

Sophie's World Study Guide

Sophie's World by Jostein Gaarder

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Contents

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Sophie's World Study Guide..... | 1 |
| Contents..... | 2 |
| Plot Summary..... | 4 |
| Chapter 1, The Garden of Eden..... | 6 |
| Chapter 2: The Top Hat..... | 8 |
| Chapter 3: the Myths..... | 9 |
| Chapter 4, the Natural Philosophers..... | 10 |
| Chapter 5, Democritus and Chapter 6, Fate..... | 12 |
| Chapter 7, Socrates..... | 14 |
| Chapter 8, Athens, Chapter 9, Plato..... | 15 |
| Chapter 10, the Major's Cabin, Chapter 11, Aristotle..... | 17 |
| Chapter 12, Hellenism..... | 19 |
| Chapter 13, the Postcards, Chapter 14, Two Cultures..... | 21 |
| Chapter 15, the Middle Ages..... | 23 |
| Chapter 16, the Renaissance..... | 24 |
| Chapter 17, the Baroque..... | 26 |
| Chapter 18, Descartes, Chapter 19, Spinoza..... | 27 |
| Chapter 20, Locke, Chapter 21, Hume..... | 28 |
| Chapter 22, Berkeley..... | 30 |
| Chapter 23, Bjerkely..... | 31 |
| Chapter 24, the Enlightenment..... | 33 |
| Chapter 25, Kant..... | 35 |
| Chapter 26, Romanticism..... | 37 |
| Chapter 27, Hegel..... | 39 |
| Chapter 28, Kierkegaard..... | 40 |



[Chapter 29, Marx.....41](#)

[Chapter 30, Darwin.....43](#)

[Chapter 31, Freud.....45](#)

[Chapter 32, Our Own Time.....47](#)

[Chapter 33, the Garden Party.....49](#)

[Chapter 34, Counterpoint.....51](#)

[Chapter 35, the Big Bang.....53](#)

[Characters.....54](#)

[Objects/Places.....57](#)

[Themes.....60](#)

[Style.....62](#)

[Quotes.....64](#)

[Topics for Discussion.....68](#)



Plot Summary

Sophie is a girl approaching her 15th birthday. She encounters first some odd philosophical questions and then the first chapter of a written philosophy course in her mailbox. Sophie starts to learn about the historical beginnings of philosophy. At the same time, Sophie is curious who is giving her this course. Sophie also begins to receive postcards addressed to Hilde, a girl also approaching her 15th birthday, from Hilde's father Albert Knag, a Norwegian Major in the UN Force in Lebanon.

Sophie gets a thorough education in Greek and Hellenistic philosophy, but things begin to become strange. The videotape that Sophie gets not only has the philosopher Alberto Knox in Athens at the Acropolis, but someone on the Acropolis is holding up a banner that reads "Hilde." There is actually an appearance by someone claiming to be Plato himself. At this time, Sophie is introduced to her philosophy teacher, Alberto Knox.

Later, Sophie follows the philosophy teacher's dog to his cabin and sees a mirror, where a girl winks back at Sophie. Soon after, Sophie gets a telephone call from Alberto to meet him in a church for a lesson on the Middle Ages. They have to intensify the course, because Hilde's father, the Major is coming home soon, Sophie is told. It becomes more and more clear that the Major has supernatural powers over Sophie and her world. Finally, after a class on the British philosopher George Berkeley, it becomes clear that Alberto, Sophie and all the other people in the story are characters in a book composed in the mind of the Major.

At this point, Sophie threatens to abandon the course, but Alberto encourages her to finish the course and then escape from the Major. Berkeley's philosophy, which Sophie has just studied, assures Sophie that sensual perceptions only exist in the mind of the perceiver. She comforts herself with the idea that just as she and Alberto are characters in a philosophy book, the Major and Hilde themselves could be also characters in a book. From the standpoint of Berkeley, it can even be argued that Sophie and Alberto are just as real as the Major and Hilde. This philosophical game foreshadows the point at the end of the book, where the positions of the characters in terms of perception are changed.

The reader is introduced to Hilde, a young girl of Sophie's age, with the same birth date. Hilde is totally involved in reading the philosophy book about Sophie and Alberto. Hilde is thrilled that her father has written this book for her, yet she becomes annoyed in how her father is treating the characters Sophie and Alberto. Due to such things as Hilde missing her crucifix, and Sophie finding it in the story, Hilde begins to believe that Sophie and Albert somehow really exist.

There is also added tension between Sophie and her mother. Sophie's mother thinks Sophie is in trouble with a boy or man or going crazy. However, Sophie calms the mother down by telling her that the mother will meet the philosopher at the party they are holding on Mid Summer Eve. This is a combination party for Mid Summer Eve and for Sophie's 15th birthday that happens a week earlier. Meanwhile, the philosophy



course goes through Descartes, Hegel, Marx, Darwin and other philosophers, through Jean Paul Sartre, the existentialist. The existentialist philosophy, too, urges Alberto and Sophie to create their own meaning.

The Midsummer Eve Party is renamed the Philosophical Garden Party, and boys, girls, Alberto Knox the philosopher and others are invited. The party rapidly degenerates into existentialist chaos but not before giving a chance for Alberto and Sophie to escape the Major's attention and his book. However, we still hear about how they are now part of the invisible people. Hilde is angered at the tricks that her father played on Sophie and Alberto and plays some tricks of her own on him as he flies home to Norway. Finally, the Major comes home to his daughter, Hilde, while Sophie and Alberto watch, now invisible to them. Before the Major is able to see them, but he now could not see them, so the position of sensual perceptions has turned around. On Midsummer Eve, the Major and Hilde have one last discussion of the nature of the universe. In this way, the book is a philosophy course and also a story of intrigue and development of two girls in two different worlds.



Chapter 1, The Garden of Eden

Chapter 1, The Garden of Eden Summary

Sophie is a girl approaching her 15th birthday. She first encounters some odd philosophical questions and then the first chapter of a written philosophy course in her mailbox. Sophie is very interested and starts to learn about the historical beginnings of philosophy. At the same time, Sophie is curious about who is giving her this course. The story is complicated by the fact that Sophie begins to receive postcards addressed to Hilde, a girl also approaching her 15th birthday, from Hilde's father Albert Knag, a Norwegian Major in the UN Forces in Lebanon.

Sophie walks home with her friend, Joanna, part of the way and then walks farther to her red house on the edge of the woods. Sophie checks the mailbox and finds an envelope with her name on it. Inside is a note saying "Who are you?" Sophie thinks about this question. Her friend has said that human beings are like computers, but Sophie doesn't really believe this. Sophie thinks about if she had a different name, would she be a different person or still herself? She looks in the mirror and asks herself this question and what it means. Then she goes back to the mailbox to check to see if the regular mail is there. There is another envelope for her, also without a stamp. In it, there is a note that says "Where does the earth come from?" Sophie feels overwhelmed by this question. She has heard that God created the world, but then where does God come from? Something has to have a beginning and an end, or can something or someone have always existed?

Sophie goes out into the garden to think on these questions. She has a secret spot that she calls "the den," where she goes when she is feeling happy or sad. Today she is confused. Sophie thinks about her father, who is not a normal father. He is a captain on an oil tanker and is away most of the time. He only comes to see his family, at his house, for a few weeks, and then after, he is away for months. Sophie goes once more to check for the regular mail. She finds a letter that is stamped with a postmark from the UN Agency. In it there is a letter addressed to Hilde Knag. The letter says, "happy fifteenth birthday," and that is better to send the letter to Sophie.

Chapter 1, The Garden of Eden Analysis

Now Sophie has two philosophical questions to answer and a third group of questions. Who is this Hilde Moller Knag and why did her father think it better to send the birthday letter to Sophie? Sophie feels now she has a mission to find the answers to these questions, and she is no longer a normal girl. From the beginning, this story is a mix of the very ordinary with the extremely bizarre. It is a call for young people to ask about the world and get involved with philosophy, and in this sense, the book also serves as a history of philosophy textbook. The question is what does philosophy mean and what is

it used for? Only a study of 3,000 years of the history of philosophy will begin to answer this question.



Chapter 2: The Top Hat

Chapter 2: The Top Hat Summary

Sophie surprises her friend Johanna after they finish classes because Sophie doesn't want to play cards or badminton. This is because Sophie is so intrigued and provoked by the course in Philosophy that she is unexpectedly receiving in the mail addressed to her. Sophie goes to her secret place behind the garden, her "den." There, with only the presence of her cat, Sophie reads a letter that is an introduction to a course on Philosophy. She reads that people have different tastes, but we all want to know where we come from. Where are we going? Is there an intelligence directing the Universe? What happens to us after we die? How should we live our lives? Sophie is confronted with a whole group of questions.

Philosophers keep their sense of wonder, Sophie reads. When a baby sees a dog for the first time, he is thrilled and calls its name when he or she learns it. If the baby sees daddy flying on the ceiling, it's just another wonderful thing that happens. If an adult woman sees her husband flying on the ceiling, she is petrified, since this violates what she is used to seeing. The woman is used to things that she expects to happen. The course makes an appeal to Sophie to retain her wonder of the world and become a philosopher. It gives the example of a magician pulling a white rabbit out of a top hat, as a trick. For human beings, the trick is how the universe works at all. So the universe is what is drawn out of the top hat. The philosophers are like the bugs that stand on the top of the rabbit fur trying to see what happens. Most people are hiding comfortably down below in the rabbit fur. The reader sees this next when Sophie tries some philosophy on her mother and astonishes her mother. Sophie's mother wonders if Sophie is on drugs, but Sophie assures the mother that drugs just make people duller—this is not what Sophie wants at all.

Chapter 2: The Top Hat Analysis

Sophie receives mail from a philosopher, without a stamp. She has no idea where this philosophy course is coming from but decides to devote herself to it in any case. In a way, this in itself is interesting. Somehow, the person sending the philosophy course to Sophie knows that she will be interested in it and probably knows a lot more about her as well. Is Hilde, who will learn about Sophie, already interested in philosophy? Sophie wonders why all these interesting philosophical questions are not usually posed to her in school. She feels privileged to get this course, before she becomes too much a creature of routine to care about philosophical questions.



Chapter 3: the Myths

Chapter 3: the Myths Summary

The next written lecture that Sophie receives is titled, "the Mythological World Picture," which is about the myths that various ancient peoples used to explain the world. First, the course paper looks at the Nordic myths. There is the story of the God Thor, who has a hammer that makes the thunder and the rain come. Note that the English word thunder has the same root as the name Thor. Thor is a powerful God that gives people rain so that the crops grow and they have food to eat. Surrounding the land of the Nordic Gods are giants. The myth states that the giants are able to steal Thor's hammer, so Thor must retrieve it. When Thor does not have his hammer, there is no rain and the crops cannot grow. In the myth, Thor dresses up as a woman and pretends that he is the goddess, Freyja and goes to the king of the giants with his henchman Loki. He pretends that he, as Freyja is about to marry the king of the giants, in order to infiltrate the giants' court. Then when Thor's hammer is brought out, Thor kills the giants and gets his hammer back. What does this myth mean in real life? This myth is related to the cycle of the season in the Northern countries such as Norway. The winter is cold, with long, dark nights, and when winter ends, Spring suddenly erupts. There are periods of drought. When a period of drought ends, the people believe that Thor has just gotten his hammer back and is able to make it rain again.

