, and numbers everywhere. The Mathemagician shows Milo several tricks with numbers, such as how to make things disappear (by writing an equation that equals zero).

Milo asks to see the biggest number, and the Mathemagician shows him a gigantic 3. Milo rephrases his question and asks to see the longest number. The Mathemagician shows him a very long 8. Frustrated, Milo looks to Tock for help, and Tock asks for the number of greatest possible magnitude. The Mathemagician asks Milo to tell him the biggest number he (Milo) can think of, then tells him to add one, then add one again, then add one again, and so on. Milo learns that you can always add one to any number. Then the Mathemagician shows him the opposite is also true - the smallest number can always be divided in half. Milo asks where they could keep these numbers, and the Mathemagician shows him the way to the land of Infinity, right up a flight of stairs. Milo runs up the stairs, telling his friends that he won't be long.

Chapter 15, This Way to Infinity Analysis

The Mathemagician carries a pencil as his magic staff because, as he says, you can do anything if you have a pencil. The Mathemagician never tells Milo that there is not a biggest or a smallest number. He just sends him to Infinity to find out for himself.



Chapter 16, A Very Dirty Bird

Chapter 16, A Very Dirty Bird Summary

Milo races up the stairs, but as time passes, he climbs more and more slowly. As he realizes that he probably will never get to the top, a voice tells him that he's not missing much. Milo sees that the speaker is a boy who looks as if he has been divided in half from top to bottom. The boy tells Milo that he is actually .58 of a child, because the average family has 2.58 people, and he is the .58. Milo and the boy discuss averages. Milo objects that averages aren't real, and the boy replies that, real or not, they are very useful. Milo tells the boy that he can't reach the top of the stairs, and the boy tells Milo that it is important to try, even if one never reaches one's goal. As Milo returns to his friends, he reflects that everyone here knows so much more than he does, and he will have to do better if he is going to rescue the princesses.

Milo returns to the Mathemagician's workshop and tells the Mathemagician that he didn't reach the land of Infinity and that everything in Digitopolis is much too difficult. The Mathemagician replies that the only easy thing to do is to fail, and that is hardly worth doing.

Milo and his friends broach the subject of Rhyme and Reason's return. The Mathemagician angrily refuses to agree to Milo's plan to rescue them, since King Azaz agreed. The two leaders, the Mathemagician states, can never agree on anything. Milo proves to the Mathemagician that since both he and King Azaz agree to never agree, they are really in agreement. The Mathemagician roars that he has been tricked, but agrees that Milo can try to rescue Rhyme and Reason. Just as King Azaz did, the Mathemagician tells Milo that there is a bigger problem than rescuing the princesses. However, like King Azaz, the Mathemagician says that he can't tell Milo until afterwards.

The path that Milo and friends must take is too steep for the car, so the Mathemagician sends them on their way with their gifts (words, sights, and sounds) and one more gift of a pencil. Milo, Tock and the Humbug begin their journey through the inhospitable mountains of Ignorance. Soon, an ugly bird resembling a soiled mop begins to speak to them, taking whatever Milo says and misunderstanding or misrepresenting his meaning. For instance, when Milo says that they are looking for a place to spend the night, the bird screeches that it is not theirs to spend. When Milo says that it doesn't seem right, the bird says that it doesn't seem left either. The bird is the Everpresent Wordsnatcher, and he is from a place called Context, but he spends almost all of his time out of it. The bird leaves the friends more confused, and they continue on their journey.

Milo, Tock and the Humbug reach the top of the mountain, only to find more and more peaks beyond. An elegantly dressed gentleman is leaning against a tree along the path, beautifully dressed but with no face. He asks Milo and his friends for help with a few tasks. Milo must move a pile of sand using only tweezers, Tock must empty a well with



an eyedropper, and the Humbug must dig a hole through a cliff with a needle. The three agree to their tasks and begin working for hours.

Chapter 16, A Very Dirty Bird Analysis

Milo has become used to "being addressed at the oddest times, in the oddest places, by the oddest people," and he meets three such odd people in this chapter. Milo gives up his climb to Infinity in disappointment, but receives encouragement from both the .58 boy and the Mathemagician. In mathematics, as in life, trying is sometimes more important than reaching a goal, and, as the Mathemagician points out, only failure is done easily. Milo proves that he is beginning to learn when he outsmarts the Mathemagician with logic.



Chapter 17, Unwelcoming Committee

Chapter 17, Unwelcoming Committee Summary

Milo, Tock and the Humbug work at their tasks for hours without tiring, but without seeming to get anywhere, either. Tock suggests that Milo use his magic staff (the pencil that the Mathemagician gave him) to find out how long it will take them to finish. Milo calculates the answer as 837 years. Milo asks the man with no face whether these jobs are really important enough to devote that much time to them. The man becomes angry and insists that nothing is more important than the unimportant. Milo recognizes the man as the Terrible Trivium, demon of worthless jobs and petty tasks. Just before Milo and his friends become lifelong captives of the Trivium, a voice calls, "RUN, RUN!" and they flee.

