

Princess Academy Study Guide

Princess Academy by Shannon Hale

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Plot Summary

"Princess Academy" by Shannon Hale is the story of Miri Larensdaughter, a fourteen-year-old girl living with her sister Marda and their father in a mountain village. Their mountain is called Mount Eskel and it is a territory of the kingdom of Danland. The main industry in the village is mining linder, a smooth white stone with ribbons that can vary in size and color. Miri, unlike her peers, is not allowed to help in the linder mines, though the exclusion makes her feel inadequate. Traders journey up the mountain once in a while to trade their goods for linder, although their prices are getting steeper. The priests in Asland, Danland's capitol, have declared that the next princess will hail from Mount Eskel. The king requires all the eligible girls to attend the princess academy, a few hours' walk from the town. Though many of them do not wish to go, their attendance is required by law. Miri misses her sister at the academy. The girls are taught by a strict lowlander named Olana, who punishes them harshly when they break rules. Miri accidentally causes the girls to miss going home before the big winter snows, effectively turning her into an outcast. Instead of socializing with the girls Miri focuses on her studies and on figuring out the properties of quarry-speech, the telepathy-like communication the workers use to communicate while in the mine. Miri misses her family and her friend Peder, for whom she has special feelings. Miri is at the head of the class and befriends Britta, a lowlander who has recently come to Mount Eskel to live. Katar and the older girls are jealous of Miri's success in class. Miri eventually regains the trust of most of the girls and leads them back to the village for the spring holiday, although Olana has resolved that most of them have not earned the right to go. The girls band together and use Olana's own teaches to regain entry into the academy, striking a balance between what the teacher expects and how the girls want to be treated. Miri is unsure whether she wants to be princess but she is definitely curious about the world outside Mount Eskel. During an exam before the ball Miri uses quarry-speech to help the other girls pass. She thinks they all deserve to go to the ball because they have worked so hard. The prince is not what any of the girls expected and many of them are very disappointed in his behavior and demeanor. He makes a hasty retreat after the ball and the academy is taken over by bandits who demand to know which girl is the future princess. The girls refuse to abandon one another and work together to confuse the bandits. They are in great danger, and Miri uses the linder to try and communicate to Marda and Pa that they need help. Finally she gets through to Peder, who arrives with the villagers and defeats the bandits. The girls move back to the village to await the prince's next visit. Miri starts a school for everyone ineligible for the princess academy. Upon the prince's return he chooses Britta, whom he has actually known for years, to be his princess. Miri is happy to stay on Mount Eskel with her family and to be truthful about her feelings for Peder. She knows that she is truly happy on Mount Eskel and is enthusiastic to teach everyone else what she has learned.



Chapter One and Chapter Two

Chapter One and Chapter Two Summary

The Princess Academy is the story of Miri, a girl born in the village of Mount Eskel, part of the kingdom of Danland. Miri's village is chosen by the kingdom's priests as the home of the next queen, so she and all the eligible girls between the ages of 12 and 17 must attend the Princess Academy to be taught how to be a princess.

In Chapter One, Miri wakes before her family and plans to go to the linder mine to prepare for the traders' arrival. Pa will not let her. She and her sister Marda go through the chores and Miri says she is determined to trade with the lowlander Enrik, who is stingy. Miri has never been allowed in the linder mines and she does not know why. Linder is the village's only natural resource and is valuable to trade to lowlanders. Miri's Pa wanted her name to be Linder, but her mother did not want her to be named after a stone. Miri's mother died when she was only a week old. In the mines people used quarry-speech, a way of communicating through the noise of the mine. Miri has been friends with Peder Doterson since childhood but now feels awkward around him. The traders come and Peder is waved over by Liana and Bena, both of whom Miri perceives as prettier than herself. A messenger from the King announces that priests have determined the Prince's bride will come from Mount Eskel. All the girls in the village between the ages of 12 and 17 are to attend an academy, and the Prince will visit in a year to choose his bride.

In Chapter Two the trading begins. Miri tries to be like Doter, Peder and Esa's mother, who is a very good trader. Enrik refuses to give Miri what she asks for the trade, claiming the other traders went to the academy instead of up the mountain. That night Miri and Marda decide not to go to the academy. Miri worries the village would not be able to mine without the extra help, and is satisfied that Pa does not want them to go either.

Chapter One and Chapter Two Analysis

In Chapter One the reader is introduced to Miri, the main character in the book. Miri is enthusiastic and curious, though is plagued with uncertainty about her role in the village. She wants to help in the mines but Pa will not let her. She assumes it is because she is small and useless and she is self-conscious about being left out. Quarry-speech is some sort of mental communication between the miners that allows them to talk without speaking out loud. This means they can still talk to one another even through the noise in the mine. Miri is confused about her friend Peder. Though she has always been friends with him and they had a lot of fun in childhood, they are each growing up and they are maturing. She feels tongue-tied and awkward around Peder now, and is confused about her feelings for him. He seems to act the same around her as he always has which makes her feel silly and adds to her self-consciousness. Mount Eskel is very



remote and far from the rest of the kingdom, and everyone is surprised that it has been chosen as the home of the next princess. The lowlanders and the king's messengers are rude to the people in the village, and the villagers have low opinions of them as well.

In Chapter Two Miri is disappointed that Enrik will not trade the way she has planned—he is in fact very rude and condescending to her, which upsets her. She is worried that the poor trade will not get them through the winter. Miri does not want to go to the academy, and thinks Pa is on her side when they discuss everything at dinner.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four

Chapter Three and Chapter Four Summary

In Chapter Three Miri wakes up to trumpeting, which unsettles her. She remembers a bandit attack from long ago, but Pa says there are soldiers sounding the trumpets. The sounds have come for the girls, but Marda is too old to be considered. Pa tries to prevent them from taking Miri and the adults of the village gather with the soldiers to discuss their situation. Os and the adults decide it will be best for the girls to attend the academy and Miri is embarrassed by Peder. Miri wonders if Pa would be more upset if it was Marda going to the academy and not her. Miri and the other girls begin walking and she takes Esa's hand, a tradition in the mountain to keep people from slipping off the cliffs. The girls spot Britta, a lowlander who has been living on the mountains. She worked briefly in the quarry but acted as if she were deaf and was sent home. She moved to Mount Eskel to live with distant cousins after her parents died. The academy was in the stone minister's house three hours from the village. The girls meet their tutor Olana Mansdaughter, who is strict and looks down on the girls. Knut is the academy's handy man and the girls are told not to bother him. Olana tells them they will be punished for speaking out of turn, and the Princess Academy is a tradition in Danland. She singles out Britta as a true Danlander and expects her to lead the class. Olana begins teaching the class to read and when Britta fails to read letters Miri wonders about her motives. Katar is determined to do well in class. Gerti speaks out of turn and Olana puts her in the closet. That night the girls whisper to each other. Miri does not think Olana's treatment of them is fair.

In Chapter Four Miri feels excluded by the other girls and wishes Marda or Peder was there with her. She wonders if there is more to Britta than meets the eye, but quickly dismisses her because she is a lowlander. Later that day the girls are excited to return to the village for a visit, even including Miri in their plans. During their lessons Miri tries to help Gerti, who missed the first lesson because she was in the closet. Olana punishes both she and Gerti by striking the palms of their hands. Later during the lesson Peder comes from the village to ask when the girls will be home. During their meal Miri says they should all just go to the village anyway. Olana hears her and punishes all of them by forbidding them to go home at all. During their free time outside the girls blame Miri for their punishment, though Miri tries to explain that she was trying to help and the rules are unfair. Katar convinces the girls to stay by talking about the luxuries and excitement of being a princess and seeing the kingdom. Miri does not think the lowlanders will let a mountain girl become a princess. The girls follow Katar and Miri becomes an outcast. When snowfall prevents them from returning home on their next rest day, Olana assures them one academy member will be chosen as princess. She offers a beautiful silver gown as a prize. Miri decides she will prove Olana wrong, win the dress, and become the academy princess.



Chapter Three and Chapter Four Analysis

In Chapter Three Miri does not want to go to the academy. She is dismayed when Marda is too old because her sister is her best friend. She wonders if Pa would let her stay if she were more valuable to the village—she has low self-confidence. Miri tries to say goodbye to Peder but gets tongue-tied and blurts out that she wants him to miss her. He seems to take her blunder well, but when she turns to redeem herself he is talking to the other girls. Her awkwardness toward Peder makes her feel very foolish. On the way to the academy she takes Esa's hand as is tradition on the mountain but she feels awkward about that as well—without her sister Marda she does not have a best friend to turn to like the other girls. Olana Mansdaughter is very strict on the girls and seems to dislike her position as their tutor—what she thought was a prestigious royal appointment has turned into a joke to her. Miri thinks the way Olana treats them is unfair, though Katar is competitive and wants to get ahead in the academy.

In Chapter Four Miri's instinct is to help Gerti with her lessons. She thinks Olana will allow her to help since Gerti missed the first lesson. Miri thinks this is only fair, but Olana is angry and punishes both of them with lashes. Miri tries to stand up for what she believes in but no one helps her. She does not understand why Olana is so strict. She tries to stand up for the injustice of it all but accidentally gets into more trouble, which separates her from the other girls even more. Katar becomes her enemy, blaming Miri for their situation and trying to convince the other girls to stay because she wants to be a princess. Miri's sense of shame and being useless gets even stronger after the girls blame her for their punishment and stop speaking with her. She is upset that she cannot talk to Peder when he comes and is confused at her strong feelings for him. Though she does not really want to marry a lowlander Miri decides she will throw herself into her studies and prove to everyone that she is as smart as any lowlander.