There are also the myths of the Greek Gods, as found in the books of the poet Homer. The Greek philosophers begin to criticize these visions of the Gods, saying that the Gods behave too much like normal human beings. This break with mythology is important in the development of philosophy. Sophie thinks about what myths she can create to explain events in her world. Sophie composes the start of her own myth, where a Prince rescues a Princess, and this ends the winter and Spring comes. This happy event signals the time when green plants and flowers grow again.

Chapter 3: the Myths Analysis

Sophie reads the chapter on the beginning of ancient philosophy. Through the colorful examples, she gets an idea how ancient people try to explain how their world works through mythology. Sophie has fun learning mythologies and even inventing her own. She also sees the need to begin developing natural philosophy as a more informed explanation of the world around human beings and how it works. It is interesting that the philosophy course considers ancient myths to be the beginning of philosophy. When the Greek philosophers break from the ancient myths, they are trying to construct a more accurate truth on how the world is organized and how it came into being.



Chapter 4, the Natural Philosophers

Chapter 4, the Natural Philosophers Summary

Sophie's mother sees Sophie get a letter and thinks that Sophie is getting a love letter. Inside the envelope is the question "Is there a basic substance?" and other questions. In a large, brown package, there is another written lesson from the unknown philosophy teacher. The course asks, what is the philosophic project or goal of each philosopher? The course looks at the fragments of the first known philosophers from the ancient Greek world. Thales says that water is the source of all things. Anaximander thinks that the world is created from the boundless, that is, substance that is not limited by being in something already created. Anaximenes believes that everything comes from air. These philosophers all believe that there is one basic substance, but the question is how it changes and transforms itself into everything in the world.

Next a group of philosophers is looked at, known as the Eleatics, including Parmenides. Everything has no real change, according to Parmenides; it is merely the one substance being rearranged. Heraclitus, from the same era, says that what is most important is change, an opposite position from Parmenides. Heraclitus talks of God as a universal being, and reason, as a universal quality. He believes in the data that our senses give us, while Parmenides does not.

A bit later in time, the philosopher Empedocles tries to organize the world around the rearrangement of the four basic elements, earth, air, water and fire. Empedocles also writes about the role of love in bringing things together and conflict, in bringing things apart. These are forces, and the forces are separate from substances and act on substances. The philosopher Anaxagoras believes in infinitely divisible particles called "seeds."

Chapter 4, the Natural Philosophers Analysis

Sophie thinks about what she knows about herself versus what she thinks she knows because something was taught to her. Sophie starts to think of philosophy as not a mere collection of facts but as a method of thinking. Some of the basic themes of philosophic argument are introduced. Some philosophers believe that what we know by the senses is most important and reliable. Other philosophers say that the ideas we develop with our reason are more important. Some believe in change and "the many" as being most important in thinking philosophically, while others believe that everything is primarily "one" and without real change, only rearrangement.

Starting the history of philosophy from the beginning is the best way to begin such a course. That way, it is fairly simple in the beginning, but the questions are still difficult to answer. The ancient Greek philosophers look at the potentially simple building blocks of matter and the universe. They immediately begin to disagree over fundamental issues,

such as, what is change, and is it real or not. Does something only appear to change, and in a fundamental sense really stay the same? Is everything fundamentally from one source or from an infinite number of sources? These questions still puzzle philosophers today.



Chapter 5, Democritus and Chapter 6, Fate

Chapter 5, Democritus and Chapter 6, Fate Summary

Sophie sees that the white envelopes come in the morning and the big brown envelopes with course material come later in the day. Later, another white envelope may come with a couple of questions for Sophie to think about. Sophie plans to see who is bringing these envelopes. One envelope has the question "Why is Lego the most ingenious toy?" Sophie finds her old Lego set stored in her closet. She tries to build things with Lego and sees that it can build a house or almost anything. Sophie's mother likes to see Sophie having fun with Lego, but is still confused by Sophie's insistence that she is doing an experiment.

Sophie is introduced to the philosopher Democritus and his theory of atoms. Atoms, as the Lego building blocks are on a large scale, are the smallest unit of building up the substance of matter, in this theory. Democritus also believes that there is a kind of conservation of matter in using these atoms. Nothing is gained or lost of the atoms; the atoms are only rearranged. Democritus is a materialist; he tries to describe everything in terms of material substance. Even the soul is material, says Democritus. Sophie readily agrees with the theory of small balls called atoms making up all substance, but she is irritated by the idea of no soul. There is nothing spiritual in Democritus' philosophy.

Sophie has been looking out the window for the approach of the philosopher. She finds the next letters on the steps, not in the mailbox, and so the philosopher avoids Sophie's eyes. The next philosophic questions are about fate and history. Is man's fate fixed before events even happen? Sophie thinks about people who are fatalistic and believe in horoscopes and other superstitions. Sophie writes a letter to the philosopher, asking him who he is. Sophie's mother becomes more worried about her daughter, but Sophie does her best to keep her calm. Sophie stays up to one in the morning and sees a man deliver a new philosophic package and take her letter. The philosopher's letter warns Sophie not to contact him until he is ready.

The Greeks believe in fate, or you could also say, predestination. The Greeks have an oracle at the temple in Delphi. There is a priesthood there that interprets the babbling of a priestess and predicts the future or answers questions of importance to the Greek city-states. An example of a tragedy that is controlled by fate is the play of King Oedipus. Oedipus cannot escape his fate of marrying his mother and sealing his own fate of doom.

Greek historians try to determine why wars are lost, and why things happen, not as fate, but as a study of man's actions. Greek medical scientists try to find the reasons for sickness occurring and to make people well again. There is the Hippocratic Oath



written, that doctors have to act in an ethical fashion, for the benefit of their patients, and not harm them intentionally.

Sophie is totally involved in these readings. Then in the morning, Sophie finds a red scarf in her room with the name "Hilde" on it, which is the same name that is on a postcard that she finds. The postcard mentions a birthday of Hilde's and is from Major Albert Knag, from the Norwegian army under the UN command in Lebanon.

Chapter 5, Democritus and Chapter 6, Fate Analysis

Sophie is learning more and more about ancient Greek philosophy. She asks herself if certain things are fated or not. She finds out about this girl Hilde, who lives in another Norwegian town called Lillesand, hundreds of miles away. Sophie asks herself if she is fated to meet this Hilde, and what role will this Hilde play in Sophie's life. Sophie's philosophic readings have been heavily on the "materialist" side, but she also wonders where the spiritual side comes in. Sophie is also beginning to find out about the philosopher, who urges her to not pursue him until he is ready to meet her.



Chapter 7, Socrates

Chapter 7, Socrates Summary

Sophie's mother is again vaguely troubled by Sophie's new interests. The philosopher replies to Sophie by letter that he cannot visit her for now and also mentions the red scarf with the name "Hilde" on it that Sophie found. The philosopher gives his name as Alberto Knox in this letter. Again, Sophie thinks of the strangeness of there being a connection between this Hilde and the philosopher. Why should the philosopher know about Hilde, whose name is on the postcards that Sophie has received? And why does Hilde's father's letter come to Sophie's house?

Sophie starts reading her new philosophy lesson. The lesson is about Plato and Socrates. It's about doing the right thing and knowing what you do not know. Also, the question is asked, how do ideas come from within? At this point, the dog Hermes comes to Sophie and delivers a letter to her. Sophie is told in the letter not to seek to find out more about Alberto at this time. The next lesson takes Sophie to ancient Athens in Greece. Sophie is confronted with the Sophists, men who charge for philosophical lessons. The Sophists generally do not believe in the Greek myths; instead they are skeptics. Philosophers such as Protagoras believe in a relative truth based on the person involved and the circumstances, among other things. Socrates opposes this, and we know his teaching from the writings of Socrates' dialogues by his student Plato.

Socrates claims not to know anything. This way, he forces people to examine their underlying assumptions when they talk to Socrates. This makes some people angry, who think that they are being ridiculed. Socrates obeys his inner divine voice and finally is brought to trial. He is charged with "corrupting the youth" and disrespecting the Gods and after being found guilty by a jury, is executed. Socrates could have escaped death through exile, but he refuses. He is often compared to Jesus Christ, who also refuses to abandon his mission in the face of death.

Chapter 7, Socrates Analysis

Socrates shows how a philosopher does not have to be a Sophist, merely having an excuse to make money and be skeptical about everything. Socrates loves wisdom, the Greek root of the English word philosophy (philo- means love, and -sophy means wisdom). Socrates' questions are what irritate the people he talks to in the Dialogues, and his questions are, in many ways, the most important thing about the Socratic Dialogues. Socrates teaches that the happy life is to be able to develop the insight to know how to live right and be able to do it. Socrates ideas come from within, using his reason.



Chapter 8, Athens, Chapter 9, Plato

Chapter 8, Athens, Chapter 9, Plato Summary

Sophie gets a videotape in her package from the philosopher. She plays the videotape, which opens with a tourist shot of Athens. Someone is holding a large board with the word "Hilde" on it. The narrator of the film is the philosopher, Alberto Knox. The film zeros in on the Acropolis and the Parthenon, Greek for the "Virgin's Palace" and dedicated to the goddess Athena. The site is shown, where hundreds of years after Socrates, St. Paul preaches the Christian gospel.

Next there is a shot of ancient Athens, with the marketplace teeming with goods. The marble buildings of the Acropolis are new and painted in bright colors. A man is told about Sophie, and he introduces himself as Plato. He asks Sophie questions relating to the forms that are the model for real objects and then a question about the immortality of the soul.

Sophie wakes up early, still in her dress. Sophie goes outside to her little "den." Sophie thinks about Plato's questions. She thinks how a cookie mold is like the forms of Plato. The mold is independent of the cookies it creates, and all the cookies look similar. Likewise, there could be a form of a horse that is independent of any individual horses. Sophie also thinks about the immortality of the soul. In the middle of these thoughts, Hermes the dog comes into the den with another package. This time Sophie follows the dog. The dog growls at her and escapes.

In the written lesson on Plato, Sophie learns about Plato writing down the words of Socrates in the famous books, Plato's Dialogues. Sophie learns that Plato set up the first Academy. Plato's theory is that while everything changes, there are eternal forms of things such as truth and beauty. Plato's theory explains how specific forms are created out of atoms or other building blocks. Within the world of ideas, the forms can be perfect. Plato also uses mathematics and geometry to aid him in obtaining true knowledge.

A human soul is also a form, separate from the human body, and the soul, unlike the body, according to Plato, is immortal. Most human beings are caught in the darkness of day-to-day sense perception. They are like people who are chained down in a cave. They can only see shadows on a wall, from a reflected light or a flame; they cannot see the eternal forms of things and ideas. In Plato's story of the cave, one of the cave people goes out of the cave and into the sunlight. He sees the real forms and ideas. He comes back and tries to tell the people in the cave about the real ideas that are weakly reflected in the shadows that they see, but the people become angry. Then they want to kill the man who went out into the light. This story is in Plato's dialogue "The Republic."

Plato describes the three key parts of the body, the head, the chest and the abdomen (gut), and how they correspond to the three classes of people in building the ideal city.



They would correspond to the rulers of the city, the key functionaries of the city and the working class of the city. These three classes correspond to Plato's theory of the three corresponding virtues, wisdom, courage and temperance. Though some call Plato's system totalitarian, Plato recognizes that women are equal with men in having human reason.