The three friends follow the sound of the voice and escape the Trivium, but are led along harder and more dangerous paths. Finally, they end up in a deep pit with no apparent exit. The voice becomes gleeful and tells Milo and his friends that they should have never taken his advice, because he is a horrible and ferocious monster. The monster comes to the edge of the pit and looks in. Milo uses his telescope and sees that instead of a giant and terrifying monster, the creature is small, furry and worried-looking. It is the demon of insincerity, and he never means what he says. Milo's ability to see the demon as it really is frightens it away, and the three friends manage to climb out of the pit.

The next demon Milo and friends encounter is the Gelatinous Giant, a creature of enormous size but no real shape of his own. The Gelatinous Giant always endeavors to blend in with his background, which in this case is mountainous. The Giant is actually frightened of being conspicuous, making a positive statement, having his own opinion, or taking chances. Milo saves his friends by offering to open his box of all the ideas in the world, his gift from King Azaz. The Gelatinous Giant cannot abide ideas (having none of his own and no wish to think about anyone else's) and lumbers away.

Milo and his friends resume their journey with renewed vigor since the alarm has been sounded, and demons of all shapes and sizes are giving chase.

Chapter 17, Unwelcoming Committee Analysis

In this chapter, Milo meets some of the demons that plague many would-be thinkers, scholars and questers-for-wisdom. The Terrible Trivium is the demon of the trivial and useless tasks and busy work that keeps many a thinker from thinking about anything of importance. The demon of insincerity never says what he means, and can consequently lead one questing for greatness far astray. The Gelatinous Giant cannot commit to anything, not even an idea, because to do so is to risk being wrong. A thinker who cannot risk being wrong is not thinking very imaginatively.

Also of note in this chapter is the solidifying of the relationships between Milo, Tock and the Humbug. Each is behaving with more assurance, even the Humbug, and they are becoming a real team.



Chapter 18, Castle in the Air

Chapter 18, Castle in the Air Summary

The demons pursue Milo, Tock and the Humbug up the mountain to the topmost peak, where the slender staircase leads to the Castle in the Air. Just as the friends reach the stairs, they are stopped by a man with a ledger, quill and ink. The man introduces himself as the Senses Taker and asks innumerable questions about their names, addresses, family names, heights, weights, shirt size, collar size, and more. Milo and his friends are impatient to keep moving, as the demons continue to draw nearer. When the questions are all finally answered, the Senses Taker offers something better than getting to the Castle in the Air to Milo and his friends. To Milo, the Senses Taker gives the fabulous sight of an amazing circus. To Tock, he offers a marvelous smell. To the Humbug, he offers the sound of cheers and congratulations. Milo and his friends are entranced by these illusions and appear to have forgotten their quest. Then, Milo accidentally drops his package of sounds. The happy sound of laughter rings out until Milo, Tock and the Humbug join in. The illusions vanish, and the Senses Taker snarls that, while he can steal their senses, even their sense of purpose, he cannot take anyone's sense of humor. It is that which has defeated him.

The demons are nearly upon them. Milo, Tock and the Humbug make the final dash up the stairs to the Castle in the Air. At the top, they enter the castle, and the sweet voices of Rhyme and Reason invite them in. Both princesses are beautiful and wise, and they listen as Milo tells of his trip. Milo laments his mistakes, and the princesses tell him that there is no shame in mistakes, as long as one learns from them. Yes, Reason agrees, there is so much to learn, but everything that we learn may someday have a purpose that we cannot yet know. While you may not be able to do or see or reach everything today, learning gets you a little closer to your goal and may make it possible someday.

The demons reach the castle and chop it free from the staircase. The castle begins floating higher in the sky. Milo reminds Tock that time sometimes flies, and Tock agrees. The princesses ride on his back, Milo grabs his tail, and the Humbug hangs on to Milo's ankles. Thus, Tock carries his friends back down to the ground.

Chapter 18, Castle in the Air Analysis

Milo and his friends meet the last demon on their way to the Castle in the Air. The Senses Taker steals their senses. First, he takes their sense of urgency and purpose with his interminable questions. Then, he steals Milo's sight, Tock's sense of smell, and the Humbug's sense of hearing. However, their sense of humor saves them, as they join in the laughter that rings from the Soundkeeper's gift of sounds.

Milo's conversation with Rhyme and Reason includes an explanation of the novel's major theme. Learning is important, both for what it gives the learner, right now, and for what it may provide in the future.



Chapter 19, The Return of Rhyme and Reason

Chapter 19, The Return of Rhyme and Reason Summary

Tock flies back down to the ground, carrying Rhyme and Reason, with Milo and the Humbug trailing behind. When they land, they must run, because all of the creatures that choose to dwell in Ignorance are hot on their heels. Demons such as the Gorgons of Hate and Malice, the Gross Exaggeration, and the Threadbare Excuse pursue them. Just as Milo and his friends are about to be caught, the demons stop. The entire army of Wisdom is arrayed before them, led by King Azaz and the Mathemagician. The demons flee.

The princesses are warmly greeted and Milo, Tock and the Humbug are cheered as heroes. Milo finally learns the "even bigger problem" that King Azaz and the Mathemagician refused to tell him at the beginning of his quest. His mission of saving the princesses was completely impossible. However, as Milo has learned, many things that are impossible remain possible, as long as one does not know that they are impossible.