Chapter Five and Chapter Six

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Summary

In Chapter Five Miri's reading skills keep getting better. Miri feels isolated from the other girls and misses Peder, Pa, and Marda. One afternoon Miri decides to stay in the classroom while the other girls are released outside, and she attempts to read "The History of Danland." When she cannot read it and does not know the word "commerce" she trades it for a book entitled "Tales," but must hide the book when Olana enters the classroom. Miri continues to practice reading in the bedchamber for the following weeks while the others are outside. A few days later in class, Miri is the only one who is able to read out of "The History of Danland," Katar is jealous of Miri's success in class. Later that evening Miri overhears Bena, Liana, and Katar talking about her performance in class and her chances with the prince. She takes comfort that night by thinking about the princess gown.

In Chapter Six winter is getting even colder and more bleak. After class Esa gestures for Miri to follow her, but Olana catches Miri trying to return the book and sentences her to the closet for stealing. Miri is terrified in the dark by herself, especially after hearing a mouse scuttling around. She eventually falls asleep but wakes up to a rat nesting in her hair. To calm herself Miri sings a song, tapping the linder on the floor. Olana promptly opens the door, claiming she would have forgotten Miri was in the closet if Gerti had not reminded her. On the way back to their room Gerti says she remembered Miri in a strange way, almost like quarry-speech. Miri is intrigued by the idea.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six Analysis

In Chapter Five Miri's isolation from the other girls spurs her to the top of the class academically: with no one to talk to she turns to her studies, improving her chances of becoming Academy Princess. She is hurt when Olana comments about her standing with the other girls, which is unnecessarily cruel. Miri is unexpectedly able to showcase her newly acquired reading skills in class, but her successes alienate the other girls even more. Katar is obviously very jealous of Miri, and actively tries to turn the other girls against her. Ironically, Miri's isolation from the others is the very thing that is helping her become the best in her class: she has nothing to do but study, while the others fill their leisure hours differently. To know that the other girls are talking about her behind her back sickens Miri, but also makes her more determined than ever to be Academy Princess.

In Chapter Six Miri may have gotten a chance to redeem herself with the other girls, but when Olana assumes she is stealing and punishes her the chance is lost. Miri is terrified of the small dark closet, and even more terrified when the rat makes itself known. The song is calming for her, but she is fascinated with the idea that Gerti somehow heard her plea—as if she was using quarry-speech. This makes no sense because they are

not in the quarry. Though she is shaken up by the rat, Miri goes to bed that night alight with the possibilities of the experience.



Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Summary

In Chapter Seven Miri thinks back to a time a few years ago when she and Peder were talking about the quarry. Peder explains to her that mining linder feels like singing along with the mountain, but singing inside oneself and not out loud. Miri remembers this conversation with Peder as she experiments with quarry-speech. She tries to communicate her experience with the rat to the other girls. During the chore hour everything briefly comes together, but it is quickly gone and she must return to the classroom. Before the lesson Miri asks Gerti how she is feeling, and Gerti responds that she cannot get the rat in the closet out of her mind. After their lesson Katar opts to stay in the classroom and study, causing Miri to go elsewhere and practice her quarry-speech. Over the next few days Miri begins to really feel the quarry-speech and practices often. Miri decides to try out her quarry-speech on someone and chooses Britta, who she thinks will be the least likely to laugh at her. They talk about Olana's cruelty and Miri tries quarry-speech on Britta, but discovers she is deaf to it. Later in the classroom Olana shows the girls a painting as incentive for them to be more aggressive in their studies: she claims the cottage in the painting will be given to the winning girl's family. Miri thinks about the possibility of leaving the mountain, and tries to communicate with the mountain in quarry-speech. She hears a rockfall in the distance, as if responding to her.

In Chapter Eight Miri is secretly excited about her work with quarry-speech, though the winter is miserable. Olana introduces new subjects to the girls including Poise, Geography, and Commerce. Miri wants to give her family the house in the painting but does not want to marry the Prince to do it. During a Conversation lesson Miri is assigned to be Britta's lesser. Olana never lets the girls forget they are considered less than citizens in Danland. Miri discovers Britta has been able to read the whole time, but withheld the information because she did not want to be treated differently than everyone else. Miri is confused when Olana explains Commerce to the girls, and frustrated when she cannot master it in her private studies later. She thinks about the village, where it will be slaughter time. Miri talks to Knut about gardening and they become friends. He does not like how Olana treats the girls and suggests Miri continue reading the commerce book. She finds a section about linder and discovers one block of linder is worth one gold coin. She realizes the lowlander traders have been giving them unfair prices, and cannot wait to return home in two months to tell her father.

Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight Analysis

In Chapter Seven Miri begins to examine quarry-speech in a more detailed way. She does experiments and then examines the outcome of her experiments. She uses the memory of Peder's explanation to guide her, which indicates that she respects his opinion and he is very important to her. It is nice for Miri to have something to occupy



her mind other than her princess studies, so in a way Katar is helping her by taking her studying space in the classroom. When Gerti says she cannot get the rat in the closet out of her mind it is a sign that Miri's quarry-speech experiment has worked, though Miri is frustrated that it will not work all the time. She chooses Britta for her next experiment because she does not think Britta will laugh at her like the other girls. This shows that Miri's standing in the school is still low—the others have not forgiven her for their missed holiday. Miri discovers that Britta is deaf to quarry-speech, therefore all lowlanders may be deaf to it as well. Olana's bribe of the cottage strikes a chord with Miri, who so desperately wants to give her family something important. She also begins to think of leaving the mountain, and if she is actually curious about the outside world. She previously had no desire to see any other part of Danland, but with her studies she becomes curious about other people and places.

In Chapter Eight Miri is less excited about the other subjects Olana introduces than she was to learn to read. Miri and Britta are becoming closer friends, which makes Miri feel slightly guilty for being so quick to judge Britta initially. Britta's opinion that everyone should be treated as one's betters shows that she is smart, and she makes Miri realize that not all lowlanders are the same. The concepts of Commerce are very difficult for Miri to understand, and even when she tries to figure it out herself she cannot. Miri wants the house in the picture for her family, but is not sure she wants to marry the Prince to get it. She is newly curious about the outside world but unsure that she wants to leave the mountain. Miri is pleased to befriend Knut, who seems like a kind person, and to hear about his father's gardening and his childhood fishing trips. She is realizing that not all lowlanders are the same, and the discovery of the price of linder sets her mind in motion. She calculates the prices of everything around her, and plans to tell the village of her discovery.



Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten Summary

In Chapter Nine Miri looks forward to the spring holiday so she can tell the village about Commerce. Miri explains to Britta the glories of the spring holiday and tells her about the quarry-speech experiments and her knowledge of Commerce. Britta admits that she could not hear quarry-speech during her few weeks working in the quarry, and Miri wants to see the gardens of the lowlands. Britta does not think the prince will see her in a room full with the other girls, and hopes the princess will be someone actually from Mount Eskel. Miri daydreams about becoming princess but she keeps thinking of Peder instead. She spends extra time studying Diplomacy and bonds with Esa, Peder's younger sister. Miri has felt separated from the others her age since they went to work in the quarry, but at the academy they are all together. After thinking about her time in the closet, Miri realizes that quarry-speech uses memories to carry messages. Everyone else seems to take quarry-speech for granted, but Miri delights in figuring out its secrets.

In Chapter Ten the girls all look forward to their spring holiday as winter slowly turns into spring. Olana decides to test the girls and only those who earn an appropriate grade will be allowed to go back to the village. She withholds the scores until the next day and reveals that only Miri and Katar passed the test. Miri thinks it is unfair for Olana to keep the other girls, but is torn between her sense of fairness and her desire to tell the village about commerce. Esa stands up to Olana and says she is going on her spring holiday, and Miri uses the girls' collective memories of the game Rabbit and Wolf to encourage everyone to leave. On the way back to the village Miri apologizes for getting everyone in trouble. She learns that the other girls thought she was mad at them because she always stayed inside to read, but she explains she was simply embarrassed. Miri shows Esa and Frid what she has learned about quarry-speech: that it communicates using memories, and the lowlanders cannot hear it because they do not have enough shared memories.

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten Analysis

In Chapter Nine Miri finally confides in someone: she reveals to Britta her experiments with quarry-speech and her musings about Commerce. She and Britta have formed an unlikely friendship, but Miri realizes Britta has been completely misjudged by the people of the village simply because she is a lowlander. They are each curious about the other's world. Miri would never have thought she would be interested in the lowlands, but she is curious about the gardens and greenery that Britta says is commonplace. In turn Britta is curious about quarry-speech and the traditions on the mountain. Miri is driven to be academy princess but not necessarily because she wants to marry the prince: her feelings for Peder are becoming more pronounced. He enters her daydreams about becoming princess and is present in her life at the academy through



his younger sister Esa. Miri is competitive and wants to beat Katar, who is unfriendly and often mean to her. Miri's realization about quarry-speech using memories comes after discussing Diplomacy with Esa—everyone else in her life has taken quarry-speech for granted, not necessarily caring how it works, but Miri has always wondered because of her separation from everyone in the quarry. Her discovery makes her feel very happy and confident, a stark contrast from her usual state of mind in the academy.