Chapter 8, Athens, Chapter 9, Plato Analysis

Sophie thinks over Plato's theory. It is very appealing to her, though she has trouble grasping the world of eternal ideas. Plato and Socrates, with the cameo video appearance of Alberto Knox, the philosopher, and Plato in Athens, definitely mark off Plato's philosophy as a centerpiece of the world of philosophy. Indeed, the high principles of Socrates and Plato and the martyrdom of Socrates have forever touched the heart of human beings all over the world, for all time. Obviously, someone would like to get this method of the glory of the Platonic Dialogues to Hilde as well.



Chapter 10, the Major's Cabin, Chapter 11, Aristotle

Chapter 10, the Major's Cabin, Chapter 11, Aristotle Summary

It is early on Sunday morning, and Sophie decides to continue her search for the philosopher by following the path that his dog took. Sophie walks into the woods in the direction in which the dog Hermes disappeared. She finds a lake and a rowboat. On the other side of the lake, she sees a cabin. Sophie takes the rowboat and goes to the other shore, by the cabin. The cabin is unlocked and she walks in. Sophie sees no one, but it is obvious that someone has been living there and been there a short time ago. Inside the cabin, Sophie finds two pictures on the wall, one entitled "Bjerkely" which is a picture of a white house by a lake or bay and a red boathouse. The other picture is a portrait of a man with the title "Berkeley," which is actually the philosopher George Berkeley. After more investigation, Sophie knows that this is Alberto's and Hermes' cabin. Sophie sees an antique mirror and suddenly, looking at the mirror, she sees another girl in the mirror, who winks back at her with both eyes. Sophie also sees Hilde's wallet laying on a table. She becomes scared and leaves, but before leaving, Sophie grabs an envelope addressed to her. She reads three questions relating to the next philosopher to be studied, Aristotle.

Sophie's mom sees Sophie come back home soaking wet. Sophie denies having a boyfriend, but she admits going to the cabin. Sophie's mother calls it "the major's cabin." Sophie writes a note to the philosopher, saying that she is now a Plato fan. Sophie also apologizes for invading the cabin and grabbing the letter addressed to her. Sophie begins to wonder if there actually is an idea of, say, a chicken, that is independent of an individual chicken. Later, Sophie's mother proposes they invite people over to celebrate Sophie's upcoming 15th birthday.

Sophie goes back to her den outside, and when the dog Hermes comes in, she gives him a letter. Sophie receives a letter from the philosopher. The letter forgives Sophie for trespassing in the cabin but says that the philosopher will have to move now. The letter also contains a new lesson about Aristotle. Though Aristotle is a student of Plato, Aristotle denies the existence of the philosophical forms or ideas. He turns instead to the classification of empirical data. It seems as though Aristotle gets his head out of the Platonic clouds and instead gets down on the ground to look at things, if necessary on all fours.

While Plato determines reality from the standpoint of reason, Aristotle returns to the importance of physical evidence, without ideas or theories. That is why Aristotle bases so much on the Aristotelian system of classification. Aristotle also classifies different types of causes. For example, Aristotle may say it rains because plants need rain, instead of due to the process of creating rain drops. Aristotle succeeds in forming a



system of classification of plants, minerals and animals, which is related to that still in use by today's scientists. Aristotle uses his categories to create a type of logic based on going from category to sub-category.

Aristotle also writes on ethics and politics. On ethics, he writes of a human being's desire for three types of happiness. They are 1. Pleasure 2. As a responsible citizen 3. As a philosopher and thinker. Aristotle likewise classifies governments as monarchies, democracies, oligarchies and tyrannies. Aristotle looks at women as being only of the category of Man's mate and mother of children, quite backwards from Plato's advanced view.

Sophie looks around her after reading the lesson. She sees the plants and animals around her house and also thinks of human beings, such as her mother. All of these are described in Aristotle's categories. Sophie's mother says that Sophie is scaring her silly with all this strange philosophical talk. Sophie arranges the pages of her philosophy lessons and puts them in a ring binder.

Chapter 10, the Major's Cabin, Chapter 11, Aristotle Analysis

After the heights of Plato, the philosophy course goes in detail about the Aristotelian classification system. Perhaps Sophie is also thinking about how to classify the cabin that she found. It has a strange category of the pictures on the wall of Berkeley and Bjerkely. The boathouse in the picture is similar to the cabin at the lake where Sophie is. When Sophie sees her reflection in the mirror and another girl winks at her with both eyes, the reader knows something magical or out of the ordinary is going on in the story. Both the mirror and the pictures foreshadow the existence of two realities that are somehow interacting, that of Sophie and of Hilde.



Chapter 12, Hellenism

Chapter 12, Hellenism Summary

Sophie finds a postcard near her mailbox from the Major to Hilde. Evidently, the Major is Hilde's father and also may be the same Major as referenced by the so-called Major's cabin. The postmark of the postcard is two months in advance. Next, Sophie has to go to school and take a religious knowledge test. She uses her philosophical knowledge to answer the questions. Sophie refers to philosophical questions for which the answer is uncertain, such as whether there is a God and whether there is life on other planets. Sophie addresses the question as to whether universal values are involved in a person's conscience. Her teacher finds her answers incredible and asks Sophie if she has done her homework. Her answers are good, but they are not based on the assigned text. Nevertheless, the teacher gives Sophie an "A." Sophie goes home from school and reads the next installment of the philosophy course, about Hellenism.

Hellenism is the period of mixed Greek and Asian cultures after the conquest of the Persian Empire by the Greek commander, Alexander the Great. One of the philosophical schools of the time is the Cynic school, which places little value in personal comfort and wealth. They also have little concern for people's well-being. That is why today if someone seems to care about little, they are called a cynic and are described as cynical. Another school of philosophy is the Stoics. The Stoics grow out of the Cynics but are more interested in statesmanship and politics. They have a central focus on the individual, like the philosopher Cicero and have some similarity to a humanist philosophy. However, since they tend to not believe in the ability of humans to change things, they believe more in fate. That is why someone called a stoic is a person who forces himself to bear the misfortunes and trials that are fated to happen to him.

The Epicureans believe in seeking pleasure and avoiding pain. They are named after Epicurus, who founds a philosophical school about 300 B.C. They use a sort of pleasure versus pain calculus to weigh short-term benefits against long-term gains. Epicureans are known to appreciate the finer things in life such as good food and expensive living.

Plotinus is from Alexandria Egypt and later of Rome, Italy. He starts a school of Neo-Platonism around 205-270 AD. Plotinus has a major influence on Christianity in that he views evil as the absence of God, or the divine presence. Evil is not an independent force. Plotinus also seeks a mystical experience of oneness with God. Mystics of various sorts are active in this era. They seek God within their soul and through prayer and meditation. Sophie tries to think and dream about this sense of divine mysticism.

Chapter 12, Hellenism Analysis

Each chapter of the philosopher course seems to send Sophie into a cloud. After studying Plato and Socrates, she is ready to believe in the ideal forms. Now after

studying Plotinus, she tries to experience the mystical experience of the presence of the divine being. As evidenced by her success in answering questions for her Religion exam, she has learned much in her philosophy course. On the other hand, the establishment authorities, in this case, the teacher, immediately get suspicious of someone who knows things not given to them through the proper channel. In this case, Sophie gets an "A" anyway, but the reader gets an indication that being a philosopher has its perils as well.



Chapter 13, the Postcards, Chapter 14, Two Cultures

Chapter 13, the Postcards, Chapter 14, Two Cultures Summary

Sophie decides to go camping with her friend, Johanna and decides to camp at the Grouse top, a place where the birds called grouse go, which is close to the Major's cabin. Once Sophie and Johanna camp there, Sophie convinces Johanna to go to the cabin. They find the lake and take the rowboat across to the Major's cabin. Sophie finds the key to the cabin and the two of them go in. After lighting a candle, they find postcards addressed Hilde, which also mention Sophie and Johanna. The Major writes about the special present that he is getting ready for Hilde. He writes that Sophie gets all the cards, too, and soon will "catch on." The reader wonders what is the secret that Sophie has to figure out about Hilde and the Major.

Sophie and Johanna are frightened, but Sophie is getting used to hearing from the Major about Hilde and her birthday. Sophie grabs the mirror that she saw in her last visit, and then the two girls quickly leave. They finish their camping expedition, and Sophie returns home. There she sees a TV broadcast about the Norwegian forces in the UN Battalion that is on a peace-keeping mission in Lebanon. Sophie wonders if the Major is one of the troops that are shown in the television broadcast.

The philosopher, Alberto, sends another package to Sophie. This lesson is about Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is examined concerning the Semitic roots of Christianity, as well as its Indo-European connections. The Indo-Europeans include the Indians and the Greeks. The Indians are shown to have many of the same Gods, with related names, similar to the Greeks. These Gods include Jupiter, also known as Zeus. Similar Gods stretch to the ancient Vikings of Norway. The Indo-European myths tend to be about many Gods and are pantheistic. They have a philosophical view of the universe, which involves seeing as the most important of the five senses; they use images in their worship. The Indo-European view of history tends to be of cycles of history that start over again. These even include the individual cycle of rebirth into other beings.

The Semites have a different culture and language, originating in Arabia. They tend to believe in one God, at least in their best side. The Semites see God intervening in human history and see events in history going from a beginning, when the world is created, to the end of time. Then, there will be a Judgment Day, and the wicked will be punished. The Semites emphasize "hearing" the word of God in the five senses. They often are against having images in their temple. For example, the Muslims still today have no pictures in their mosques and often have discouraged art work.

Ancient Israel is a key example of a Semitic people. Their kings are called the Messiah, of which the greatest one was King David, the chosen one. Later, the Kingdom of Israel



is destroyed, but the idea of the Kingdom of God lives on. Jesus says he is the Messiah and is bringing in the Kingdom of God but not in any political sense. He is not leading a revolt against the Roman Empire; instead, Jesus is bringing salvation and atonement for the whole world. For this, Jesus is opposed, judged and crucified. It is said that he rises from the dead, and this is the beginning of Christianity. Paul converts to Christianity and brings it to the Greek and Roman world in his far-flung travels. Paul brings Christianity to Athens, and there is a meeting of the two cultures—Christianity, from the Semitic tradition, and neo-Platonism, from the Indo-European tradition. Paul, the preacher, recalls the Greek tradition of worshipping the unknown God, and Paul says that this is Jesus Christ, who is the son of God and also a true Man and who suffers and dies on the Cross. Sophie looks at this incredible meeting of cultures and sees how her history goes back three thousand years, just as the poet Goethe says.

Chapter 13, the Postcards, Chapter 14, Two Cultures Analysis

From a philosophical standpoint, in many ways, this is the high point of the book. Sophie is shown the connection between philosophical beliefs and the Christian religion. She sees how the best of the Semitic and Indo-European traditions are brought together in this process. The confusing point is why does the Major seem involved in this process. Why is the Major and his daughter, Hilde, engaged in Sophie's philosophical education? The Major definitely has magical powers, but how did he get them, and what does he intend to do with them? The extent of his power over Sophie is foreshadowed in that he seems to know everything she does, including that she is with Johanna. The theme is also introduced of the conflict between the power of human reason versus things and powers that seem to be beyond reason, in this case, the power of the Major.



Chapter 15, the Middle Ages

Chapter 15, the Middle Ages Summary

Sophie is fixing dinner. Another postcard is blown onto the window by the wind, from the Major, for Hilde. Alberto calls Sophie on the phone and tells her that they are running out of time; Hilde's father is coming. They no longer will run the course through mail; from now on it is to be taught by Alberto in person. Alberto tells Sophie to meet him at St. Mary's Church early the next morning. Sophie arranges to sleep over at Joanna's house but has the alarm clock set to go off early in the morning so Sophie can go to St. Mary's Church.