A festival and carnival begins, halfway between Dictionopolis and Digitopolis. All the characters that Milo met on his journey are there, entertaining the citizens by using their gifts in moderation and accord. After three days, Reason and Rhyme tell Milo that it is time to go, for there is still much work to be done. The Humbug and Tock have jobs in the realm, and Milo bids them a fond farewell. Milo thanks everyone for all the things that he has learned and gets into his car to drive home. As he leaves, he hears Azaz and the Mathemagician beginning to bicker about the importance of words versus numbers and think, "Oh dear, I do hope they don't start it all again."

Chapter 19, The Return of Rhyme and Reason Analysis

Milo's quest has been a success. Not only has he learned a great deal about thinking, learning, words, numbers, sounds, sights and friendship, but all the citizens of the Lands Beyond have been returned to their proper places, able to do what they do best in the right measure. Azaz and the Mathemagician may begin bickering, but it does not dull the accomplishment of the return of Rhyme and Reason (at least not yet.)



Chapter 20, Good-by and Hello

Chapter 20, Good-by and Hello Summary

Milo retraces his journey home, a little concerned that someone might be worried about his extended absence. He finds the tollbooth with no trouble. He ends up back in his bedroom, and it is only 6:00 on the very day he left. Exhausted by his adventures, Milo soon falls asleep.

At school the following day, Milo's head is full of plans for a return trip to the Lands Beyond. When he gets home, the tollbooth is gone. A letter addressed to MILO, WHO NOW KNOWS THE WAY tells Milo that other boys and girls need the Phantom Tollbooth, and Milo will surely find a way back if he really wants to. Milo is sad at the thought of not seeing his new friends, but soon realizes that there is so much to do and see and learn right where he is. For the first time in his life, Milo feels too busy and excited about the here-and-now to be concerned about what he's missing.

Chapter 20, Good-by and Hello Analysis

The reader is left with the sense that Milo has been irrevocably changed by his experiences in the Lands Beyond. Happy, interested, busy, and looking forward to what comes next, this Milo is quite opposite from the dull, bored boy the reader met in Chapter 1.



Characters

Milo

Milo is a young boy with too much time and too little to do. At the beginning of the novel, Milo is perpetually bored and glum. The mysterious delivery of the Phantom Tollbooth is especially suited to shake Milo out of his thoughtless and disinterested rut. Indeed, it is addressed to Milo "who has plenty of time." Despite his glum outlook and lack of interest in anything, Milo is an appealing character in whom a reader can usually identify some of his own bad traits and habits.

Milo's journey to the Lands Beyond begins his true education. Milo has never been interested in school, in part because he has never had it explained to him why learning is important. In the Lands Beyond, Milo will be shown over and over why learning and knowledge are important. His journey begins in the Doldrums, where the lassitude and lack of interest that have defined Milo's life are shown to be a dead end. If one does not think or care, one may as well just give up and be a sleepy Lethagarian, who does nothing all day long. Fortunately, Milo is saved from this life of nothingness by the watchdog, Tock, who becomes his first friend and companion in the Lands Beyond.

As Milo's travels continue, he is exposed to new ideas, meets new creatures and people, and taught a great deal about learning, knowledge and wisdom. One of Milo's most appealing characteristics is that he almost always underestimates himself but rises to challenges without really being aware of how or why he got there. As the novel progresses, Milo's boredom disappears and his respect for learning and knowledge grows. Milo also becomes able to use the tools or skills that he has been given along the way in a quest to save the princesses, Rhyme and Reason. By the end of the novel, Milo is changed. The Phantom Tollbooth disappears while he is sleeping, because he has learned to learn and will continue to find new things to think about and try.

Tock

Tock is a watchdog, a truly large dog with an enormous alarm clock for a body. He is, naturally, interested in time. When he first meets Milo, Tock reprimands him for wasting or "killing" time. Tock is also a dog, and he shows the fierce loyalty to Milo that one associates with a dog. He also loves car rides, as many dogs do, and it is this that first brings him to accompany Milo on his journey.

Tock treats Milo as the unquestioning leader of their journey and, later, of their quest to save the princesses, Rhyme and Reason. But, even as he follows Milo's leadership, Tock is still a thoughtful creature. He is often the voice of reason when Milo is expressing bemusement about some one or thing that they have met. When Milo is befuddled by the volume of words used by King Azaz's advisors, Tock wisely points out that they are using a lot of words to say very little. Tock is also good with numbers, and



is the one who can solve the math problem given by the Dodecahedron about which road to take into Dictionopolis.

The friendship between Milo and Tock forms fast, thanks to Tock's habit of loyalty and ability to follow. Since Milo has so little judgement of his own, at least in the beginning of the novel, he learns to trust the good advice of his steadfast friend. This is the relationship that makes Milo's leave-taking sad. No other character has become so close to Milo by the book's end.

The Humbug

Primarily a humorous character, the Humbug also becomes a member of Milo's team and, at times, shows some worth other than as a belligerent fool. Milo first meets the Humbug in the word marketplace of Dictionopolis. The Humbug approaches, loudly denouncing the Spelling Bee and demanding to be introduced to Milo. The Humbug is nearly always wrong, and shouts his wrong opinions at the top of his voice, but he is neither ill-natured nor, as the Spelling Bee says, "a very dislikable fellow."

The Humbug inadvertently "volunteers" to accompany Milo on his quest to save Rhyme and Reason by thoroughly articulating the path and the dangers involved with the impossible journey. He is of little use to Milo along the way, usually shouting out exactly the wrong thing at the wrong time. Somehow, however, he is so predictably wrong yet good-natured (at least toward Milo), that one cannot find him nearly as disagreeable as he ought to be.