In Chapter Ten Miri and the other girls finally reconcile in their unity against Olana. Miri knows it is unfair for Olana to keep the girls through their spring holiday, and when she has to make the choice between gratifying her desire to go home and standing up for what she knows is right, she chooses to help the others. Katar, meanwhile, is ready to abandon everyone to get what she wants. This is the perfect time for Miri to both test her theories about quarry-speech and win back the friendships of the other girls: by telling them all to run she is confirming that she is on their side and wants to be part of their group, and also showing them something they have never seen before. Miri is driven mostly by her desire to help others: she must get back to the village to explain about Commerce, and she also wants the girls to be treated fairly. She also learns she has completely misperceived the girls' behavior toward her. While she thought they were all angry with her, it turns out they thought she was angry with them—happily, they can all move on after the shared rebellion from Olana and Miri's explanations.



Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Summary

In Chapter Eleven the girls return to the village and join the celebrations. Miri is happy to see Pa and Marda and embarrassed when Peder finally dances with her. The girls tell a story for the village, each contributing a line. After the storytelling Miri uses what she has learned in Conversation to talk to Peder and he reveals that quarry work bores him sometimes—he likes to carve things in linder stone. Miri mentions to him that his dream may be possible, abandoning the rules of Conversation to tell him her discoveries of the past few months. He tells her she does not have to pound out a rhythm to quarry-speak. After sharing a memory with Peder, Miri realizes that the linder makes quarry-speech work. Peder kisses her on the cheek as a goodbye, telling her the prince would be crazy not to choose her. Miri and Britta attend the village council meeting and share Miri's findings about linder prices and Commerce, and they decide to raise their prices to the traders. Miri is present for the debate, nervous about proposing her idea but gratified when the village agrees with her.

In Chapter Twelve Miri wakes early to start breakfast and meets some of the other girls outside. Bena and Liana think the village boys are boring, though before they had been very interested in Peder. They accuse Miri of being too proud to admit she wants to marry the prince, but really all she wants is the house in the picture, Peder, and her family. Britta shares that the prince's name is Steffan. The girls discuss how Mount Eskel is a territory, not a province, and lowlanders do not think of them as true Danlanders. Miri suggests they use Diplomacy to return to the academy and make things right with Olana. Katar, Bena, and Liana do not want Miri to lead the discussion but the other girls overrule them. Miri is happy the girls have so much faith in her. Later she tries to explain her findings about quarry-speech to Pa and Marda. Marda suggests that the linder amplifies quarry-speech and Pa says linder is in the people's bones. Miri realizes her sister a good problem-solver and wishes she had the opportunity to attend the academy too.

Chapter Eleven and Chapter Twelve Analysis

In Chapter Eleven Miri and the other girls are overjoyed to be home, and the villagers are likewise happy to have them. The village traditions are very important to each girl, and even Britta wants to be a part of everything. Miri is happy to see Pa and Marda, and joins in the ribbon dances. She is distracted by thoughts of Peder and startled when he suddenly begins dancing with her. She is afraid she appears unfriendly, so she seeks him out to ask him about how things have been since the girls have been gone. Though at first their conversation is stilted, she uses what she has learned of Conversation to draw Peder out of his shell. Eventually he notices that she is acting differently and he mentions it to her—he can tell she is not the same Miri. After she tells him all about the academy he confides in her his wish to carve linder. This gives Miri even more



motivation to tell the village about Commerce—she can help Peder with the knowledge too. He is upset that she wants to be academy princess and thinks the prince would be crazy not to pick her. He is internally struggling between what he wants and what he thinks Miri wants. The kiss is impulsive, as if Peder is still trying to think of Miri as his best friend but let his guard slip for just a moment. Miri has accomplished much of what she set out for in Chapter Eleven: she talks to Peder and tells the village about Commerce. Though she is terrified that they will not listen to her, Pa's approval is worth all the agonizing it takes for her to speak up.

In Chapter Twelve the girls decide to go back to the academy—not all of them aspire to be princess like Katar, but they like learned and want to learn more. They choose Miri to lead them in the Diplomacy plan against Olana. This finally convinces Miri that she is good at something and can be useful outside the quarry. This is important because Miri has felt useless all her life compared to the others who work. Miri's ambition to be academy princess is more to prove that she can be good at something, even if she is not allowed to work in the quarry. She is less interested in marrying Prince Steffan than Katar and more interested in her changing relationship with Peder. She and Peder have something in common now: they each feel they can do more than have been their traditional roles. Miri's realization that Marda is smart makes her wish her sister could also attend the academy. She also realizes that Marda wishes she could attend the academy as well—Miri's sense of fairness surfaces again and she begins to think of ways for Marda to learn like she has learned. Though Miri is disappointed in Pa's reaction to her discoveries, her sister's cleverness sparks her to reevaluate her idea of someone being "smart."



Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen Summary

In Chapter Thirteen the girls return to the academy, discussing their strategy along the way. Miri presents their terms to Olana: they will no longer be hit or locked in the closet, they will be allowed to go home for holidays and to help with trading, and they will only be punished with a missed meal. Olana accepts their terms, impressed at the girls' ability to demonstrate Diplomacy. The soldiers are dismissed so the girls do not feel like prisoners. Katar steps in at the last moment to help, but only out of self-interest. The next morning Miri spots a hawk carved from linder, a gift to her from Peder. She is happy to be his best friend.

In Chapter Fourteen spring has come to Mount Eskel in full force. Miri muses about becoming princess, but doubts she could marry someone she does not even know. The girls discuss how their newfound knowledge of Danland makes them feel small and insignificant, and Katar points out that a princess would matter much more than mere mountain girls. Miri knows there is nothing she can do to become the princess of Danland, but she can work toward becoming academy princess. The older girls began to study harder after Miri's tie with Katar, so Miri must devote even more of her time to her studies. Olana and the girls gradually relax into their new agreement. On the next test Katar scores first and Miri second, though Katar is not a gracious winner. Bena accuses the fourteen-year-olds of cheating. On the way back to the village the girls encounter the traders. They are outraged at the village's new prices for linder, but after a rousing speech from Doter the traders agree to the villagers' demands. Miri feels very important and the traders seem to be more respectful. Miri tells a story about Peder to Britta to get his attention, and Britta guesses that she has feelings for him. Britta feels uncomfortable at her second cousins' house so she decides to stay with Miri. Marda is hurt in the quarry and Miri is shocked when Pa bellows at her to get out. Miri is comforted by Doter, who explains that Pa keeps Miri out of the mines not because she is small or weak, but because Miri's mother died while stone-breaking and Pa cannot bear to let Miri do it. Doter says Marda takes after Pa and Miri takes after her mother. The next morning Pa apologizes to Miri.

Chapter Thirteen and Chapter Fourteen Analysis

In Chapter Thirteen the girls are nervous to stand up to Olana, but know they must in order to get what they want. The girls are able to get Olana to agree only by showing what they have learned—ironically, using what she has taught them. Miri argues their case very well, making fair demands of Olana and promising the girls' obedience and devotion to their studies. She also points out Olana's weakness in the situation: if she alienates all her students she will inevitably be alienating her future princess as well. Katar's interference at the end of the discussion helps the group, but Katar is only interested in helping herself. She does not like Miri and is probably jealous of her, since



she is one of the younger girls and is overshadowing her. The girls want the soldiers gone and dismiss Olana's fears about bandits—after all, at the spring holiday they just heard the song about how the bandits were chased off Mount Eskel a generation ago. When Miri finds the carved linder hawk outside the next day she knows it is from Peder. She is extremely happy at the small gift and revels in the fact that she knows she is Peder's best friend. Though it is clear to the reader that Miri's feelings for Peder are more than friendship, she is still going through the process of discovery.

In Chapter Fourteen the girls are dealing with their expanded knowledge of the world: they do not want to betray their families in the village, but they now need to satisfy their curiosities about the outside world. Miri knows that the princes may not like her and she has no desire to marry a stranger, but she does want to be academy princess to prove to everyone else and herself that she can be good at something. She has long been disappointed about not being able to work in the mines, convinced she is too small and weak and is a burden to her family and the village. The traders' acquiescence is a huge victory for Miri and for the village. Though she is afraid the traders will not agree to their terms, they finally do and seem to respect the villagers more for their newfound understanding of Commerce. Britta is the first person to guess at Miri's feelings for Peder and she suggests Miri tell him how she feels. Miri is afraid she will ruin their friendship, not to mention the mortification if Peder did not feel the same way about her. Britta and Miri have become very good friends at the academy, so much so that Britta feels more comfortable staying with Miri than at her cousin's house. Miri finally learns the truth about why she has never been allowed in the mines after Marda's accident: it was not that she was not strong enough or that she was unwanted, it was simply that Pa could not bear to have her work in the same mine that killed her mother. He kept her out of the mine because he loved her and she assumed it was because she was somehow flawed. This realization wraps up an insecurity that Miri has had for years, giving her confidence and making her feel that much closer to her family.



Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen

Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen Summary

In Chapter Fifteen it is summer and Olana allows the girls to have class outside. One evening Miri confides the true story of her mother to Britta, Esa, and Frid and asks if she is a burden on the village. They admit they never thought of her as a burden and liken Miri to a bird whose wings are unpinned. The girls get a week off school every time the traders come, and they come with more and more refined good for the village. Pa gives Miri new shoes for her fifteenth birthday. Marda admits that she is afraid of not being smart when Miri is almost the top of her class. Miri thinks Marda is very smart since she is the only person outside of the academy who can read, and opts not to tell her of the years of jealousy over the quarry. She decides to let go her dream of working in the quarry and find her own place.

In Chapter Sixteen fall is fast approaching, meaning the prince's visit is coming up. Miri spends her time studying, talking to Britta, and trying not to think of Peder. As testing begins, Katar and Bena purposely try to distract Miri so she makes mistakes. During the decisive quiz Gerti struggles to answer a question. Miri uses quarry-speech to help her remember the answer. She thinks they all deserve to go to the ball since they have studied so hard all year. She helps everyone who seems to ask, though Katar does not approve of her aid. When Miri cannot help with an answer Gerti steps in to help, then everyone begins to help one another. When Katar cannot remember an answer no one tries to help, but Miri is conflicted and finally sings her the answer. She does not want to give Katar an edge but does not feel right about letting her fail. All the girls score 100% on the exam. The total scores show that everyone is eligible to go to the ball, but the last five girls are too close in their scores for Olana to determine. She allows the class to vote on whether Katar, Esa, Liana, Bena, or Miri will be academy princess. Over half the class votes for Miri. Later she comes across Katar, who is crying. She reveals that she does not care about marrying the prince but hates life on the mountain and wants to leave. She does not feel loved by her father and felt that becoming academy princess was her only chance to get out. Miri does not know how to comfort Katar, but hopes to help her sometime in the future.

Chapter Fifteen and Chapter Sixteen Analysis

In Chapter Fifteen Olana has continued to honor her agreement with the girls, though she does not like it. Miri feels very free and happy in the knowledge that she is not a burden to the village and no one has ever thought of her as such. All the years of agonizing over her position in the village and other peoples' perceptions of her were for naught—she is not weak or inept, just so loved by Pa that he cannot bear to have her doing a dangerous job like stone-braking. Miri and Marda bond in Chapter Fifteen. While Miri has been at school learning and having new experiences, Marda has been in the village with the same old routine—even worse since she hurt her leg. Though she is



pleased when Miri brings her a book she despairs that she will ever be able to read it. The girls have reversed their roles: Miri, who for so long felt inadequate and foolish is now bursting with confidence. Marda, the sister who was able to contribute in the quarry and in taking care of the family, feels slow and inept when presented with the book. Miri assures her she is very smart, but opts not to tell Marda of the years she spent being envious of her job in the quarry. Miri is growing up and making informed decisions. She is actively using what she has learned in class to help her in life.

In Chapter Sixteen the girls are in a tizzy about the prince's upcoming visit. Miri still thinks of Peder often, but she tries to focus on her studies and her goal of becoming academy princess. The older girls are very jealous of her, even to the point of purposely trying to distract her during her curtsy test. Not only do they want to be the academy princess, they feel threatened by Miri because she is younger and more successful than they have been. Miri's sense of fairness is very strong during the testing. As a competitor the smartest thing for her to do would be to let the others fend for themselves, but she cannot abandon her friends, especially since she believes they all deserve to go to the ball. At first only she is helping, but eventually all the girls are helping each other using quarry-speech. Miri is not only incredibly fair and selfless, she inspires the same feelings in others—even when Katar struggles on a question Miri helps her, though she must debate with herself for a moment before she does. The twist of the girls voting for their own princess works in Miri's favor, and is a very fair way for Olana to choose the princess—the girl will need to be able to interact well with the public. Ironically, in the end the academy princess is a popularity contest, though Katar rudely corrected Miri on that fact months ago. Miri is thrilled to be princess, but never would have guessed Katar's struggle. Under all her meanness, she hates living on the mountain and has an unhappy home life with her father. Miri cannot comprehend such a problem since her family loves her very much, but she feels sorry for Katar and decides to help her in the future if she can. Even Miri's worst enemy gets the benefit of the doubt from her: Miri's compassionate nature and her ability to see things fairly are her greatest strengths.



Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen Summary

In Chapter Seventeen the girls are free to make their own schedules, and many practice subjects from class on their own. They do not talk about the prince but each girl has her own daydreams, and Miri wishes Peder were there to take her mind off the prince. Esa is worried the prince will dislike her because of her injured arm, but Miri tries to make her feel better by joking. Suddenly the wagons arrive and the girls are sent to their bedchamber. The prince is described as tall with dark hair. The girls make a pact that they will be happy for whoever is chosen. Britta falls ill that night and the girls take care of her as they prepare for the ball. The school has been made over into an elegant ballroom. The girls are made over and fitted into beautiful dresses by the seamstresses, who spend time to fit each girl individually. With Miri they take extra time, and she feels special and beautiful. She is in the front of the line of girls, and though she asks Olana to tend to Britta she is pushed into the ballroom.

In Chapter Eighteen Miri and the girls enter the ballroom to beautiful music. They are all introduced to the prince, who remains indifferent. He dances with Miri first, but the dance ends and she feels disappointed with her performance and with the prince. He is polite with all the girls but extremely distant. Miri has a wonderful time despite the unresponsive prince. After dinner they go for a walk and Miri addresses Prince Steffan very plainly, asking why he seems so indifferent to the girls. He confesses he thought things would be much simpler and had hoped he would simply know when he saw the right girl. He and Miri joke with each other and he tells her he is more comfortable with her than with any of the other girls.

Chapter Seventeen and Chapter Eighteen Analysis

In Chapter Seventeen time is quickly drawing thin: the prince's arrival is imminent and everything the girls have worked toward all year will be coming to a head. They all devote time to their studies and live in their daydreams. Miri is caught up in the excitement and competition, but she knows she does not truly care for the prince and wishes Peder were around to keep her head where it should be. She accomplished her goal of becoming academy princess but knows she has feelings for Peder, making it complicated for her to present herself to the prince. Miri always tries to help others, and reassures Esa that her injured arm will not take her out of the running for princess. Miri's fairness inspires the other girls and they decide they will be happy for whoever wins the prince's hand—this is a big deal for the girls, since so many of them want the title so badly. During the makeovers the girls truly feel beautiful: Esa does not feel self-conscious about her arm, and Frid's size does not detract from her loveliness in the gown chosen for her. Miri feels embarrassed to be so happy in her beautiful gown and



nervous about being in the front of the line. Even while walking into the ballroom she worries about Britta, who cannot attend the ball because she is sick.

In Chapter Eighteen the moment has finally arrived: the prince's ball. Miri is both excited and nervous to dance with the prince, but taken aback by the prince's apparent indifference toward the girls. He is perfectly polite but clearly uninterested. On their walk Miri abandons the rules of Conversation with great success—she coaxes the prince to joke with her and makes him feel more comfortable. Miri's newfound confidence and happiness makes an impression on the prince, as does her decision to treat him like a person and not a prince. Steffan admits he is cowed by the situation and feels pressured: to choose one girl out of the group is huge decision. His comments that he thought things would be more straightforward, which could mean the evening did not go as he had hoped or planned. Miri's joy at being chosen as the prince's favorite makes her feel as if she is floating on air, though it also presents a potential conflict with her feelings for Peder.



Chapter Nineteen and Chapter Twenty

Chapter Nineteen and Chapter Twenty Summary

In Chapter Nineteen the girls discuss their opinions of the prince. Miri tells Britta at first she was in awe of him and then thought him rude, but she later learned he was just nervous. Miri confides in Britta that he liked her the best. The girls are visited by the chief delegate who informs them that the prince must return to Asland. They are dismayed that it may snow, in which case the prince would not be able to return until springtime. Miri is upset, seeing her dreams of leaving Mount Eskel disintegrate before her eyes. After the prince's departure Olana blames the girls for failing and says they must study even harder. Miri is outside when Peder arrives asking about the prince's choice. He is upset thinking that Miri wants to be the princess and they argue. After Peder runs off, Miri hears quarry-speech from Esa telling her to run.

In Chapter Twenty Miri obeys Esa's command, but is caught from behind by a bandit. The school is taken over by the bandits and even Olana is afraid. The lead bandit is named Dan and another is Dogface. Dan demands the girls give over the prince's choice for princess, and he does not believe her when Katar tells him the prince left without choosing. The bandits tie Gerti up and hit Miri when she tries to help. Frid admits that the prince chose her but asked her not to tell anyone. Miri knows Frid is trying to sacrifice herself for the others, but she worries the bandits will harm them anyway. Miri tells the bandits the prince said the same to her during his visit, and soon all the other girls join in the ruse. The bandits determine they must take all the girls to be sure they have the right one.