At the church, the organ plays and Alberto is dressed like a monk. Alberto explains to Sophie how it was when the Middle Ages began. As the Roman Empire crumbles, Christianity becomes the state religion. The Academy of Athens is shut down by the church, and this is part of a beginning of a dark age. Yet, parts of the old Greek philosophy are preserved in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire and in areas of the Near East and Africa that are conquered by the Arab Muslims. In the West, St. Augustine leads in the synthesis of Christian and Platonic philosophy. Augustine believes that evil has no independent existence. Yet, he also looks at questions such as whether man has free will, or if the chosen of God are chosen by fate.

Later in the 1200s, there is renewed progress in Europe with the building of the Cathedrals. The Arabs, who are Muslims, develop science and use Aristotle's scientific classification system. St. Thomas Aquinas in Italy and later in Paris uses Aristotelian logic to prove the existence of God. Aquinas looks at the whole order of the creation from the inanimate objects to animals to man and to the angels. He questions if time is the same for all of these. At this point, Sophie recalls that the Major, in his postcard to Hilde says that time is different for Sophie than it is for them. This foreshadows the revealing of the actual relationship between the Major, Sophie and Alberto.

Chapter 15, the Middle Ages Analysis

The pace of the book heats up with the end of the written portion of the lectures. From now on, the philosophy lectures are given in person. There is a sense of urgency because, somehow the Major is approaching and wants to have the full philosophy course done in time. It still is not clear when the philosophy course is due. Sophie reflects that St. Thomas Aquinas' philosophy is important where the Major is from, since the Major says that Sophie's sense of time is different. This can only mean that Sophie and Alberto inhabit a different order of existence than do the Major and Hilde. The postcards symbolize the written communication that both levels of existence share.



Chapter 16, the Renaissance

Chapter 16, the Renaissance Summary

Sophie returns to Joanna's house late in the morning and manages to calm down Joanna's parents. Sophie tells Joanna everything about the meeting with Alberto in the church. Joanna doesn't like it but is told that this is serious business. Sophie and Joanna then go to Sophie's house, where Sophie's mother serves lunch. Sophie goes to her room to take a nap. She looks in the antique mirror and sees her reflection, but behind that is the reflection of another girl. At this moment, Sophie realizes that the other girl must be Hilde. Sophie sleeps and dreams seeing the Major, who is Hilde's father, returning to Hilde. Sophie sees Hilde's golden crucifix and wakes up. Then she is stunned to find Hilde's crucifix under her pillow. Now, Sophie knows that the Major is coming back to Hilde, but why does Sophie keep finding Hilde's possessions?

On Sunday morning, Sophie and her mother see Alberto's dog, Hermes, outside. Sophie tells her mother that she will take the dog home and follows Hermes to the philosopher's house. The dog leads Sophie to an attic apartment in the Old Town. Sophie tells Albert about finding Hilde's golden crucifix under her pillow, but Alberto dismisses this as a cheap trick, presumably by the Major. Alberto is dressed in a Renaissance costume, and his apartment is filled with objects from the Renaissance period, including a hand-made doll. The doll symbolizes the fleetingness of life. Hundreds of years ago, a girl plays with the doll and later grows up, lives and dies. Sophie shows Alberto the postcard from Hilde's father, the Major, that she found in the street. Alberto rips it up in disgust and tells Sophie that the Major has them under "the closest surveillance." Alberto then goes into a lecture about the European Renaissance.

The Renaissance is a time of technological progress that includes better ship navigation with compasses. Firearms and printing are also introduced. The whole world is visited by European ships and colonies, which are started in various places. Likewise, the ancient Greek philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle are studied again. Man is considered to have infinite creative potential and to have been created in the image of the Creator; such philosophers such as Pico della Mirandola believed thusly. Artists paint the human body, and science and mathematics are developed. The Church of St. Peter's is built as a huge monument to faith in Rome, seat of the Pope. There is also resistance to this wave of innovations. For example, Giordano Bruno is burned at the stake for, among other things, looking for God in nature, thus being accused of pantheism.

Nevertheless, progress is made. Copernicus declares that the Sun, not the earth, is the center of the universe and the Solar System. This is later elaborated on and developed by Galileo, Kepler and Newton. The development of humanism and individuality is felt in religion, too. Martin Luther breaks with the Catholic Church in part because he believes in the primacy of the individual's relationship with God. He translates the Bible into German, as well. At this point Sophie realizes she is running late. Oddly, Alberto calls



her Hilde a couple times. What does this mean? It foreshadows the revelation of the actual relationship between Sophie and Hilde. Sophie needs bus fare, and she finds the exact bus fare, ten crowns, on the street.

Chapter 16, the Renaissance Analysis

It is becoming more obvious that Sophie is a symbolic stand-in for Hilde. While the philosophical lessons are given to Sophie, they are meant for Hilde as well. Hilde's father has extraordinary power over Sophie's world. The reader learns of the Renaissance man, who is skillful in many intellectual and other fields. This foreshadows the intellectual qualities of the Major, which seem to be quite developed. Sophie finds Hilde's crucifix under her pillow, and there is shown to be a strong link in identity between Sophie and Hilde. Likewise, there is some link between the Albert Knag, the Major, who is Hilde's father, and the philosophy teacher, Alberto Knox. Even their names are similar. However, the exact relationship between these characters is not yet revealed.



Chapter 17, the Baroque

Chapter 17, the Baroque Summary

Sophie tells her mother that she took the dog home and met a physics professor, who told her about the discovery of the geometry of the Solar System. Sophie becomes upset when she hears of the killing of a Norwegian UN soldier in Lebanon on the television. Sophie tells her mother a little about Alberto and the dog Hermes, while omitting some details. Sophie says Alberto's brother is a Norwegian Major, who is posted in Lebanon with the UN. Sophie's mother decides she wants to meet Alberto, the philosopher. She and Sophie plan to invite him to Sophie's birthday party.

Later in the week, Sophie is in school, where her teacher wants to know how she is learning so much. Sophie finds another postcard from the Major in her exercise book and learns that the Major is saddened because of the death of the Norwegian UN soldier. Sophie leaves school and meets Joanna and tells her about her plan for a Midsummer night eve party, and boys, including Joanna's favorite, Jeremy, will be invited. Joanna is surprised to find out that Alberto Knox, the philosopher, is invited to the party, too.

When Sophie gets home, she sees the dog, Hermes. The dog takes Sophie to Alberto's home, where he is wearing a Baroque costume, as if from the court of Louis XIV of France. In this lecture on the Baroque, Alberto discusses philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, who has a strongly materialist philosophy. Other philosophers of the period are the opposite; they are extreme idealists. The period is known for its magnificent palaces such as Versailles in France, and also monasteries, where people retreat from the world. The period known as the Baroque is also characterized both by personal vanity, and the knowledge that death will come. People think about the briefness of life. Politically, it is a time of assassinations and later revolts, such as the French Revolution. In a distinct foreshadowing of what happens later, Alberto refers to the Spanish dramatist Calderon de la Barca, who wrote a play "Life is a Dream." In another work by Holberg, the main character wakes up in a ditch and dreams he is a rich Baron, then goes to sleep in the Baron's bed and dreams that he is in a ditch. The question is posed, how does a person know which is reality and which is a dream?

Chapter 17, the Baroque Analysis

There is more talk of preparations for the Midsummer Eve party. Joanna is interested in the party, too, including asking which boys will come. Something wild is possibly going to happen at this party. It is foreshadowed that this is an important event in the story, and sort of a turning point. More to the point is Alberto's discussion of a Baroque work, where the character is unclear whether they are in a dream, or they are in real life. There are clearly two realities at work in the story, one around Sophie and Alberto, the other around Hilde and the Major.



Chapter 18, Descartes, Chapter 19, Spinoza

Chapter 18, Descartes, Chapter 19, Spinoza Summary

The pace of the lectures increases, as if Alberto feels he is on a tight schedule. Next he talks about the philosopher, Descartes. Descartes lives mostly in Paris and Holland. Descartes' system is related to the new physics of his time, in that Descartes has a mechanistic world view. Descartes wants to start his philosophy as a clean break from the ancient Greeks such as Plato and Aristotle. Descartes' philosophy asks, how Man can trust his own senses, since maybe his whole life is a dream? Descartes thinks about what is evident to him, either from his reason or his senses. The existence of God is evident to Descartes, as well as his own existence. His famous quote is "I think, therefore I am," meaning that his own ability to think is evidence to Descartes of his own existence. Descartes tries to make thought and matter independent in their actions, so he is labeled a dualist. At this point, Alberto shows Sophie a computer. Sophie finds out about Hilde on the computer. Suddenly, Major Albert Knag appears as a sort of data virus. Sophie notes the similarity of names, Alberto Knox and Albert Knag.

Next, Alberto discusses Baruch Spinoza, a member of the Jewish community of Amsterdam, Holland, who is excommunicated for heresy. In Spinoza's philosophy, the philosopher sees himself from the perspective of all eternity; he is part of the whole universe and all time. Spinoza rejects Descartes' idea of two main substances, for the idea of everything being made of one substance; therefore, Spinoza is a monist in his thinking. In Spinoza's thought, God's attributes include both matter and spirit. Spinoza believes that while there is human free will, this free will is constrained by the laws of nature and all of nature's actions. Spinoza's human ethics are largely determined by God's natural law, there is freedom but also necessity. In that way, Spinoza is a deterministic philosopher. Only God, according to Spinoza, is a being that has totally free will. At the end of this lecture, Sophie is offered some fruit. She takes a banana, and as she peels it, she again sees birthday greetings from Albert Knag to his daughter Hilde. Sophie asks, what are Albert Knag's powers over them? Can he put words in their mouths?

Chapter 18, Descartes, Chapter 19, Spinoza Analysis

It is becoming more obvious that somehow Sophie and Alberto are part of Major Albert Knag's imagination. He seems to be able to do anything to them in their world. According to Sophie's and Alberto's senses, they are real beings, but they are getting evidence that they are really living in a sort of a dream. This dream, in effect, is like the dream states that are posed to exist by philosophers such as Descartes. In Descartes' dualist world, there is a separation of matter from spirit. Sophie is beginning to wonder if she and Alberto are somewhere in the realm of spirit, in the mind of the Major.



Chapter 20, Locke, Chapter 21, Hume

Chapter 20, Locke, Chapter 21, Hume Summary

Sophie's mother gets more insistent about finding out who the older man is that Sophie has been seeing. So, Sophie shows her mother the video of Alberto Knox in Athens, and her mother comments that Alberto looks like the Major who used to live in the Cabin. Sophie goes to Alberto's apartment in the old town. She finds a note citing the philosopher Berkeley. On June 14th, Hermes the dog shows up again. The dog takes Sophie to the philosopher's apartment. On the way, the dog stops and actually talks. It says "Happy Birthday, Hilde." Alberto begins his class on the English empirical philosophers. After Descartes and Spinoza, who are rationalists, there is a shift in philosophy toward empiricism. The idea is to shift from relying on reason, to relying more on the data of the senses. These philosophers include Locke, Berkeley and Hume.

These English philosophers shift to a belief that no innate or internally-generated ideas are possible in Man. Man is like a blank blackboard, ready to take in data collected by the senses. Locke asks where do ideas come from and can Man trust the data that the senses give him. Locke separates sensory data into those ideas that we get directly from the senses and our reflections on sensory information that human beings have afterwards. Locke is called a liberal philosopher, since he rejects prior rational philosophical systems and, instead, allows every man the freedom of ideas that he gathers from empirical sensory data. Locke is also known for his political ideas, such as the separation of powers between the king or executive, the judges or courts and the legislature of a state.