King Azaz

The monarch of Dictionopolis, King Azaz is obsessed with words. His name, Azaz, is spelled only with the first and last letters of the alphabet, as if his name encompasses all the letters, and therefore all the words, in the world. Faintly Macabre, the Which, tells Milo the history of the Kingdom of Knowledge and about the never-ceasing argument between King Azaz and his brother, the Mathemagician, over the importance of words versus numbers. Azaz and the Mathemagician sent their foster sisters, the princesses Rhyme and Reason, to the Castle in the Air when the princesses said that neither words nor numbers were more important than the other.

King Azaz has a small role in the book, presiding over a strange royal banquet in which the guests eat their words and agreeing to send Milo on the quest to rescue Rhyme and Reason. He is blustering and quick-tempered, and the reader can easily imagine that he is involved in an argument that has sunk the Kingdom of Knowledge into disarray. King Azaz gives Milo a box containing all the words, and therefore all the ideas, in the world. This gift helps Milo escape the Gelatinous Giant in the Mountains of Ignorance.



The Mathemagician

The Mathemagician is the brother of King Azaz and the ruler of Digitopolis, the city of numbers. Just as boisterous and argumentative as his brother, the Mathemagician is extremely knowledgeable in his area of expertise (numbers) but insensitive to anyone else's ideas or opinions. He refuses to agree with King Azaz to send Milo on a quest to save Rhyme and Reason until Milo proves that by agreeing to always disagree, the Mathemagician and King Azaz are actually in agreement. The Mathemagician gives Milo a magic staff, which is actually a pencil, to use to figure out any problem he may find on his quest. Milo uses his magic staff to determine that the jobs given him and his companions by the Terrible Trivium will take hundreds of years to complete.

Rhyme and Reason

The princesses Rhyme and Reason are not so much characters in the novel as personifications of ideas. It is the absence of Rhyme and Reason that has the Lands Beyond in disarray. None of the characters (except the demons in the mountains of Ignorance) in the Lands Beyond are evil or deliberately cruel. Most of them are just lacking perspective and moderation. The absence of Rhyme and Reason is the reason for this lack of balance.

When Milo actually meets the princesses in the Castle in the Air, they are beautiful, wise, and kind, just as fairy tale princesses ought to be.

The Whether Man

The first person Milo meets on the other side of the Phantom Tollbooth, the Whether Man greets Milo in Expectations. The Whether Man is jolly and lively but incapable of making a decision for himself.

The Spelling Bee

The Spelling Bee is a large insect that spells words as he talks. Milo meets the Bee in the word market of Dictionopolis.

Officer Shrift

Officer Shrift is an incredibly short, pushy policeman who throws Milo and Tock into prison for the disturbance in the word market.



Faintly Macabre

Faintly Macabre is the "Which" whose former job was to determine which word was appropriate. She is now in the prison of Dictionopolis for temporarily enforcing silence, and she tells Milo the story of the banishment of Rhyme and Reason.

King Azaz's Cabinet

King Azaz's advisors, The Duke of Definition, the Minister of Meaning, the Earl of Essence, the Count of Connotation, and the Undersecretary of Understanding, use synonyms to say very little with a great deal of words.

Alec Bings

Alec Bings is the boy who sees through things. Milo meets Alec in the Forest of Sight on his way to Digitopolis. Alec's head is at an adult's height and his feet are off the ground at about the height of Milo's head. Alec gives Milo the telescope that will show him what is actually there instead of what something looks like. Milo uses it to see the Demon of Insincerity as he really is.

Chroma the Great

Chroma the Great is the conductor who conducts the orchestra of color that gives everything in the world its color.

Dr. Dischord and Dynne

Dr. Kakaphonous A. Dischord is a carnival-style doctor, who claims to cure people of a lack of noise. The awful Dynne is a genie-like creature, who works as Dr. Dischord's assistant.

The Soundkeeper

The Soundkeeper lives in a fortress, where she keeps all the sounds away from the citizens of the Valley of Sounds. When Milo helps to destroy her fortress and release the sounds, she gives him a package containing some of her favorite sounds, including the sound of laughter. This sound helps Milo get away from the Senses Taker in the Mountains of Ignorance.



The Dodecahedron

The Dodecahedron is a twelve-faced creature, who changes his face to match his feelings and introduces Milo to the Mathemagician.

Demons and Other Creatures in the Mountains of Ignorance

The Everpresent Wordsnatcher takes everything Milo says out of context. The Terrible Trivium assigns meaningless and time-consuming tasks. The Demon of Insincerity never means what he says. The Gelatinous Giant is afraid to think for himself. The Senses Taker wastes time recording facts and steals Milo's sense of sight, Tock's sense of smell, and the Humbug's sense of sound.



Objects/Places

The Phantom Tollbooth

The tollbooth arrives and disappears by mysterious means. First, it takes Milo to the Lands Beyond. Then, it leaves him to find his own way back when he has learned the way.

The Doldrums

The Doldrums is where Milo first gets lost by not thinking. Its inhabitants are called the Lethargians, and they do nothing all day.