Chapter Nineteen and Chapter Twenty Analysis

In Chapter Nineteen the girls are decidedly let down by the prince—all of their grand expectations have not been met. Miri feels she understands Prince Steffan better after their conversation, but is shocked and disappointed when he returns to Asland the day after the ball. Olana's conclusion that the girls have disappointed him causes all of them to feel glum: the event they had been preparing for all year has been a bust. Though Miri and Britta are excited that the prince liked her the best, Miri's conversation with Peder does not go well. She is upset at the prince's unexplained departure and Peder is upset that she apparently wanted him to choose her. She cannot seem to find the words to mend their argument, though she knows she has feelings for Peder. He assumes she now has feelings for Steffan which upsets him enough to turn around and run back to the village. The end of the chapter foreshadows some great trouble as Esa sends out a message to run in quarry-speech.

In Chapter Nineteen Miri is terrified to be caught by a bandit. She tries to call for Peder's help but the sound cannot escape her throat. She knows they are in a bad situation when even Olana is afraid—she never loses composure. The bandits do not believe



that the prince left without choosing a princess. When Gerti is threatened Miri immediately tries to come to her aid: her sense of right and wrong will not let her be still. She is shocked when the bandit actually hits her and very fearful for the others. It is extremely selfless of Frid to take on the danger for the other girls, but Miri suspects her sacrifice may not truly help anyone in the end. She thinks it is better for them to stay together than separate, so even after being hit she offers herself up again to the bandits. All the girls join in the spirit in an attempt to confuse the bandits and protect one another. Miri's sense of fairness and right and wrong has infused the other girls with courage. Though they are terrified at least they are facing the danger together.



Chapter Twenty-one and Chapter Twenty-two

Chapter Twenty-one and Chapter Twenty-two Summary

In Chapter Twenty-one a winter storm keeps the girls and the bandits trapped in the school. The girls have been separated from Olana and Knut. They realize that no one will be coming to help them, especially after Miri's conversation with Peder and the snowfall. The bandits begin to eat through the food supply, feeding the girls only meager porridge. Dan plans to stay in the school until the storm breaks, then march the girls to the bandits' camp to wait for the king's ransom money. Onor stops Dan from killing Liana, saying there will be plenty of time later. Miri realizes that none of them will return if the bandits take them down the mountain. Miri tells everyone to run in quarry-speech but only half the girls obey. None escape and Bena tells the bandits that Miri gave the order to run. Later Miri begins the old story about the bandits being chased out of Mount Eskel and the other girls help her continue the story. The other bandits are spooked but not Dan, and he threatens Miri with death the next time there is an incident. He gags her and binds her hands together. Miri decides to try and alert the village using quarry-speech. She tried to communicate with Pa and Marda to no avail, so instead she tries to tell Peder. After hours of trying she finally feels him and puts all her effort into telling him about the bandits. She finally falls into an exhausted sleep.

In Chapter Twenty-two Miri awakes suddenly, as if her name has been called. It is Peder calling to her in quarry-speech. He tells her through a memory that the villagers have arrived with weapons. Miri must get the girls out of the building while the bandits still sleep. She strengthens her courage by reminding herself that she is the academy princess and her ma alive again. Miri and Britta wake the other girls, and together they disassemble the window in the room. Sixteen girls get through the window before the bandits wake up, leaving Miri and Frid. They each get through the window and run through the knee-deep snow, but Miri is caught from behind by Dan. He threatens to kill her.

Chapter Twenty-one and Chapter Twenty-two Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-one the girls are in a desperate situation. Miri realizes the level of danger they are in and, as always, attempts to help everyone by uniting them. While many of the other girls are paralyzed with fear and shock, Miri formulates a plan for their escape. She knows the bandits plan to kill the girls, and though escape is unlikely they stand a better chance trying than waiting as prisoners to be killed. Perhaps some of them could have escaped if all the girls had run together, but the continued jealousy and meanness of some of the older girls spoil their chances. Bena seems to think she will gain favor with the bandits by refusing to participate in the escape attempt and by



identifying Miri as the ringleader, but she soon realizes that is a ridiculous hope. They are all in danger together; the bandits want their ransom money but every girl who is not to be the princess is entirely expendable to them. Miri is determined to try and get help, doggedly spending hours in her attempt to communicate with the village through Pa and Marda. Finally Peder gives her the breakthrough she is searching for—perhaps because her feelings for him are so strong, as are his for her. Miri has not given up hope, though she has exhausted herself and her small list of resources. That is why she is a symbol of strength for the other girls: she does not give up and she is unwilling to be intimidated by the bandits. Wary and fearful, yes, but deep down she knows she can figure out how to save everyone.

In Chapter Twenty-two Miri's quarry-speech plea to Peder has worked. Despite the former failed attempt at escape, she knows she must organize the girls and get them out. She has accomplished so much but still expects more of herself, and still will leave no one behind—she easily could have tiptoed out to safety. During the operation Miri takes strength in the fact that she is a mountain girl, and that she reminds Pa so much of her ma—she is academy princess and a girl of Mount Eskel, and if anyone can get them out of the situation she can. Miri's pride in Mount Eskel is perhaps the reason she is able to communicate so well through quarry-speech: she has come into her own, and now has the confidence to believe that she is capable of helping all of them. The other girls trust in her leadership—if not before, certainly during the escape out the window. Miri's strength of character gets the girls out of the school, though just when she dreams of running into Pa's arms she is caught by the dreaded Dan.



Chapter Twenty-three

Chapter Twenty-three Summary

In Chapter Twenty-three Pa rushes forward to save Miri, though Dan threatens to kill her. The bandits have nine girls and the villagers have four bandits. Os suggests a trade but Dan refuses. The two sides are at a standoff until Dan declares that he wants a prize for his trouble or he will kill Miri. The other bandits want to go and avoid more conflict. One by one they abandon Dan until only Dogface and Onor are left. Miri worries for Britta, held by Dogface, and the night turns into dawn. When light falls on all the people who have come to help the girls Miri realizes she does not want to leave the village or the mountain—that both are home for her. She remembers her linder hawk in her pocket and realizes Dan is backing away but veering too far to the left toward the cliff edge. Miri decides to send her thoughts to Peder, who will understand better than Pa. He understands and leads Jans and Almond to help him turn Dan in the right direction. Miri uses the linder hawk to stab Dan's wrist. She crawls away from him and rolls to the rocky shelf on the edge of the cliff she knows is there. She grabs the root of a tree to hang on but Dan in turn grabs her ankle. Pa throws his mallet at Dan, who falls to his death, and Miri is saved.

Chapter Twenty-three Analysis

Chapter Twenty-three is full of action but also full of personal realizations for Miri. Miri is less worried for herself than she is for Britta, captured by Dogface. Miri is completely selfless, risking herself so the others can escape. The dawn is a symbol of Miri's realization: as she sees the faces of the villagers who have come to help them she knows she does not want to leave Mount Eskel. It is her home and is full of the people she loves—people who love her enough to come and face the bandits. This is significant because Miri has never felt she belonged in the mountain village, but now she recognizes it is her true home. Even though she may be curious about the outside world she would never want to live away from the mountain. During this realization Miri remembers the hawk in her pocket, which is symbolic of Miri herself: small and clever but also very strong. She informs Peder of her plan because they know each other well enough that he will understand exactly what she is thinking, whereas she is afraid that Pa will misinterpret. Though Miri faces the very real danger of falling off the cliff, Pa is there to save her. She is finally safe thanks to Pa, Peder, and the villagers.



Chapter Twenty-four

Chapter Twenty-four Summary

In Chapter Twenty-four Miri is pulled from the cliff into Pa's arms. The girls are reunited with their relieved families and Olana and Knut are released from the closet. Miri and Britta fall asleep next to Pa. The bandits ruined a years' supply of meat so no one will be able to stay at the school through the winter. The villagers eat one group meal and set off toward the village, the mood in the air like a holiday. Olana stays with Doter, Esa, and Peder and helps the village by skinning rabbits. Knut stays with Os and Gerti and Britta mostly stays with Miri. They help Marda in her studies and eventually many of the other children come to learn from Miri as well. She realizes she wants to teach everyone in the village and begins to formulate plans. Olana and the academy girls study in the chapel most afternoons, and often additional students are there as well. One day after class the girls talk about whether or not they really want to be princess. Miri thinks it is strange to talk about becoming princess after so much as happened to them. Olana cooperates with the girls' wishes but insists they practice dancing and curtsies as the prince's visit approaches. The village holds a ball, including boys, so the girls can have some practice dancing. Peder asks Miri for the first dance and she feels he is her best friend again. He asks Miri what she is thinking and she replies that she is thinking about the prince. Peder is upset and thinks Miri wants to marry the prince. She is conflicted again about the possibility of becoming princess, and feels it is an opportunity that, for her family's sake, she cannot pass up.

Chapter Twenty-four Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-four the girls settle back into life in the village, with the additions of Olana, Knut, and the school. Though the villagers are traditionally mistrustful of lowlanders, many of the children who were unable to attend the academy come to Miri for help learning. The girls realize that while their friends and families are not dumb, Mount Eskel's isolation has left them ignorant in many ways. Miri is excited to teach the other children what they learned at the academy, feeling she has finally found a place where she fits well. Though many of the girls are still interested in becoming princess, Miri is still conflicted—she definitely has feelings for Peder, though she tries to ignore them. She is more excited about the possibility of learning more and seeing new places than marrying the prince and becoming princess, and she wants the cottage in the painting for Pa and Marda. Miri is trying to decide whether or not being princess is an opportunity she can pass up. She imagines she can be friends with Steffan but clearly does not feel the same for him as she does for Peder. She is willing to take a leap and sacrifice her own happiness to get her family what she thinks they deserve.