The next philosopher to be discussed is Hume. Hume is also an empiricist and also a major influence on the philosopher Immanuel Kant. Hume looks at the putting together of complex ideas from two different experiences. For example, if one wants to put together the idea of an angel, he combines the idea of wings from a bird with the idea of man, to form an angel idea. Like Locke, Hume separates the experience of sensation from recollection of sensations, in order to form ideas. A picture of heaven in a person's mind could consist of many ordinary people and objects but put together in a heavenly way. Hume, in his radical empiricism, can be compared to oriental philosophies such as Buddhism. The Buddha rejects an unchangeable soul and even rejects an eternal soul. Hume is also not a Christian, but an agnostic, one who is indifferent or undecided on the question of the existence of God. Hume doubts that we know that a stone will always fall to earth just because it has always fallen before.

Hume rejects human ethics being due to one's reason; instead he sees that ethics come from sentiments and customs. Hume says that people may have good or bad feelings, but they are not based on reason. Alberto uses Hume's argument to support environmentalist sentiments against the rational need for economic development. Although economic development may be a rational need, it conflicts with



environmentalist sentiment. People thus may decide that it is not good to always find more oil, have more energy and more electricity, due to other factors.

Chapter 20, Locke, Chapter 21, Hume Analysis

The English school of philosophy is strongly empirical. It is a break from the philosophy of the Renaissance. Its appeal is to the sentiments and customs of a time, not to reason in a universal sense. It is called a liberal philosophy because it does not bind Man to a set philosophical system or an endless process of reasoning like the dialectics of Plato does. Each person has their own set of perceptions that determines what they believe. So Sophie's senses tell her that the dog is talking to her and saying "Happy Birthday Hilde," but Sophie has no reasonable explanation for this data she gets from her senses. Likewise, she cannot explain how a birthday greeting from the Major can be written inside a banana skin; it is just there.



Chapter 22, Berkeley

Chapter 22, Berkeley Summary

Alberto and Sophie look out the window. They see a plane with a trailing banner saying "Happy Birthday, Hilde." Sophie wonders if the Major's powers are God-like. Alberto starts the next lesson about the philosopher and Irish Bishop, George Berkeley (1685-1753). Though a Bishop, Berkeley is the most extreme of the empiricists. While Locke will see an apple but doubt it to be green and sour, Berkeley will doubt its perception altogether. By the logic of empiricism, Berkeley doubts all our perceptions. Sophie calls this a stupid theory.

Berkeley believes that all our ideas have a spiritual origin because everything comes from God, even our sensory perceptions. Everything exists in the mind of God. After hearing this about the philosopher Berkeley, Sophie becomes nervous. She realizes that she and Alberto exist in the mind of the Major. And Hilde is an angel because she is the one to whom this God-like creature, the Major, speaks. Sophie is frightened. She runs out in the rain to go back home. Strangely, she runs into her mother, who also wonders what is happening to them.

Chapter 22, Berkeley Analysis

The fact is revealed that Sophie and Alberto exist as characters in a book by the Major. They are a story within a story. Major Albert Knag is writing a book about them in order to interest his daughter, Hilde, in philosophy. The book is her birthday present. Major Knag and Hilde in turn are characters in the author's book. This is a turning point in the story because not only does the reader now know there is a story with a story, but so do the characters Sophie and Alberto. Their ideas of themselves as represented by the author have to change, now that they are self-conscious of who they are, that is, storybook characters.



Chapter 23, Bjerkeley

Chapter 23, Bjerkeley Summary

The point of view of the story is now told in the third person from the standpoint of Hilde. Hilde is the daughter of Major Knag, and she is going to be 15 years old tomorrow. Her dad is expected to come home in a week, on June 21st, Mid-Summer Eve. This is an extra special day in Norway, which is in the far north and has days that are 24-hours long in the middle of the summer, or as they are called, white nights. Hilde looks out over her garden and the bay with her little rowboat. Bjerkeley is the name of the Major's house where she lives.

Hilde looks at herself in a brass mirror, probably the same type as the brass mirror that Sophie took from the Major's cabin. Hilde's father, Albert Knag is a part-time author, as well as a Norwegian Army Major. Major Knag is part of the UN Peace Keeping force in Lebanon and is a big booster of the UN as a kind of world government. Hilde looks at the birthday present on her table. She unwraps the package; it is a ring binder with the typed text of a book. It is the book about Sophie and Alberto's adventures in philosophy. Hilde reads the book, as the reader read it, from the beginning. She finds it funny that Sophie gets postcards addressed to Hilde, but she also feels sorry for Sophie, who gets very confused.

Hilde's mother comes in and says "Happy Birthday." Hilde is totally wrapped up in the book. She gets to the point where Sophie enters the Major's cabin and sees the portraits of Bjerkeley, Hilde's house, and George Berkeley. Hilde looks up George Berkeley's identity in the encyclopedia. She reads that Berkeley denies the "existence of a material world beyond the human mind." Hilde continues to read the philosophy book and reads about Aristotle's philosophy of categories and his backward view of women.

Hilde enjoys reading about the mysticism of Plotinus and the Neo-Platonics. Hilde is angry that Sophie finds all the Major's postcards to her in the cabin. They are actual copies of postcards that the Major has sent Hilde. Hilde is also stunned by the view of Jesus Christ and Christianity of being a meeting of the Semitic and Indo-European cultural worlds. Then, when Hilde reads about the Middle Ages, she reads about Sophie going to the medieval St. Mary's church. Hilde realizes that she has to go to an old church on the last day of school. Hilde is surprised when she reads about Sophie finding Hilde's golden crucifix, which actually is missing. Hilde has a vision that Sophie is somehow not just a creature of the book, but somewhere, she actually exists.

Chapter 23, Bjerkeley Analysis

This chapter is a book shift in the book, in that it is openly shown that Alberto and Sophie are characters in a philosophy book written for Hilde by her father. The philosopher George Berkeley is important in the book because he is the one who says



that a material world of sorts can exist if it is in someone's mind, in this case, the Major. Hilde is drawn into the book and is reading it constantly. The Major is successful in interesting Hilde in philosophy, but Hilde is also becoming resentful in how he treats the characters, particularly Sophie. Hilde wonders if Sophie is only a make-believe character, how did she get the golden crucifix, although Hilde's mother admits that she told the Major about the missing crucifix, Hilde is still not satisfied with the explanation. This foreshadows the increasing reality of Sophie and Alberto, although they have now been relegated to the role of characters in a book.



Chapter 24, the Enlightenment

Chapter 24, the Enlightenment Summary

Hilde is totally involved in the story "Sophie's World." Hilde agrees with the character Alberto that her father is going too far in manipulating Alberto and Sophie. For example, she is appalled by having the dog Hermes saying "Happy Birthday" and similar passages. Hilde's father, the writer, seems interested in Berkeley's idea of a "denial of a material world outside of human consciousness" because that is where "Sophie's World" exists. Hilde looks at the brass mirror, and like Sophie in the story, swears she sees the reflection blink at her with both eyes. Hilde also finds out that her golden crucifix is really missing, the one that Sophie finds. Hilde returns to reading the book, and the point of view returns to that of Sophie and Alberto.

Sophie recovers from the storm and wakes up the next morning. Her mother celebrates Sophie's birthday. Shortly after, her mother leaves, and Alberto calls Sophie on the phone. Sophie is confused, now that she knows she is "not real," but Alberto urges her to finish the philosophy course. Alberto tells Sophie that they have some freedom, though they are characters in the Major's story. What they will use this freedom for is unknown. Meanwhile, Hilde is reading all this. Hilde still believes that Sophie and Alberto really exist on some level.

Next, Alberto discusses the French Enlightenment. The most important discussion points are listed on a postcard from the Major. There is a theme of the individual's role in the Enlightenment philosophy, such as the need to question authority. This is a new type of skepticism that helped to start the French Revolution. This skepticism argues from the standpoint of rationalism. There is an impulse toward mass education and cultural optimism in the Enlightenment period. However, this can take strange forms, such as Rousseau's obsession with the natural man and primitive man. Some philosophers of this period are atheists, while others are Deist, in that they believe in God but not in revealed Scripture or prophets. There is an attempt to secure women's rights, but it is stopped for another hundred years or so. Meanwhile, during the class, a Sea Serpent comes out of the lake by the Major's cabin, but Alberto tells Sophie to ignore it.

Chapter 24, the Enlightenment Analysis

Sophie and Alberto are now consciously (if that is possible) story book characters. From a philosophical standpoint, how could a story book character, in someone's mind, have its own thoughts? By playing with this "story within a story," the author creates rather unique conflicts. For example, there is beginning to be resentment on the part of Hilde in how her father, the Major, is treating Sophie and Alberto. Hilde thinks he is teasing them too much and playing too many tricks on them. George Berkeley's philosophy is central to the idea that our perceptions of reality are solely due to what is in our consciousness. This strange philosophy has some odd implications for the development



of "Sophie's World." Likewise, even the name of the Major, "Major Knag," is an interesting pun in English, though possibly not in the original language Norwegian. Is Hilde's father really a major nag?



Chapter 25, Kant

Chapter 25, Kant Summary

Hilde gets a birthday call from her father, Major Knag. Hilde says she feels sorry for Sophie and what the Major has done to her in the book. Hilde insists that the characters Sophie and Alberto really exist. Back in the story, Alberto now discusses the philosopher Immanuel Kant, who lives from 1724 to 1804. Kant is concerned with what people can know about the world, through either reason or sense perception. Kant leans toward the empiricist side of philosophy but also looks closely at what our reason can say about such things as time and space. Kant calls time and space and its measurement a key part of man's sense perceptions.

Kant goes on to state that, unlike Hume, he believes that cause and effect are not simply there by force of habit. The human mind determines cause and effect, and this is what Kant calls, a thing in itself, versus what it appears to human beings. In this way, according to Kant, there are clear limits to what a person is able to know. Kant says that since reason and perception fail to let us know the world, this leaves a space for something else. That something else is faith. This allows Kant to also be a devout Protestant Christian, as a matter of faith. Kant looks for the necessity of moral law. Moral laws are absolute, but one is unable to know them. So reason fails, and faith takes over. Kant's ethics are mainly around the idea of finding out what a human being can know, and these are the customary duties of man, in terms of ethics. In addition, Kant believes in what he calls practical reason. By a man using his practical reason, he gets a degree of free will. This idea of practical reason suggests to the philosophy teacher, Alberto, that this is the way that he and Sophie can put their plan of escape into effect.

Sophie walks home and meets mythical characters such as Alice in Wonderland and Winnie the Pooh and gets a note from the Major that the lecture neglected Kant's plan for a league of nations, similar to today's UN. Since we know that Sophie is self-consciously a storybook character, the reader does not find it strange that she meets other storybook characters in her travels.

Chapter 25, Kant Analysis

The conflict between reason and empiricism is further explored in the philosophy of Hume and Kant. The questions of time and space become practical questions, as the reader wonders what someone like Sophie can do in her time and space. Time for Sophie is different than for the reader or the Major. The idea of how Alberto and Sophie can escape from the story and the Major's attention increasingly becomes a major theme of the story. From a practical standpoint, it would seem hopeless, but as Kant says in his philosophy, there is a small window between what we can know and what

exists. In that window, Kant puts his faith in God. In Alberto and Sophie's case, this small window of faith is the one through which they plan to escape.