Dictionopolis

Dictionopolis is the city of words, ruled by King Azaz the Unabridged. The countryside surrounding the city is full of orchards, where all the words in the world are grown.

Box of Words

King Azaz gives Milo a gift of all the words, and therefore all the ideas, which he knows. Milo uses the ideas to defeat the Gelatinous Giant, who is terrified of ideas.

The Forest of Sight

When Milo, Tock and the Humbug leave Dictionopolis, they travel through the Forest of Sight on their way to Digitopolis. Here, they meet Alec Bings, the man who is a giant, pygmy, fat man or thin man (depending on one's point of view.) They also meet Chroma the Great.

Telescope

Alec Bings gives Milo a telescope with which he can see what is really there. Milo uses the telescope to see the Demon of Insincerity for what he really is.

The Valley of Sound

Although it is called the Valley of Sound, Milo and his friends find this area completely silent. The ruler of the area, the Soundkeeper, took away all the sounds when people began misusing them. Milo helps the citizens destroy the Soundkeeper's fortress and regain their sounds.



Bag of Sounds

The Soundkeeper gives a bag of sounds to Milo for when he finds himself hungry for beautiful sounds. When Milo drops the bag under the influence of the Senses Taker, the sound of laughter helps Milo, Tock and the Humbug regain their senses.

Magic Staff

The magic staff is the symbol of the Mathemagician's power. It is a large pencil, and the Mathemagician gives a smaller version to Milo for his quest. Milo uses his pencil to figure out how long it will take to complete the Terrible Trivium's tasks.

Mountains of Ignorance

In the Mountains of Ignorance, all the demons reside that plague Milo on the last leg of his journey to save the princesses, Rhyme and Reason.

Castle in the Air

Rhyme and Reason are confined to the Castle in the Air until Milo arrives to free them. The demons destroy the stairway that holds the Castle to the ground below, and Tock carries everyone safely back to the ground.

Setting

The book has two settings. The story begins in the real world, in a large modern city much like New York or Chicago, where Milo lives on the eighth floor of an apartment building. He walks home from school along busy streets, past a vast array of buildings and shops, but nothing ever interests him enough to cause him to look up from the pavement. Although his room at home is filled with toys and games, he does not enjoy playing with any of them. One day he arrives home from school and discovers a huge package sitting in the center of his room. Inside is a turnpike tollbooth, just the right size to go with his small electric automobile. Having nothing better to do, he assembles the tollbooth, gets into his car, and drives up to it.

Suddenly, without any warning, Milo finds himself driving down a country highway in the Kingdom of Wisdom, a magical land where the unexpected can—and does—happen at any time.

The Kingdom contains two great cities, Dictionopolis, ruled by King Azaz the Unabridged, and Digitopolis, where Azaz's brother, the Mathemagician, is king. Between these two outposts of civilization, the Old City of Wisdom, the original outpost, lies in ruins, although settlements of people may be found in the Forest of Sight and the Valley of Sound. On the frontier of the kingdom are the Mountains of Ignorance, and demons dwell there, waiting for their chance to overrun the land.



Social Sensitivity

Juster's book addresses a current problem in society: children and young adults who simply do not want to learn.

It is one thing for adults to lecture them on the importance of getting an education; but these speeches often leave no impression. The Phantom Tollbooth reinforces the importance of learning in a humorous and entertaining fashion.

The book has other virtues: it is neither sexist nor racist. The most enlightened characters in the book are female, while the kings, traditional bearers of male power, are confused and are depicted as in the wrong. While no actual races are mentioned, the inclusion of so many characters of different types (dogs, bugs, a character called the Dodecahedron, because he has twelve faces) allows the reader to see that there is nothing to fear just because someone is different.

People should be judged on what they do and say, not on how they look, and throughout The Phantom Tollbooth, Juster attacks prejudice.

Literary Qualities

The Phantom Tollbooth is written in a warm and conversational style, and Juster often steps out from behind the scene to directly address the reader.

When Milo drives through the tollbooth and into the lands beyond, for example, he thinks, "What a strange thing to have happen," and the author adds "(Just as you must be thinking right now)." This style is one of the great strengths of the book. Its simplicity and the level of its diction make it easy to read, although Juster occasionally challenges readers with a difficult word that may send them scurrying for the dictionary.

The book can be read as a simple adventure story, a fantastic tale of a young boy who enters a magical land, undertakes a dangerous quest, and succeeds. However, there are other things in the book that may be enjoyed in addition to the story. Juster includes a number of puns and plays on words in his names and places, and these puns will sometimes only be funny to readers with a large vocabulary or an extensive reading background.

The illustrations by renowned cartoonist Jules Feiffer are a fortunate addition to the story, and their whimsical depictions of the characters fit perfectly with the text descriptions. Feiffer's pictures help the reader visualize some of the more difficult concepts and descriptions, such as what Tock or the awful DYNNE (who is described as a "thick bluish smog") might look like.



Themes

Wisdom and Ignorance

The primary theme of the novel is the tension between wisdom and ignorance. Indeed, because the Lands Beyond are quite literal, Wisdom is a kingdom carved out of the wilderness of Ignorance. Just as one must constantly struggle in the pursuit of knowledge and learning to keep ignorance at bay, so the city of Wisdom is in constant struggle to keep the demons of Ignorance from overwhelming the city. With the banishment of the princesses, Rhyme and Reason, the city of Wisdom falls into disrepair, regained territory by the denizens of Ignorance.