Chapter Twenty-five

Chapter Twenty-five Summary

In Chapter Twenty-five Britta teaches Miri about gardens while they wait for word from the prince. Finally he arrives at the academy and sends a messenger to request the girls' presence. Miri and Britta prepare to leave, and Miri realizes her family does not care about a house in the lowlands—they just want her home. Back at the academy the girls wait for the prince in the bare ballroom. Britta folds under the pressure and rushes outside, telling Miri that she knows the prince and her father is actually a nobleman. Britta loves Steffan but does not know if he loves her, and Britta's father sent her to Mount Eskel in an attempt to help her become princess. She is extremely embarrassed and terrified of what Steffan will say when he sees her. She thinks he will choose Miri instead and is prepared to be happy for her friend. Miri realizes she truly does not want to be princess and thinks whoever marries Steffan should be in love with him. Steffan is excited to see Britta and chooses her as princess. After the ceremony the priest announces Mount Eskel has become the sixteenth province of Danland and all the girls are invited to Steffan and Britta's wedding. Miri stays behind after the others have gone back to the village. Steffan knew Britta was at Mount Eskel and left so quickly on the first visit because he did not see her. Britta offers Miri the job of delegate, but Miri suggests she give the job to Katar. Miri keeps the clay tablets from the school and buys six of Olana's books to take home. Olana admits that the cottage in the painting was a fabrication on her part as an attempt to motivate the girls. She gives the painting to Miri. Peder arrives to walk her home and admits he is glad she was not chosen as princess. He shares that his father is letting him carve linder blocks, and he thanks Miri for making it possible. She asks him to make her another linder hawk and he holds her hand through the village. Pa and Marda love the painting and Britta's garden has begun to bloom.

Chapter Twenty-five Analysis

In Chapter Twenty-five Miri learns that Britta and Steffan already know each other well, but Britta is too afraid of what Steffan thinks of her to take a chance with him. Britta is convinced Steffan will choose Miri because she is the smartest girl in the school and was chosen academy princess. Britta's agony is similar in many ways to Miri's uncertainty about Peder: each girl too afraid of failure or rejection to take a chance. Miri is relieved to discover Britta's feelings because she now has a clear path to follow: she will stay on Mount Eskel with Pa and Marda. She even recommends Katar for the job of delegate because she knows it will make her happy, and she is bound to be a much more pleasant person if she is happy. Considering how she was treated by Katar, Britta is surprised when Miri suggests her for the job, but all Miri wants is for everyone to be happy. She is surprised and delighted when Peder meets her at the academy. Finally, they are able to be honest about their feelings for one another. Peder makes this public by holding Miri's hand through the village. In the end it is best that the painting of the



cottage is just a painting and not an actual place—Miri loves her life and her family on Mount Eskel, and they would probably not want to move. The miri flowers blossoming is symbolic of Miri's coming-of-age: the insecure young girl has grown into a confident and intelligent young lady.



Characters

Miri

Miri is an intelligent and precocious fourteen-year-old girl with a deep sense of fairness and an understanding of right and wrong. Miri loves her mountain village but begins to dream of something more while she attends the princess academy. She has always been mistrustful and suspicious of lowlanders, but realizes in school that much of her mistrust came from ignorance. Miri longs to fit in and be a part of the group, but she feels separated from the others because she does not work in the quarry. She assumes the reason is that she is small and weak and would be a burden rather than a boon. At the academy she misses the companionship of her sister Marda and her friend Peder, for whom she has developed feelings.

Miri's first thought is always for others. She is always trying to help someone else, and even during her lonely first months at the academy she dreams of the prestige she could bring her family as academy princess. She is very curious about the world and begins to learn for the pleasure of it as soon as she can read. As a result of her isolation from the other girls Miri jumps to the top of the class and begins experimenting with quarry-speech. Though quarry-speech is so commonplace for the other girls they barely give it a second thought, for Miri it is mysterious and powerful—yet another part of everyday life on Mount Eskel that excludes her. Through studying and experimenting with quarry-speech Miri gains more confidence in her abilities, whereas before she simply assumed she was incapable. Miri is a born leader that others look up to, and she repeatedly takes command in difficult situations in the novel.

Miri's feelings for Peder confuse her, especially since they have been friends for so long. In the beginning of the novel she feels unable to compete with the older girls for his attention, and by the end she knows she has feelings for him but is confused about what to do if she becomes princess. She eventually comes to the realization that Mount Eskel is her home, and even if offered she would not go with Steffan and become the princess. Miri's resolve and strength of character grows exponentially throughout the novel: by the end she is a fully-realized young lady with the confidence to teach others in school, contribute to her family's household, and admit her feelings to the boy she loves. Miri just wants everyone to be happy, which is evident when she suggests Katar should be the delegate for Mount Eskel. She holds no grudges even against Katar, who was so rude to her and purposefully tried to derail her studies. In the end, Miri embraces her identity as a mountain girl and realizes that such a person can be every bit as important and lead just as satisfying a life as a person with a royal crown.

Peder

Peder is Miri's love interest in the novel, the boy in the village who all the girls want to talk with. He and Miri have been best friends since childhood, but now that they are



young adults their relationship is changing in unexpected and sometimes uncomfortable ways: for Peder, who is older than Miri, it is alarming. Miri is his best friend and his sister's age and, after all, he is getting attention from Liana and Bena. At first it seems that he is playing with Miri, or at least has a better sense of humor about their situation than she does. After the girls are taken to the academy Peder's behavior changes: toward Miri he is moodier and his behavior more cryptic. While the girls have been away at the academy it seems as if Peder has little to do but think, and his thoughts inevitably turn to the questions of who will become princess. He fears Miri will be taken away from him by a prince, so their encounters are often tense and fraught with everything unsaid between them. Eventually Peder is worried that Miri does in fact want to become princess, not only for the prestige and honor of the title but because she has feelings for Steffan.

Peder enjoys life on the mountain but dreams of something more: he wants to carve linder stone for a living. His dreams are not as grand as some of the others', but in a village that can barely make it through the winter on the linder they manage to mine is dream of making pretty carvings is almost as unlikely as Katar becoming princess or Britta learning quarry-speech. It is because of the changes Miri brings to the village that Peder is able to finally do something he loves. He recognizes her part in his new career and feels he must thank her, but is nervous about the prince up to the very moment he hears Britta is chosen instead. His final obstacle out of the way, Peder finds the strength to show Miri how he feels: he holds her hand through the village for all to see, a public display of affection. This action reassures Miri as well that Peder's feelings for her are real. After all the emotional ups and downs, Peder is finally able to declare his feelings for Miri and do a job that he likes.

Britta

Britta is not from Mount Eskel originally: her story for the village is that she is a lowlander whose family has died and sent her to live with second cousins in the mountains. The reader later learns that Britta's father is actually a nobleman and he sent Britta to Mount Eskel in hopes the prince would choose her to wed. Britta is embarrassed at her family's high ambitions for her and keeps to herself in the village. She is put to work in the quarry but cannot hear quarry-speech, which the others take to mean she is either deaf or playing dumb. They do not realize that lowlanders cannot hear quarry-speech. Britta is sweet, kind, and happily befriends Miri when given the chance. She also feels isolated from the other mountain girls and must live with the added pressure and shame of the true reason she is on the mountain. She has harbored a secret love for Steffan for years, but is so afraid of his rejection that she makes herself ill during the first ball. Steffan is distant and uninterested in the other girls because he is expecting to see Britta, but she has had no communication with her family and does not know he is looking for her. They are star-crossed but finally find one another, Steffan striding boldly to her and leaving no doubt that he is happy to see her. Britta in turn comes alive, the shy girl forever gone and replaced by a confident girl in love.



Britta enjoys Miri's company and the kindness in her home, apparently a very different home from the one in which Britta was raised. At first Miri does not trust Britta but the reader learns later that Miri had a blanket distrust of lowlanders. She eventually overcomes her prejudice and she and Britta become very close—Britta reaches out to Miri at the academy when no one else will be her friend. Though at first Miri is suspicious of Britta's kindness, she quickly realizes the other girl means no harm. Their friendship is symbolic of the two worlds uniting—the mountain people and the lowlanders. With a mountain girl as princess, hopefully the kingdom of Danland will be able to overlook former prejudices and give each other a fair chance.

Pa

Miri's Pa is raising both his girls as a single parent after the death of Miri's mother shortly after she was born. Pa is a hardworking man of few words whose love for his two daughters is apparent. He goes to work with Marda everyday in the mines to support them. He does not seem to begrudge his work, but will not allow Miri in the mines. The reader later learns that Ma died after complications from an accident in the mine, and Pa cannot bear to have Miri doing the same job that killed her mother. It is difficult for him to allow Marda in the mines as well, but she is more his daughter both physically and in temperament. Miri, however, is her mother reborn. This makes her too precious for Pa to risk having in the mine—losing another girl out of his family would presumably be too much for him.

Though Miri loves her Pa dearly, much of the reader's view is of a somewhat stern and distant man. It may be difficult for Pa to connect with his teenaged daughters with no mother-figure available to help him. He may not be able to talk with Miri about her feelings, but he is always there when Miri needs him: he is constantly reassuring her using physicality, like hugs. He is also responsive during the girls' crisis with the bandits, and angrily faces off with Dan to keep Miri safe. When Marda is hurt Pa screams at Miri to get out, not because he is angry at her but because he is afraid for her, and probably afraid for himself: without his daughters, Pa would have very little to live for. He is happy when Miri decides to stay and proud that his girls are so smart and capable in and of themselves.