Chapter 26, Romanticism

Chapter 26, Romanticism Summary

The reader returns to Hilde, in her bedroom, in the real world. Hilde continues to read about Sophie. Sophie comes home, and Sophie's mother has a birthday cake for her. They go back to planning to Mid Summer Eve party. Today Sophie's mom has a little birthday party for Sophie, which includes Joanna's parents. Sophie and Joanna put together an amusing invitation to the Philosophical Garden party. Joanna's parents, the Ingebrigtsens, find the invitation amusing and are invited to the party, too. Alberto calls Sophie on the phone after Sophie's mom leaves. Alberto arranges to give the next lecture, about Romanticism, at the Major's cabin.

The Romantic era is somewhat the successor to Kant. Since Kant looked at the individual's perception, and his mind's interpretation of that perception, as most important, this sets the stage for the ego-ideal of Romanticism. The freedom of the compositions of Ludwig van Beethoven, and the playfulness of the poet Friedrich Schiller are considered by some the romantic ideal. On the other hand, romantic novels are more dreamy and remote, often set in the Middle Ages. Fairy tales and folk songs are collected as part of assembling the collective consciousness of various nations. An example of such a collection is the Grimm Brothers' Fairytales, and the Tales of Hans Christian Andersen.

Dramas can be written about something ordinarily seen as absurd; for example, the quest for the perfect flower. The Romantic Movement tends to degenerate into the hippie counter-culture of that era in the early 1800s. When the Romantics reach the age of 30, they often either die of despair or disease, or suddenly become very conservative. Philosophically, Schelling revives the ideas of Spinoza, which is the oneness of everything. An actual world spirit is sought. New nations arise in the search for national identity, such as Norway in 1814.

In the meantime, Alberto and Sophie get greeting from the Major in the form of a boy, Aladdin, who visits. Aladdin's genie is released and appears as the Major with greetings to Hilde. Alberto reiterates to Sophie that the plan is to finish the philosophy course as soon as possible and then escape. They examine the idea that just as they know they are living their life in the pages of a novel, the Major and Hilde themselves could be living inside a novel that someone else is writing. That is a dream within a dream within a dream.

Chapter 26, Romanticism Analysis

The tension continues around the upcoming Mid Summer Eve party, now known as the Philosophical Garden party. With boys coming to it, and now Alberto and also Joanna's parents, it is guaranteed to be a significant and probably wild event. Alberto discusses



the Romantic Movement. Like the discussion of I. Kant and Hume, much of the romantic's philosophy is subjective, based on the feelings and inclinations of the individual. The ideal of the romantics is the great artist who can create new laws of composition and be totally original. Their ideal is Beethoven, but the movement also degenerates into a type of cultural backdrop, to events such as the French Revolution, which itself quickly becomes bloody. The Major is exerting his total power of Sophie and Alberto, the two protagonists of this novel, but Alberto still has his plans to alter the laws of the universe, in a grand romantic gesture, and escape.



Chapter 27, Hegel

Chapter 27, Hegel Summary

Hilde is still reading the book her father sends her. She is provoked and wants to somehow aid and act for Sophie and Alberto in their "romantic" rebellion. Then she decides to read the next chapter about the philosopher Hegel. In the book, Alberto and Sophie are continuing the philosophy course. The next subject is the work of Hegel, who recasts the romantic idea of a world spirit in terms of the human spirit of historical eras. In German this is known as the "Zeitgeist." While Kant believes in a distant, absolute truth that humans are incapable of knowing, Hegel says that everything is subjective. Hegel's work is an attack on the notion of a timeless universal ideal or system. He introduces the notion that every era has its own laws and spirit. Slavery, for example, is considered wrong now, but in Ancient Athens, it is considered normal and necessary. Truth, to Hegel, is not a set thing; it keeps changing. This is what Hegel calls human progress.

Hegel looks at this constant change in human values and thoughts and asks himself how this comes about. It comes about, according to Hegel, through the conflict of new ideas versus old ideas, through a dialectical process. From the conflict of new versus old ideas, a new synthesis of ideas is created. Then when the new idea is overturned, too, this Hegel calls the negation of the negation. This constant changing of ideas, values and ethics is what Hegel defines as progress. In this way, each era can synthesize new ideas from the clash of opposite ideas. The role of the philosopher, according to Hegel, is to be the mirror that reflects the ideas of his or her own time. This is a break from prior philosophies, which search for universals.

Chapter 27, Hegel Analysis

Hegel is a break with the past and the search for eternal universal ideas. While the Romantics say that ideas are those of each individual, Hegel writes that the dominant or governing ideas of each era are changed through a dialectical process of conflict, change and synthesis. In the meantime, Hilde is reading the story and is in a sort of revolt against her father. She knows he means well in teaching her philosophy, but Hilde sees her father abusing Sophie and Alberto. Since Hilde identifies closely with Sophie, Hilde feels that she herself is being abused and begins to think of how she can get back at her father for being overly authoritarian.



Chapter 28, Kierkegaard

Chapter 28, Kierkegaard Summary

Hilde continues to think how to rebel against her father and play some tricks on him. Hilde asks her mother about her father's planned flight home and finds that the Major will stop in the Copenhagen, Denmark airport. Hilde also resents her father ordering her to finish the book by long-distance telephone. Hilde then returns to the story. Sophie's lesson on the philosopher Kierkegaard is interrupted by Alice, of Alice and Wonderland, visiting. Sophie drinks one container brought by Alice and feels that "all is one," while the other makes her see multiplicity and many individualities. This is Sophie's introduction to the difference between Spinoza's philosophy, emphasizing the one, and Kierkegaard's philosophy, emphasizing individuality.

Kierkegaard is a Danish philosopher, who becomes very critical of his own society. His philosophy becomes a kind of Existentialism, which he claims is in the tradition of Socrates. Like Socrates, Kierkegaard wants to throw his whole existence and put it at risk for philosophical questions. Kierkegaard looks for particular, individual truths and accuses Hegel of abandoning thoughts of the individual. Truth is subjective to every man, according to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard has developed a philosophy of an individual path through life. He maps out three stages in life and people in those stages. The first seeks pleasure and avoids pain; the second tries to do his duty, and the highest stage Kierkegaard calls the religious stage. He calls this the level of faith and for Kierkegaard, that is Christianity, but for others perhaps, it could be something else.

Chapter 28, Kierkegaard Analysis

Hilde begins to take practical steps to play a joke on her father as he returns home. The reader sees a foreshadowing of some plan to exert authority over Hilde's father, or make him feel that he is helpless against outside forces. Hilde wants to break his pride, in a fun sort of way. This is triggered and reinforced by Hilde next reading the chapter on Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is known for believing in an extreme existentialism. He even is the origin of the slogan "Question Authority." Truth is subjective to Kierkegaard, and Hilde wants her father to know what the subjective feeling is like, to feel like a person is being watched.



Chapter 29, Marx

Chapter 29, Marx Summary

Hilde has been reading the book all day. Now she begins her plot to get back at her father. Hilde calls up her friend, Anne Kvamsdal, in Copenhagen, Denmark. Hilde tells Anne about the book in the ring binder and Sophie and the other characters and gets Anne to cooperate in arranging certain tricks on Hilde's father when he passes through the Copenhagen airport. Then Hilde returns to reading about Sophie's world. Sophie calms her mother down about Sophie taking lessons from Alberto. They are waiting for the Midsummer Eve party, where Sophie's mother will meet Alberto Knox, the philosophy teacher. The next day, Sophie, together with Joanna, work on preparing the Philosophical Garden party. That evening, Alberto calls Sophie again on the phone. Alberto is scheming for a way for him and Sophie to escape from the Major's story. It is two days before the Mid Summer Eve party. Alberto says that his plot goes between the lines of the book, so the Major cannot see it all. Alberto's thoughts are very subjective and individual, like in the philosophy of Kierkegaard. Sophie makes her way to the Major's cabin. On the way, she meets Ebenezer Scrooge, the stingy capitalist from Charles Dickens' book. Scrooge is then confronted by the little match girl, who he refuses to help. The little Match Girl turns out to be a fire setter and a communist.

When Sophie meets Alberto, he says that this is your introduction to Karl Marx and the notion of class warfare. Marx, like Kierkegaard, attends the philosophy Professor Schelling's lectures, but Marx is more inclined to materialist philosophers such as Democritus and Epicurus. Marx is influenced by Hegel and studies historical development of man but says that material and economic factors are what cause historical change.

Marx looks at the structures of society through art and philosophy and says that his philosophy is dependent on what Marx calls historical materialism. Since nations have changed from agrarian nations to ones that emphasize industrial progress, this changes everything else. The basis of society in Western Europe now is in cities with factories owned by private owners. This is dependent on developing a better rate of the means of production. The last factor is the question of changing the ownership of the means of production from private to public hands. Marx sees progress in history through conflict. The conflict of his day is the workers against the owners of factories, the means of production. The problem, Marx says is that because the worker does not control his workplace, he doesn't control himself. Marx calls this problem, the alienation of the worker from the means of production. Marx says that there is exploitation of the worker. The factories produce too much, and try to increase profits by cutting wages. There are too many goods, and the workers can't afford to buy them. This can cause society to collapse. The solution, according to Marx, is to have a communist revolution where the workers form a classless society.



Chapter 29, Marx Analysis

Hilde is planning her little revolt against her father and schemes with her friends in Copenhagen, Denmark. Because Hilde loves her father, anything she does is foreshadowed to be a funny, practical joke, though there is still some tension over this plan. In Sophie's story, the fire setting of the little Match Girl shows that this type of resentment can get out of hand and become violent. Marx's philosophy is a break from the past, since it involves the belief in collective action of classes of people, in this case, the working class. Marx's thinking does have its roots in Hegel, but it is different, since it bases progress on the economic well being of the general population.



Chapter 30, Darwin

Chapter 30, Darwin Summary

Hilde sleeps and dreams about the book and philosophy, then gets up and starts reading again. After another interruption from Hilde's father, Alberto talks about Charles Darwin. Alberto tells Sophie that Marx and other thinkers of the time, link their work to that of Charles Darwin. These so-called naturalists are all heavily materialist, using self-certainty for their conclusions. Charles Darwin starts as a practical naturalist, studying animals and birds. As a boy, Charles Darwin collects beetles. He loves bird-watching and later in college, is known as a natural scientist. After graduation, he applies geology to the study of rock formations and looks for fossils. Then Darwin is invited to serve as a natural scientist on a ship going to survey the coasts of South America. The ship, the HMS Beagle spends five years sailing all over the world, including to the Galapagos Islands in the Pacific, where Darwin makes key observations. This is where Darwin begins his work, later published as "the Origin of the Species." This includes his theory of natural selection through the survival of the fittest.

However, evolution of species is not an original idea from Darwin. Just like gradual changes over millions of years could change rocks, other scientist have thought of the idea of species changing over time. Darwin studies bird species on several of the Galapagos Islands, which on each island have developed slight, but distinct, differences. The noted differences of sub-species are hypothesized to be due to "natural selection" of features such as the shape of the bird's beak. Individual birds that have the feature that was desirable tend to survive better, so that more of the birds of the next generation have the desired feature. The new feature can arrive through things such as chance mutations of the inherited genes of birds.

This is similar to when humans breed plants and animals to enhance certain qualities. It usually occurs over a much longer period of time. Negative results of natural selection have occurred when antibiotics are overused. The germs that are resistant to the antibiotic tend to survive, and if they multiply, they create a new strain of antibiotic-resistant bacteria. Yet, many questions about the origin of species are still unanswered.