When Wisdom falls, it is interesting that the cities of Dictionopolis and Digitopolis continue to thrive. The author seems to be making a distinction between learning and wisdom. King Azaz and the Mathemagician are experts in their fields of words and numbers, respectively. For all their learning and power, they lack wisdom, as shown by their inability to accept the judgement of Rhyme and Reason that both words and numbers are important. Even at the end of the book, they begin quarrelling again, leaving Milo to wonder if the whole thing will start all over again. Azaz and the Mathemagician have mastered learning, but if they do not accept the influence of Rhyme and Reason, they will continue to lack wisdom.

The book presents a dim view of the "state of wisdom" in the Lands Beyond, and, by inference, the reader's world. Milo thinks that the pursuit of knowledge and learning is a colossal waste of time, because no one has ever told him otherwise. Who should have told Milo that learning is valuable? The reader can infer that the author is criticizing not only schools and teachers, but also parents and society as a whole. The novel is littered with comments that imply that wisdom is sought only by a very few. For instance, Canby tells Milo that he can swim all day in the Sea of Knowledge and come out dry, and that most people do. In other words, most people don't absorb even a drop of knowledge, even when they are submerged in it. Milo learns by the end of the book to enjoy learning and the pursuit of wisdom. The book does end on an optimistic note, at least for this one character.

Moderation and Balance

The princesses Rhyme and Reason could easily be renamed Moderation and Balance. The princesses are the embodiment of justice and balance, and their banishment puts all of the Lands Beyond out of balance. When Wisdom falls, King Azaz and the Mathemagician continue to pursue their own particular areas of expertise with great success, but everywhere there are signs that all is not as it should be. When Milo boasts that he can count to a thousand, King Azaz is enraged and declares that he and the citizens of Dictionopolis only use numbers when absolutely necessary. When the Mathemagician shows Milo a letter written entirely in numbers, the Mathemagician



insists that numbers are the only universal form of communication and cannot comprehend that King Azaz might not have understood the note. Neither ruler can see that his area of learning is only one part of the whole of wisdom.

As Milo travels, everyone he meets is, to a greater or lesser degree, out of balance. King Azaz's advisors use a profusion of words to say very little. Faintly Macabre, the Which, and the Soundkeeper begin to value silence more than the words and sounds that their jobs entail. The Dodecahedron cares more about getting the right solution to a problem than whether the problem has any value or sense to it. With the exception of the demons of Ignorance, Milo meets no one on his journey who is intentionally evil or trying to cause disruption. Yet, everyone he meets is either causing harm or has been harmed by a lack of sensible moderation in what they are or do. Many characters are explicit about things beginning to go wrong, or get out of balance, when Rhyme and Reason were banished. The author seems to be proposing that there is good in many things; such as, words, numbers, sights, sounds, spelling, and being able to see someone else's point of view. However, there must be an overriding sense to these pursuits. They must be tempered by moderation.

Language

If the "message" of the novel is that wisdom ought to be pursued and ignorance shunned, and if the "warning" that goes with that message is that all things should be done in moderation, then those themes are conveyed to the reader in a playful, humorous way by the author's use of language. The whole world created in the Lands Beyond is a world where words have power and physicality. Language is not just a form of communication in the novel. It defines the very being of everything it names. Dr. Kakofonous A. Dischord's name tells you almost everything you need to know about his character. If the average family has 2.58 people, then it follows that, in the Lands Beyond, there must be a .58 person in the family. In the novel, every idea has a person, place or thing that gives that idea physicality.

There is a quality of "metafiction" to this theme. A book is, at its most basic level, a collection of words. In this case, this "collection of words" is at least partly *about* words. The novel asks the reader not only to share in the author's enjoyment of language and wordplay, but also to think about words and language as powerful tools in the pursuit of wisdom.



Themes/Characters

The main character of *The Phantom Tollbooth* is Milo. As the story begins, he is not interested in anything at all, and consequently, he is not very interesting himself. King Azaz, for example, mutters, "What an ordinary little boy," when Milo admits that he cannot sing, or tell stories, or do anything to entertain.

However, as Milo continues to experience surprises, the reader can see that he is actually intelligent and perceptive. He has simply been unwilling to apply himself. By the close of the book, Milo has completed the quest set for him, and all of his good qualities have been revealed: intelligence, determination, honesty, resourcefulness, and love.

Through his experience in the Kingdom of Wisdom, Milo becomes a complete—and much more interesting—person.

The two characters that accompany Milo through most of his trip are the ticking watchdog, Tock, and the lovable Humbug. Tock is a watchdog in every sense of the word; although he has four feet, a dog's head, and a tail, his body is a loudly-ticking alarm clock. Tock teaches Milo many lessons, beginning with how to escape from the Doldrums, where Milo has driven without thinking, and it is Tock whom Milo misses most when he prepares to leave for home.

Milo's other companion, the Humbug, is a large, beetlelike insect who wears fancy clothes and a derby hat. The Humbug is a long-winded fellow, sure of himself and dense as a brick, but somehow he is impossible to dislike, and Milo develops a real affection for him during their adventures. The reader, too, will discover how first impressions can be mistaken, for the Humbug is not very appealing at first glance, but grows more lovable as the story unfolds.

King Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician are the authority figures in the book. Although their quarreling over whether words or numbers are more important puts them in a bad light, they are essentially good people. After the rescue of the wise and beautiful princesses, Rhyme and Reason, the two kings are able to settle their differences, revealing that even people with deep-seated disagreements can compromise and work together. In addition, a number of whimsical minor characters appear, including Faintly Macabre, the Not-So-Wicked-Which; the Spelling Bee, a huge insect who spells everything it says; Alec Bings, who sees through things; and King Azaz's ministers, who consistently use too many words in order to seem intelligent.

All of these characters, major and minor, embody the main theme of the story: the importance of learning. The most ridiculous characters, such as the ministers, are people who abuse their learning, while the princesses, Rhyme and Reason, represent everything a human can attain in their intelligence and wisdom. Milo begins as a boy who cannot understand why he is expected to learn things. He discovers how little he really knows during his adventures, as well as how important it is to learn as much as possible and apply that learning judiciously. All of the good characters in the book,

including the stubborn kings and the Humbug, learn something during the book. The only characters who do not are the demons who inhabit the Mountains of Ignorance. They are content to dwell there, away from the light of learning, but human beings should realize that ignorance is not the state in which they ought to live their lives.



Style

Points of View

The point of view of the novel is in the third person. As Milo is the main character, the reader is sometimes given a glimpse of his thoughts, while the other characters are only given a "voice" when they are actually speaking. A particularly notable example is Chapter 12, The Silent Valley, when all the characters lose their ability to speak in the Valley of Sound. The narrator keeps the reader informed of Milo's thoughts, but the other characters must be physically described: "The Humbug...leaped to his feet in terror, and Tock worriedly checked to see if he was still keeping time."

Setting

Most of the novel takes place in "the Lands Beyond." This is a strange and wonderful world, which Milo enters when he uses the Phantom Tollbooth. The Lands Beyond include the cities of Dictionopolis and Digitopolis, where all the words and numbers in the world come from, and natural landmarks, such as the Sea of Knowledge and the Mountains of Ignorance.

The world Milo comes from can be assumed to be very much like the reader's. The Lands Beyond are totally unlike the reader's world in that nearly everything is literal. While we might say someone "eats his words" in our world, in the Lands Beyond, someone can do that quite literally.

Language and Meaning

While the novel's plot is fairly simple (similar to a traditional fairy tale, for instance), the language is by far the most important part of the story. In a world such as the one created in this book, where words and phrases have literal, physical structure, knowing the meaning of the words in the book is very important. Some of the words or phrases that may be unfamiliar are defined here:

Doldrums: sluggishness or inactivity; a dull or gloomy feeling

Humbug: a person who is not what he claims to be, or an impostor

Short shrift: impatient or careless treatment

Macabre: grim or horrible

Chroma: color

Kakofonous (cacophony): a deliberate misspelling of cacophonous (unpleasant to hear)



Dischord (discord): a harsh noise

Dynne: a deliberate misspelling of din (an awful noise)

Gelatinous: jelly-like, without its own shape

Senses Taker: a deliberate misspelling of census taker (one who records many small pieces of information about a large number of people)

Structure

The story is told in twenty chapters of varying length. Most chapters' titles mention a person or place that will be important in that chapter. For instance, Chapter 3 is titled *Welcome to Dictionopolis*. Each chapter follows the one before in strict chronological order. The only flashback in the book is entirely contained within Chapter 6, which is aptly named *Faintly Macabre's Story*.



Quotes

"And since no one bothered to explain otherwise, he regarded the process of seeking knowledge as the greatest waste of time of all." Chapter 1, Milo, page 9

"What had started as make-believe was now very real." Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations, page 16

"...once a week we take a holiday and go nowhere...Would you care to join us?' 'I might as well,' thought Milo; 'that's where I seem to be going anyway.'" Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations, page 27

"Do you mind if I get in? I love automobile rides"" Chapter 2, Beyond Expectations, page 31

"I never knew words could be so confusing," Milo said to Tock as he bent down to scratch the dog's ear. 'Only when you use a lot to say a little,' answered Tock." Chapter 3, Welcome to Dictionopolis, page 44

"History is full of Humbugs." Chapter 4, Confusion in the Marketplace, page 54

"Everyone loved the princesses because of their great beauty, their gentle ways, and their ability to settle all controversies fairly and reasonably." Chapter 6, Faintly Macabre's Story, page 75

"...if Christmas trees were people and people were Christmas trees, we'd all be chopped down, put up in the living room, and covered with tinsel, while the trees opened our presents." Chapter 9, It's All in How You Look at Things, page 104

"...it's just as bad to live in a place where what you do see isn't there as it is to live in one where what you don't see is." Chapter 10, A Colorful Symphony, page 119

"If only Rhyme and Reason were here, I'm sure things would improve." Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions, page 164

"It's really quite simple: every time you decide something without having a good reason, you jump to Conclusions, whether you like it or not." Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions, page 168

"...you can swim all day in the Sea of Knowledge and still come out completely dry. Most people do." Chapter 13, Unfortunate Conclusions, page 170

"...as long as the answer is right, who cares if the question is wrong? If you want sense, you'll have to make it yourself." Chapter 14, The Dodecahedron Leads the Way, page 175