Marda

Marda is Miri's older sister. Miri always envied Marda's ability to work in the mines, and felt that she herself was either not capable or not wanted. The tables turn later when Marda wishes she could attend school and Miri begins to teach her. Marda is a good older sister to Miri and they are very close, especially after the excitement at the academy and Marda's accident.



Olana

She is the strict and often callous teacher at the princess academy. Olana is disappointed by her post on Mount Eskel, having clearly expected her appointment to be more grand than teaching goat girls to dance. Because of her unhappiness Olana often uses cruel methods in the classroom, including lashing the girls' palms and isolation. Though she never becomes quite likable, Olana reconciles with Miri in the end of the novel, explaining she was only trying to do her job well.

Gerti

She is Os's daughter and one of the younger girls in the academy.

Katar

She is unhappy with life on Mount Eskel and hopes the prince will choose her so she has the opportunity to leave.

Knut

He is the gruff handyman at the academy.

Prince Steffan

He has come to Mount Eskel to choose a bride, but is actually in love with Britta.

Doter

She is Esa and Peder's mother and a role model for Miri.

Esa

She is Peder's younger sister and Miri's friend.

Dan

The head bandit in the band that takes over the princess academy.

Dogface

He is a bandit.



Onor

He is a bandit.

Os

The village leader and Gerti's father.

Frid

One of the girls in the academy, she is very large for her age.

Enrik

He is one of the traders that come to Mount Eskel for its linder.

Bena

She is one of the older girls at the academy and is jealous of Miri's successes.

Liana

She is considered the prettiest girl in the village and dislikes Miri at the academy.



Objects/Places

Mount Eskel

This is the place that Miri and the other villagers call home.

Linder

This is the stone that allows the villagers their livelihood.

The Academy

This is the place the village girls go to get their education in preparation for meeting the prince.

The Silver Gown

This is the garment that Olana uses as incentive for the girls to become academy princess.

Books

These objects were formerly of little interest to Miri, but become invaluable after she and the others learn to read.

The linder hawk

This is given to Miri from Peder, and helps save her in the fight against Dan and the bandits.

Honey

Miri tries to get Enrik to trade for more than last season, though she must content herself only with some extra of this object.

The Closet

This is where Olana sends girls who have misbehaved. Often she forgets they are there.



Asland

This is the capitol of Danland and the home city of the royal court.

The painting of the cottage

This is the second tool Olana uses to bribe the girls into studying, though later they learn such a thing does not exist.

The Ledge

This is the place where Miri discovers Katar crying, upset after Miri is declared academy princess.

The Chapel

This is where the girls hold class after the bandits ruin the food supply at the academy.

Ribbons

These objects are part of the spring celebration dances.

Gold Coins

These are the object the villagers now insist on trading their goods for.

Mallet

This is a tool for use in the quarry, and also the weapon with which Pa defeats Dan.

Silk

This is the fabric used to disguise Esa's arm.

The Window

This is the opening through which many of the girls make their escape from the bandits.



Rabbits, run!

This is a game the girls played when they were young children. It is useful later as Miri tries to coordinate everyone for escape.

Commerce

This is the subject that causes Miri to revolutionize the way Mount Eskel conducts their linder business.

Diplomacy

This is the subject that allows the girls to gain reentry to the academy after leaving for spring holiday without permission.



Themes

Family and Home

Through the novel, Miri takes a long journey toward discovering what she wants and what will make her happy. It is clear from the very beginning that she loves her family very much and vice versa, but Miri's misperceptions about her role in the community make her feel like she is a burden on her father and sister. She equates her worth to her ability to work in the mine and contribute to the household. Being unable to do so leaves her feeling self-conscious and guilty. She has such high hopes for the traders to come so she can impress Pa and Marda, proving her worth and her role in contributing to the family. When the traders collectively underprice the linder Miri's chance at impressing is gone and she is left feeling more inept than ever. She never doubts that Pa and Marda love her, she has simply misconstrued her role: she thinks she is not allowed to work in the mines because she is small and weak, when actually it is Pa's emotional attachment to her that keeps her out of the mines. Once Miri excels in school she begins to build up confidence again, and the first people she wants to tell about her new knowledge are Pa and Marda, though Pa does not understand her work with linder as well as she could hope.

Later, Miri is conflicted between the allure of a brand new life as princess and the life she already loves on Mount Eskel. Because of the academy she is curious about the outside world in a way she has never experienced before. She latches on to the picture of the cottage because it provides a prize for her family: she so desperately wants to give them something worthy, to make up for all the years she perceives she has been a burden. The cottage is also a way to keep Pa and Marda with her should she become princess. Though she would be traveling with the prince and taken away from them at least she could give them a beautiful new place to live. As Miri gains more and more confidence she realizes that Mount Eskel is her home, and that is where she will be most happy—she is finally proud to be a mountain girl and unapologetic about her skinny arms and her role outside the mine. To discover her true home Miri had to learn about the rest of the world. Once she gained the confidence to face her fears, Miri is able to truly come home, to her village, her family, and her love. To her, home is the most important thing, but she could never have discovered that without leaving.

Friendship

Miri's friendships play an important role in her journey throughout the novel. Her first friend is her sister Marda, who she loves and looks up to. Miri's jealousy of Marda's ability to work in the mines is later reverse, when Marda wishes she were free to attend the academy. In a display of maturity, Miri decides not to tell Marda of her jealousy: she decides things are fine just the way they are without bringing up pain from the past. As sisters Miri and Marda have a friendship born out of their sisterly love, and when Miri must attend the academy without Marda she feels lost. Most of her peers have gone to



work in the mines, and at the academy she almost immediately manages to alienate everyone, albeit accidentally. As a result, Miri throws herself into her studies and becomes the victim of an unfriendly group of older girls—Katar, Liana, and Bena becomes jealous of Miri's successes. Though later all the girls are forgiven for their behavior by Miri, in the early days at the academy she finds her confidence shaken.

Miri is confused about her friendship with Peder. She knows her feelings for him herald more than friendship, but she lacks the confidence to take the chance with him. She fears that he will not feel the same way, and she does not know how to reconcile her feelings for Peder with her aspirations as princess. Eventually through her work at the academy Miri realizes what she wants most—not a crown and a prince for a husband, but the Peder she knows with the straw-colored hair with whom she has shared so many memories. Miri is inspired by Britta and Steffan's love and realizes what she wants with Peder—the friendship they have shared for so long, but she is also ready to add another layer to an already rich relationship.

Britta is perhaps an unlikely friend for Miri. After all, Miri herself often refers to Britta as a lowlander in the beginning of the novel. She assumes Britta is either stupid or stuck-up, and definitely not trustworthy. But later in the novel when Miri is decidedly at the bottom of the social ladder in the academy Britta is kind to Miri, demonstrating the importance of withholding judgement. If Miri had given Britta the benefit of the doubt and not simply assumed things were true because Britta grew up in the lowlands, she may have made a friend long before the girls began their studies at the academy. Britta's friendship becomes a Marda-like relationship for Miri; a sister at the academy. Britta is in as much need of a friend as Miri, especially when considered that she cannot hear quarry-speech and is in love with Prince Steffan. Miri inspires confidence in Britta and Britta teaches Miri not to judge a book by its cover. Friendship is almost as important to Miri as family, and does as much to move along the plot of the novel and help Miri come to her realization.

Growing Up

The novel focuses on a group of twelve to eighteen-year-olds in a competition for the prince's hand in marriage. While this seems like a large undertaking for a girl as young as twelve, throughout their time at the academy even the older girls learn a bit more about what it means to live in the world as an adult and not a child. The girls are expected to learn to read, learn history, politics, poise, and dancing, among other things, which is high culture for mountain girls who often sleep with goats. At the academy each girl is faced with her own shortcomings and forced to tackle them head-on. Olana's methods are often harsher than necessary but spur many of the girls on to successfully learning the curriculum. They must not only confront the challenges of the classroom, but also the challenges each other pose. Many of them react differently to the idea that they are in competition with one another: in Katar's case she becomes surly and unfriendly, thinking only of herself and how she can win. Miri wants to do well and win academy princess, but ultimately resolves to be happy for whoever wins the prince's hand. This displays a great depth of character and understanding, while the older girls



like Liana and Bena wallow in jealousy instead of trying to be on the same team as everyone else. Miri's role as the leader at the academy helps her mature and she tries to set a good example to the others by being fair. She has a finely-tuned idea of what is right and what is wrong, and is willing to stick to what she believes in.

The academy gives Miri the confidence to return to the village, formerly a source of endless guilt and shame for her, and tell them of her new ideas for the sale of linder. She is able to take her years of disappointment and shame and let it go, channeling her energy into her new ideas. She becomes a young lady at the academy, and many of the other girls gain the confidence they have been lacking as well. Britta is fulfilled knowing her love for Steffan is returned, and this gives her a radiant and calm demeanor she could never have learned otherwise. Even Peder finally leaves behind his image of Miri as his best friend and accepts their feelings for one another make their relationship different than it once was. All the children in the village are faced with adversity, from the girls leaving to attend the academy to the bandits, and they all grow personally in significant ways.