Still mysterious to Darwin and later biologists is, where did life begin? This is still unknown, though there are theories of a primal soup, without oxygen, being able to create life under the stimulus of cosmic radiation adding shock and stimulus to create life in the first place. Does this answer all questions? Not really, because could "pure chance create the human eye?" Alberto recites a poem from Goethe's Faust, where Faust first says that his life has meaning, but after, the devil says that Faust's life was totally meaningless. What does it mean to say that after you die, part of your matter becomes part of grass and animals? This could be used to say life is meaningless, or others could say that there is meaning because human beings are part of the whole and connected to the whole creation.



Chapter 30, Darwin Analysis

Darwin is an inspiration for other philosophers such as Marx and Freud. His theories attempt to answer the question of how life changes and evolves. Darwin receives a negative reaction in his time because he says that Man is related to, and is an evolutionary successor to monkeys and other animals. Also Darwin's theory of Natural Selection has certain negative connotations. Does this theory mean that superior military nations and cultures have the right to wipe out weaker and inferior groups of people? Also, even if Man is a descendant of certain groups of apes, these apes, monkeys and other animals still perform useful functions in the world and the environment. Likewise, Marx has a desire to identify his theory of class struggle as a cultural struggle of natural selection, to wipe out the capitalist and have a classless society. These theories and their extensions show the problem with oversimplification of Darwin's theory or other philosophies. Darwin and other biologists are not able to define or determine the origin of life, though they have theories about this as well.



Chapter 31, Freud

Chapter 31, Freud Summary

Hilde sees a passage recited to Sophie as something Hilde's father has said to Hilde, too. The passage goes "We are a living planet, Sophie..." Hilde is angry that this passage is recited to Sophie, when it is her property in a sense. She rows her boat back and forth in the lake until she calms down. Hilde is still angry in general about how her father treats Sophie and Alberto in the story, and Hilde goes back to reading. Back in the story, Alberto and Sophie open the door and a naked man appears. It is the Emperor, from Hans Christian Andersen's story of "the Emperor's New Clothes." The Emperor flees after Sophie laughs at him. This is the opening to a lesson on Sigmund Freud, as a cultural philosopher, who deals with issues such as how people deal with sex and sexual repression.

Sigmund Freud develops psychoanalysis. Freud examines how society forces the repression of sexual desires, and what effects this has. In some cases, this repression causes mental illness. Freud looks at the id, the ego, the super-ego and the unconscious mind. The id is related to the seeking of pleasure and avoidance of pain. An infant is predominantly id. As the person grows older, he or she develops a personal identity, while the super-ego is the voice of society telling people when they are doing wrong things or things against the society's taboos. When people, especially Freud's many women patients suppress their desires because they feel guilty of crimes against the super-ego, they tend to suffer from various neuroses. The unconscious does bubble up at times. People then do and say things that they consciously do not want to do or say. Other mental effects are when people project their unconscious desires on other people. A patient may think that his neighbor desires to have the patient's wife because he has an unconscious desire toward the neighbor's wife to which he doesn't want to admit.

Freud also works on analyzing and interpreting dreams. This study of dreams later influences art, for example in the surrealist art movement. The surrealists say that art should be a blend of the conscious and the unconscious mind. At this point, an eruption of the unconscious suddenly comes in the story when, out the window, Sophie and Albert see Goofy, Donald Duck and other cartoon characters playing. Alberto comments that the Major may not know the real meaning of his unconscious thoughts and desires. This will give Sophie and Alberto a chance to escape the story. Of course, the question is open, since the Major is writing the book, isn't that "escape" what he wants, too?

Chapter 31, Freud Analysis

Freud's work on the unconscious and dreams is certainly relevant to Sophie's story. She and Alberto are living in a dream within a dream, or in this case, a story within a story. Freud's cultural philosophy explains why people try to keep within society's normal



values. When people defy the super-ego and do things they know are forbidden, they feel guilty. At the same time, if a person undergoes too much repression, usually by their own doing, they suffer from various disturbances and neuroses. Sometimes unconscious thoughts bubble up into the consciousness and make people do things they do not intend to do. This discussion of repression and sexual feelings foreshadows an eruption of repressed ego states and sexual feelings at the party soon scheduled for Sophie's birthday and Midsummer Eve.



Chapter 32, Our Own Time

Chapter 32, Our Own Time Summary

Hilde imagines she is at the Major's cabin in the story. She reads that Alberto is planning to escape but didn't her father also knows this and actually typed those words. It's another case of a dream within a dream. Hilde sleeps and dreams that Sophie sees her, but Hilde can't see or hear Sophie. Then Hilde's father comes home. At this point Hilde continues her reading. Sophie is going home from the cabin. She tries to draw the Major's attention by skipping around, singing and even climbing a tree. Sophie can't get down, but she is saved by a magic, talking goose, from a story about a boy, Nils Holgersson. Sophie gets home before her mom returns. Sophie and her mom begin the last preparations for the Philosophical Garden party. After mom leaves, Alberto calls and arranges to meet Sophie downtown at a French café. When she gets there, Sophie becomes anxious because Alberto is not yet at the café.

Alberto walks into the café 20 minutes late. He buys food and talks about existentialism. Alberto mentions the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche and his revolt against Christianity and for the strong to not have pity on the weak. This continues with Martin Heidegger (at one point a favorite philosopher of the Nazis). Alberto concentrates on Jean-Paul Sartre, a French philosopher, who was close to the French Communist Party. To Sartre, existentialism means that man creates himself and his values. Freedom is a sort of curse because freedom forces Man to make choices, without any guidelines on what to choose. This is sometimes referred to as man being "thrown into the world." There is therefore no meaning to life, unless people create a meaning to their lives. Simone de Beauvoir applies this philosophy to feminism in her book "the Second Sex." Women can choose an identity free from the trends of tradition. They can break free of the traditional roles of a woman as wife, housekeeper and mother.

There also arises an existentialist literature and a theater of the absurd. Theater pieces and movies, such as Charlie Chaplin movies, show daily life activities, but make people laugh when they realize the absurdity of them. This changes the meaning of monotonous daily tasks into comedy, or in other cases, possibly tragedy. Many other philosophers of our day develop further the theories of Darwin and Marx. There is also a neo-Thomist school, after St. Thomas Aquinas. Philosophers tend to further develop logical empiricism. Other theories develop from the ideas of materialism. Ecological philosophies, or eco-philosophy, such as that of the Norwegian, Arne Naess, look at man's role in the environment and environmental destruction.

Alberto and Sophie look through a bookstore and its Philosophy and New Age sections. Alberto warns Sophie that most of these new philosophies are totally useless. There is another magical greeting, in the form of a television set that had been showing UN soldiers in Lebanon. The Major appears and greets Hilde, but then Sophie gets another shock. Sophie is shown the book on the shelf "Sophie's World," and Alberto buys the book for her. Sophie takes the bus home and meets her mother on the bus. Her mother



sees the book and wonders if Alberto has been ghost-writing the book for the author Albert Knag. The author even used his teaching experiences with Sophie to write the book, Sophie's mother implies.

Chapter 32, Our Own Time Analysis

Sophie is confused at first when she goes to the café. She is only fifteen years old and not used to this type of place where people look over people in a curious fashion. Sophie thinks about whether this crowd is at the "aesthetic" stage (pleasure seeking) or in an existentialist crisis yet. These are terms from Kierkegaard's study of crowds. Sartre and his companion Simone are known for spending much of their time in cafes such as the one in which Sophie and Alberto sit. Sartre's existentialist philosophy does not question whether or not Man exists but questions what meaning his existence has. It is an interesting philosophy but can be dangerous in that the selection of meaning itself is arbitrary. For example, Martin Heidegger is known for selecting the Nazis at one point as his idea of something meaningful. New philosophies have become best-selling books, which spread into new religions, astrology and mysticism. Most of these books are not worth the paper they are printed on, states Alberto.



Chapter 33, the Garden Party

Chapter 33, the Garden Party Summary

Hilde thinks about her last two hours of reading. She is reminded of the book "The Wonderful Adventures of Nils," with the magical goose, that her father had read to her. Now the goose rescues Sophie from a tree she climbed. Hilde also takes to heart her father's warning through the story about getting attracted to the wild New Age books on the shelves of bookstores. Hilde wonders what will happen now that the philosophy course is finished and continues to read the book. Sophie returns home from downtown and shows her mother the book "Sophie's World." By their house, Sophie and her mother see an absurd demonstration with signs such as "the Major is at Hand" and hurray for the UN.

Sophie and her mom get help from Joanna in preparing for the garden party. The party is lavishly prepared with a large birthday cake. The boys and girls arrive, and Sophie sees Joanna and Jeremy discreetly looking each other over. Joanna's parents drive up later. They actually give Sophie a large Barbie doll, the joke being that Sophie says that Mrs. Ingebrigtsen dresses and behaves like a Barbie doll.

Alberto arrives and Sophie's mother welcomes him in front of the entire gathering as Sophie's new philosophy teacher. Then the party starts to get wild; it is the theater of the absurd, as the existentialists say. Joanna goes over to Jeremy, and they start to kiss passionately, leaning over one of the tables. After that, a chicken salad, coffee and cake are served. Jeremy and Johanna walk over to the side of the garden and start to roll in the grass and undress each other; however, instead of getting upset, Joanna's parents and other guests find this amusing.

Alberto sees that things are disintegrating rapidly toward their absurd end. Alberto makes a speech, while a plane flies by with a happy birthday banner. Alberto states that they are living in a book written by the Major, in Lebanon, for his daughter, Hilde Knag. The Ingebrigtsen's Mercedes is worthless, Alberto states, while Mr. Ingebrigtsen's daughter is doing it in the bushes. Mr. and Mrs. Ingebrigtsen are insulted, as Alberto calls the whole scene a shadowy and unreal existence. Sophie and Alberto prepare to escape the Major's consciousness. They run to the cabin as the Mercedes crashes.

Chapter 33, the Garden Party Analysis

This is truly an example of the theater of the absurd as described in the last chapters and put into plays by existentialists writers. First of all, a demonstration in the middle of nowhere saying "the Major is at Hand" sets the tone for something really wild about to happen. Likewise, when Johanna and Jeremy go off to roll in the bushes, it is an act of absurdity, emphasized by the nonchalant reactions of the parents present. It could be

viewed as a warning by the Major of what happens to those who act out their impulses and whims. More likely, it is just a supremely existentialist moment.

The reader sees how philosophical talk can disturb the standing order and the Establishment, as the Ingebrigtsens are upset more than anything by Alberto's truthful speech. The party becomes more messy and wild. As the Mercedes crashes into an apple tree, Sophie and Alberto make their escape. The theater of the absurd is shown as an ordinary birthday party. Likewise, with Alberto getting into trouble, the reader is reminded that philosophy is a risky business; look what happened to Socrates.



Chapter 34, Counterpoint

Chapter 34, Counterpoint Summary

Hilde wonders about the book and how it ends. She asks herself if her father really thinks that Hilde's world is as absurd as the Garden party. Back with Sophie and Alberto, they run into the Major's cabin and disappear through a trapdoor. In Hilde's world, she works out her plan to play jokes on her father and to escape from his authority, on a certain level. At least she wants to show her father how it feels to be constantly watched, provoked and ordered around. Hilde sends letters about her plan to Anne Kvamsdal in Copenhagen, Denmark. In addition to Anne and her husband, Hilde recruits most of her friends to help her. Hilde also works with her mother to prepare a celebration for Mid Summer Eve at Bjerkely, their house.