"...the only thing you can do easily is be wrong, and that's hardly worth the effort."
Chapter 16, A Very Dirty Bird, page 198

"'You must never feel badly about making mistakes,' explained Reason quietly, 'as long as you take the trouble to learn from them. For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons.'" Chapter 18, Castle in the Air, page 233

"'Well, I would like to make another trip,' he said, jumping to his feet; 'but I really don't know when I'll have the time. There's just so much to do right here.'" Chapter 20, Goodby and Hello, page 256

Adaptations

In 1970, MGM released an animated film version of *The Phantom Tollbooth*. It duplicates the spirit of the novel by using live action for the "real world" sections at beginning and end, and animation for the fantasy world that makes up the middle. The film includes half a dozen songs, most with little redeeming value, with titles like "Numbers Are the Only Things That Count" and "Noise, Noise, Beautiful Noise." Critical reception to the film was mixed; the entertainment paper *Variety* described the film as tedious and dull, although it praised the animation and found the basic story amusing. Other reviewers found it to be excellent entertainment for children as well as adults.



Topics for Discussion

1. Although Milo is the hero of the story, is he a remarkable character?

How typical is he of boys and girls today?

2. The Mathemagician thinks that numbers are more important than words; King Azaz believes the opposite.

Do you believe that one is more important than the other? Or do you agree with Rhyme and Reason that they are of equal importance?

3. The Humbug is a liar, a fraud, and, as the Spelling Bee says, "A very dislikable fellow." Why, at the end of the book, is he described as "lovable"? What has happened to change our opinion?

4. What does Milo learn from conducting Chroma's orchestra? How does he feel after the episode is over?

5. Milo's parents never appear in the story. Why do you suppose Juster left them out?

6. Among the demons that are described in the book are the Terrible Trivium, demon of petty tasks and worthless jobs; the demon of insincerity; the Gelatinous Giant; the Overbearing Know-it-All; and the Threadbare Excuse. What are some other demons that might be named for bad habits?

7. At the conclusion of Milo's journey into the lands beyond, why does the tollbooth disappear? Why does it not remain so he could reenter the Kingdom of Wisdom again and again?

8. How would you respond to the tollbooth appearing in your room? Knowing what you know about the Kingdom of Wisdom, would you want to go there?

How do you think you would react differently than Milo to the situations he faced?



Essay Topics

Discuss the theme of wisdom and ignorance in the novel. Does the book seem optimistic about most people's ability to achieve wisdom?

Give three examples in the novel of words or phrases that have a literal or physical being in the Lands Beyond. How does the meaning of these words or phrases inform the reader about the character, place or thing in the Lands Beyond?

Name three of the gifts that Milo receives on his journey. Explain how he uses those gifts in his quest to save the princesses Rhyme and Reason.

Milo does a heroic thing by rescuing the princesses. Does Milo fit your idea of a hero? Why or why not? Support your answer with examples from the book.

Who gives Milo the most help on his journey and quest? Support your answer with examples from the book.

Name three characters in the book whose interests, duties or activities have gotten "out of balance" since the banishment of Rhyme and Reason. How do you expect those characters to behave after Rhyme and Reason return? Give a specific description of how you imagine those characters to behave "in the future."

How does Milo change during the course of the novel? Do you believe that Milo's normal life will be significantly different after his time in the Lands Beyond?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Many reviewers have compared *The Phantom Tollbooth* to fantasy novels such as *The Wizard of Oz* and *Alice's Adventure in Wonderland*. Compare the book to one or both of these classic fantasy tales. How are they similar? Different? Which did you like the most?
2. Juster has played on words and made puns throughout the book (take, for example, the Wicked Which and the awful DYNNE). Pick several words or names from *The Phantom Tollbooth* and explain what Juster has done to make a joke.
3. The Wicked Which and the Soundkeeper are both women who once occupied positions of responsibility and abused their power. How are they similar? Is one more sympathetic than the other?
4. How does Milo succeed in a quest that the two kings believe to be impossible? Describe his character, the help he receives from Tock and the Humbug, and how the gifts he receives along the way lead to his success.
5. Although some of the demons are frightening, others appear, at least at first, to be likeable, or at worst, worthy of sympathy. They represent faults that all of us have to some degree. Pick several of the demons and describe how they have influenced someone you know, possibly even yourself. What, for example, are some things that you have done to waste time under the influence of the Terrible Trivium?
6. *The Phantom Tollbooth* was made into an animated film in 1970. Compare the book and the film. Do the songs in the film add to your enjoyment? Is the experience of imagining what happens in the book better than seeing it depicted in a cartoon? Which do you like better?
7. Some people have said that the book is too complicated for young readers, that it contains jokes and wordplay that will go over their heads. Do you agree or disagree? Explain your answer. You may also want to let friends read the book and compare experiences with them.

Further Study

Mathes, Miriam. *Library Journal* 87 (January 14, 1962): 332. Mathes argues that Juster's use of irony and wordplay may make his book too difficult for some young readers.

Maxwell, Emily. *New Yorker* 37 (November 18, 1961): 222. This lengthy review of the book describes it as "lucid, humorous, full of warmth and real invention."

McGovern, Ann. *New York Times Book Review* (November 12, 1961): 35.

McGovern's highly-complimentary review compares the book to classic fantasy novels like Alice's Adventures in Wonderland.



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