Fairness

Miri is an extremely fair person with a heightened sense of right and wrong. She will always put others before herself, even if the other person is someone who has not treated her well. She feels guilty about not working in the quarry because she wants to contribute to the community, she wants to do her fair share and not be a burden on her family. In the classroom she stands up for poor Gerti, even when Olana lashes her hands as punishment. She knows the girls should not be treated in such a cruel way. Miri learns throughout the novel not to judge people by their appearances: though at first she thinks Britta may be dull, as soon as she gives her the benefit of the doubt she sees what an extraordinary friend she has in Britta. During the bandit attack Miri will not let Frid sacrifice herself for the group and as a result all the girls stick together throughout the conflict. Miri and the others study hard and get ahead in their classwork, but in the end Olana has them vote on their princess. Miri, who has tried to be kind and fair toward everyone in the class, wins in a landslide. However, Katar, Bena, and Liana have been mean and often combative to the other girls. Though their grades may have been the same, Miri gets the votes of her peers over the other girls. Britta even asks Miri to be the delegate for Mount Eskel, but Miri realizes that Katar is mean because she is unhappy. She knows if Katar can get the one thing she wants—to get off Mount Eskel—that she may blossom into a kind person and a good friend. Miri helps the other girls pass their tests because she believes they all deserve to go to the ball, and she leads them back to the village for their spring festival because she believes they have earned the break. Her clear sense of fairness and right and wrong help her become the confident leader that gets the girls through the trouble with the bandits, and helps the village get back on track with its linder trade.



Style

Point of View

"Princess Academy" is written in the third person, meaning the author refers to the characters as "he" or "she" and never "I" or "we." The author is able to share the thoughts and feelings of Miri, the main character, but none of the other characters. Everything in the story is filtered through Miri's perspective, so the reader has a limited knowledge of the events of the narrative. This point of view allows the reader to go through the journey of the story with no more information than Miri has, and thus to identify more fully with Miri and her experiences. This is effective because the reader is able to finish the book and feel as if they have learned all Miri's lessons alongside her. It also aids with other elements in the story, such as the shock and surprise when the bandits take over the school: the reader knows only what Miri knows, instead of being privy to the bandits' trek up the mountain and takeover of the school. This point of view makes Miri's isolation from the other girls even more dramatic, and allows for poignant realizations for both Miri and the reader. She is the protagonist and because of the point of view, the reader is put right into the thick of the story with her.

Setting

The story takes place in a small mining village on Mount Eskel, a territory of the fictional kingdom of Danland. Though other areas of the kingdom are mentioned, the action of the plot takes place either in the village or at the princess academy. The time period is unclear since the book is a fantasy, but the rusticity of the village and the use of horses and coaches puts the date closer to the 1500s or 1600s than modern times. The village is small and ekes out a living mining linder, which can be a labor-intensive and sometimes dangerous task. The village is isolated from the rest of the kingdom, not only because of its inaccessibility in the mountains but also because it is only a territory and not an official province of the kingdom. The capitol of Danland is Asland, which is located somewhere near the seaboard. In the village action takes place in the town square and in Miri and her family's small home made out of rubble rock. In the school the action is either in the classroom, the girls' sleeping chamber, the yard, and briefly in the closet. The fantasy aspects of the setting allow great freedom with the storytelling. The author describes the surroundings in rich detail, creating a vivid world despite the lack of a specific time period or an actual historical place.

Language and Meaning

The language of the novel is fairly simple since it is geared toward a younger reading demographic. The author occasionally sprinkles the text with more complicated words, but they are easily figured out when taken in context. The names of the characters are all uncommon or made-up, as are the names of many of the places. Asland, the capitol



of Danland, may be a reference to the lion in CS Lewis's classic Narnia series. There is poetry used in the novel in the songs the characters sing, and lines of poems precede each chapter. The poems at the beginning of chapters give a hint as to what themes the chapters will encompass. There are folk songs that all the characters know by heart, as well as other old stories passed down from generation to generation. When the characters communicate using quarry-speech they sing to each other, again using a poetic device to help tell the story. The story utilizes dialogue and Miri's internal monologue to drive the plot forward. The author also includes passages describing the setting and the characters' surroundings to provide a deeper understanding of the story's world.

Structure

The novel is structured simply: it is divided into twenty-five chapters. At the start of each chapter is a poem that gives insight to what the chapter will be about. The point can be either specific or abstract, i.e., a poem about bandits because the bandits are involved in the chapter, or a more abstract reference to love in a chapter where Miri is thinking about Peder. The characters interact using dialogue and the reader is privy to Miri's inner thoughts and feelings. When using quarry-speech the characters sing to one another, often rhyming or repeating old folk songs. The novel has a main plot and a subplot. The main plot involves all the girls being taken to the princess academy to be groomed as potential brides for the prince. The subplot is Miri's experiments with quarry-speech and her discoveries about the properties of the linder stone. The chapters vary in length depending on the action of the story. Time is generally constant in the novel, though in a few instances months pass within a few paragraphs. There are no flashbacks in the story though Miri does sometimes recall past events in her attempts to test quarry-speech. The novel is generally straightforward, using simple chapter structures and a clear point of view to communicate its coming-of-age story.



Quotes

"It was a unifying song and one that she was not invited to join" (Chapter 1, pg. 9.)

"She looked from the bald head of the miri flower down to Peder's straw-colored hair and wanted something that she was afraid to speak" (Chapter 1, pg. 16.)

"For the past few years, all her childhood friends has begun to work in the quarry, and Miri had grown used to solitude in her house and on the hilltop with the goats" (Chapter 2, pg. 34.)

"Miri has hoped to draw out a laugh as ease the friction, but the girls stayed quiet at hunted prey" (Chapter 4, pg. 52.)

"Once, words had been invisible to Miri, as unknown and uninteresting as the movements of a spider inside a rock wall" (Chapter 5, pg. 62.)

"She closed her eyes and imagined she was singing her thoughts right down into the stone, singing of the rat and her desperate need that night in the closet, pushing her internal song with a quavering desire to be heard" (Chapter 6, pg. 80.)

"She wanted to speak back to the mountain, send some greeting in a childish hope that it would hear her and accept her as one of its own" (Chapter 6, pg. 89.)

"They could sit in the shade of their large house and sip sweet drinks, learn to play lowlander instruments, and stare at the flowers" (Chapter 8, pg. 99.)

"Miri thought of Doter's saying, 'Never hesitate if you know it's right'" (Chapter 9, pg. 106.)

"No, her gut told her the only way to communicate her plea to run was to use quarry-speech" (Chapter 10, pg. 117.)

"She would have talked and teased and laughed with him, but his sudden appearance had startled her, and she did not know if she could keep up her carefree facade" (Chapter 11, pg. 125.)

"Let them come, and they'll give up after their first block cracks. We have linder in our bones" (Chapter 11, pg. 141.)

"They trusted her. It gave her hope that at the academy, far from the quarry, she might have a chance to be as useful as everyone else" (Chapter 12, pg. 147.)

"Now, smart meant to Miri the talent to think around a new problem and to learn new things" (Chapter 12, pg. 150.)



"If you don't agree to this, whichever of us the princes chooses will report your bad behavior and demand of him that you serve the rest of your days in some outlying territory of Danland even more distasteful to you than Mount Eskel" (Chapter 13, pg. 154.)

"For that moment, she did not care who knew the secret that made her chest tight and her head as light as seeding weeds in a breeze. 'I'm his best friend'" (Chapter 13, pg. 158.)

"The world had never felt so wide, a great gaping mouth that could swallow all of them whole" (Chapter 14, pg. 161.)

"For the moment, in her woolens and braided hair, she felt as important as she imagined she would in the silver gown and a crown" (Chapter 14, pg. 166.)

"It's like all my life I thought the sky was green" (Chapter 15, pg. 179.)

"From the cracks in the rocks all around, the miri flowers were already blooming" (Chapter 25, pg. 314.)



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Miri's guilt at not working in the quarry. Why does she feel so guilty? Why does she assume she is a burden to the community? What does it take for her to realize how mistaken she is in her thinking?

Miri and the other girls range in age from twelve to eighteen. How would you feel if you were aged similarly and told you may have to marry a complete stranger? What are some of the girls' reactions to the news?

Why is Miri's name special? Do you know what your name means? What did Miri's father originally want to name her?

Why does Miri decide to help the other girls pass the oral exam? Do you think she did the right thing? Why or why not?

Why has Britta been sent to the mountain? Why does she keep the truth from everyone, even after she and Miri are friends?

Discuss the relationship between Miri and Peder. How do they act toward one another? Why is it difficult for them to share their true feelings?

Discuss the linder hawk that Peder carves for Miri. What could the hawk symbolize? How does the hawk help Miri?

How do the girls in the princess academy behave once they become competitors for the hand of the prince? Why are the older girls often mean to Miri? How does Miri handle her isolation from the group?

Discuss Olana's treatment of the girls. Do you think she is a good teacher? Why or why not? How might you have done things differently than Olana?

What does "home" mean to Miri in the beginning of the novel? What does it mean by the end of the novel? How has Miri grown as a person throughout her ordeals at the academy?