And what has happened to Sophie and Alberto? This time, their story is no longer, presumably, in Hilde's ring binder, since it is no longer being written by the Major. Sophie and Alberto have appeared somewhere in Oslo, the capital of Norway. They see people, but the people can not see or hear them. Sophie and Alberto are out of the Major's grasp and out of normal time and space as well, the reader is told. They have escaped and will never grow any older. Alberto convinces Sophie that they have to find out what happens to the Major, Hilde's dad, and Hilde, back at their home, Bjerkely, in Lillesand. They find a car that, like them, is from a storybook. No one, but the storybook people "the invisible people" can see them, as they head toward the Major's house.

Back in reality, the Major arrives at Kastrup Airport, in Copenhagen. He hears a message from the loudspeaker, and when he goes to the information desk, receives an envelope from Hilde. Hilde claims in the letter that she has been sued for the Mercedes that is damaged in the last chapter of the Major's book. At the Danish food deli, the Major finds another envelope with a letter inside. It tells him what food to buy, and it is also from Hilde. The Major gets several other envelopes, which manipulate him and give instructions.

Meanwhile, Sophie and Alberto are driving to the Major's house. They stop at the Cinderella Café to get a cup of coffee, but at the café, no one can see them, and Alberto cannot make the coffee dispenser work. Then, as they are about to leave, after screaming with no response, an old woman says hello. She takes them to the storybook character's camp, where the invisible people are. The elves, dwarves and other creatures are celebrating Mid Summer Eve.

Back with the Major, he reads the last letter in his plane seat on his flight to Norway. Hilde writes that she is the Queen of the Magic Mirror. At the airport in Kjevik, Norway there is a small demonstration with signs such as "Irony Lives." A young man there offers to drive the Major home to Bjerkely. The Major sees signs held above the highway such as "I can see you, Dad!" The Major arrives home, tips the driver, hugs his wife and then looks for Hilde.



Alberto and Sophie arrive in Lillesand and find the Major's house, Bjerkely. Sophie gets out of the car and sees Hilde in the backyard by the lake, but Sophie cannot be seen. Hilde's father greets Hilde. The Major and Hilde talk about the story in the ring binder, Sophie's world. Sophie, at the same time, is unable to contact Hilde because Sophie is invisible. Alberto tells Sophie that he and she will never have a real life, but also will never die.

Chapter 34, Counterpoint Analysis

The story continues, but Alberto and Sophie escape from the Major. That presumes that someone else, presumably the author is now writing the story. Mr. Gaarder is writing the story that wrote about the Major writing about Sophie. This is a tricky technique because additionally, there is the philosophy course within the story about Sophie. Therefore, the book functions on three levels.

The Major is treated like he treated Sophie and Alberto in the story when he gets to the airport in Copenhagen. He really feels like somehow his daughter has acquired magical powers to follow his movements. When the Major is greeted by a demonstration of Hilde's friends, it is a scene similar to what happened to Sophie and her mother when they come home to prepare for the Garden Party. There is a bit of question as to what will happen at the Major's house. Will something crazy happen as it did on Midsummer Eve in Sophie's world? Actually, something dramatic does happen, but it is of a much more philosophical nature.



Chapter 35, the Big Bang

Chapter 35, the Big Bang Summary

Hilde relaxes with her father, the Major, as they sit by the bay. They discuss whether there is other life on other planets in the universe. The Major speaks of the structure of universe and the galaxy. Since light takes time to travel, Man sees galaxies as they appeared millions of years ago. Galaxies are actually moving away from each other, says the Major. A possible theory to explain why this is happening is "the Big Bang." Some astronomers think that eventually the force of this first explosion will die out and the universe will gradually come back together. The Major recalls Sophie wondering where did the universe come from? Was it from the act of creation of God?

Meanwhile, Sophie and Alberto are sitting in the car, overhearing the Major lecturing to Hilde on the universe, much as Alberto used to lecture Sophie on philosophy. Alberto comments that now Sophie and Alberto can see Hilde and the Major, but before it was the opposite situation. The Major was writing about them, but they couldn't see him. Sophie thinks about the Major and the Big Bang theory. She gets a wrench out of the car and bangs Hilde on the head with it. Hilde has a slight reaction, as if she is bitten by a bug. The Major goes on, about how all life and objects in the universe are from one source. If life comes from the Big Bang, what is the source of the Big Bang?

Sophie, at this point, though invisible and nearly powerless in the real world, tries to untie the rowboat. She wants to somehow make her presence felt. The Major talks about how he decided on the past New Year's Day to write a book about philosophy for Hilde. Suddenly, the Major and Hilde see the rowboat become loose and drift off into the water. The Major and Hilde feel the presence of Sophie and Alberto, though it seems impossible. They are able to deny it rationally, though still suspect it subjectively.

Chapter 35, the Big Bang Analysis

Major Albert Knag is now lecturing his daughter on philosophy. He talks about the Big Bang theory of the origin of the universe. In this the Major definitely agrees with Spinoza, that all substance is one. The Major is not upset with Hilde for playing jokes on him. This Midsummer Eve party ends peacefully, though it is still filled with enigmas. The Major and Hilde wonder if the universe will keep expanding forever or will it one day, billions of years from now, collapse again into one point. This is a philosophical exercise because there is no firm proof that the Big Bang is actually how the universe begins. Meanwhile, Sophie is frustrated that she cannot get a reaction from Hilde and the Major. Since Sophie is closely tied to Hilde as to be her double in a way, as a philosophy student, Sophie is more able to affect Hilde, though Sophie still has to hit Hilde over the head to get even a slight effect. Finally, both Hilde and the Major feel the presence of Alberto and Sophie, when they have to go for a swim to get the boat back.



Characters

Sophie Amundsen

Sophie is a 14-year old girl, who lives in a small suburban town in Norway, perhaps near Oslo, the capital. She begins to receive white envelopes that ask her philosophical questions, such as "who are you?" and others about what is the meaning of life, and what happens after people die. Sophie also begins to get postcards addressed to Hilde Moller Knag, a girl who soon will turn 15, like Sophie. The postcards are from her father, Major Knag, who is a Norwegian UN soldier. Sophie is an inquisitive girl and continues with the philosophy course. She also wonders who is behind it. Sophie follows the trail of Alberto's dog, Hermes, who has been delivering the packages and comes to a cabin by a lake. There Sophie finds more postcards to Hilde Moller Knag and a mirror, where for a moment she sees someone else's reflection. Sophie studies the ancient Greek philosophers through the Middle Ages, before she finally meets the philosophy teacher, Alberto Knox. Sophie is a good student and a serious young girl, though she also has a playful side, usually with her friend, Joanna. Sophie uses the things she learns in the philosophy course to get "A's" in some of her courses, such as religious studies.

At a certain point Sophie and Alberto realize that they are characters in a philosophy course for the benefit of Hilde, and are part of a book written by Hilde's father, Major Knag. Sophie is upset and wants to quit, but she is assured by Alberto that they should finish the course. Then they can escape from the Major's grasp. After Sophie escapes from the story, she and Alberto go to Hilde's house, Berkeley. There Sophie seems to be able to create physical effects to some extent in the real world, though now she is one of the "invisible people."

Alberto Knox

Alberto Knox is Sophie's philosophy teacher. He begins dropping off envelopes with philosophical questions in her mailbox. At first, he refuses to meet or speak to Sophie, despite her offer for him to come over for coffee. Sophie first sees him narrating a videotape in Athens about Plato and Socrates. Alberto is living in the Major's cabin in the woods, until Sophie finds the cabin and an envelope from Alberto. Sophie first sees Alberto dressed as a monk at St. Mary's Church, where he delivers a lecture on the philosophy of the Middle Ages. Alberto gives the next lecture to Sophie in his attic apartment downtown in the Old Town. He is dressed in a Renaissance-period costume. Later, for the lecture on the Baroque period, Alberto appears dressed in a more elaborate Baroque outfit.

When Sophie's mother sees the video of Alberto in Athens, she comments that Alberto looks like the Major who used to live in the cabin in the woods. While Sophie is similar to Hilde, Alberto is also very similar to Hilde's father, Major Albert Knag. Indeed, his relationship to Sophie is strictly as a teacher and a father figure, despite various dress-



up and other theatrical games. Alberto assures Sophie that she should use her study of philosophy to understand how she and Alberto can act between the lines of the story, despite their near total control by the writer, the Major. Particularly, the philosophy of Berkeley, as described by Alberto, allows for a reality to be created solely by the sensual perception of the person who is receiving those perceptions. That is how Alberto understands that he is a character written in a book by Major Knag, who in turn is a character in a book.

Hilde Moller Knag

Hilde is the daughter of Major Albert Knag. The reader first hears about her because she is the addressee of all the postcards from the Major. She finally appears in the book, when it is revealed that Sophie and Alberto are really storybook characters in a book written by the Major for Hilde. Hilde is angry with some of the more outrageous tricks her father, the Major, plays with Alberto and Sophie in the book. Hilde decides to play various tricks on the Major as he passes through airports in Denmark and Norway on his way home. In the final chapter of the book, Hilde has a dialogue with her father on the origin of the universe.

Major Albert Knag, the Major, Hilde's Dad-

Major Albert Knag is a Norwegian UN soldier in the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Lebanon. He is the writer of a book on philosophy that he has written for his daughter Hilde. Sophie and Hilde know of him first as the writer of postcards to Hilde. Later, Alberto and Sophie realize that they are characters in a book written by the Major for his daughter

Sophie's mother, Mrs. Helene Amundsen

Sophie's mother, Mrs. Amundsen is married, but usually her husband is at sea. She worries about Sophie and the philosophy course but also is interested that Sophie gets a good education.

Joanna Ingebrigtsen

Joanna is Sophie's best friend. They walk home from school together and play games. Joanna helps Sophie organize the Mid Summer Eve party, at which Joanna suddenly is attracted to a boy, Jeremy and acts on this impulse.

Mr. Ingebrigtsen

Mr. Ingebrigtsen is a well-to-do banker and the father of Joanna. He owns a Mercedes, which crashes during the Philosophical Garden Party.



Mrs. Ingebrigtsen

Mrs. Ingebrigtsen is Joanna's mother. Sophie says she acts and dresses like a Barbie doll.

Sophie's father, Mr. Amundsen

Sophie's father does not appear in the book, except that he writes a letter to Sophie. He is said to be away at sea.

Jeremy

Jeremy is a boy that Joanna likes. At the Midsummer Eve, she suddenly comes up to him and kisses him.

Philosophers

The philosophers discussed in the book include Thales, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard, Berkeley, Marx, Darwin, Freud, Sartre and others.

Various Cartoon and Storybook Characters

Various cartoon and story book characters appear, as they are deployed by the Major to play with and harass Sophie and Alberto. They include Alice in Wonderland, Donald Duck, The Emperor with No Clothes, the Little Match Girl, Ebenezer Scrooge and others. Some of these also join Sophie and Alberto at the end of the book, when they join the invisible people.



Objects/Places

3 Clover Close

3 Clover Close is Sophie's home address. It is a house by the edge of the woods.

The Den

The den is a hole in the hedgerow in Sophie's backyard, where she goes to be alone.

Sophie's room

Sophie's room is where Sophie does much of her reading and where she hangs the antique mirror.

The Major's Cabin

The Major's cabin is by a lake in the woods behind Sophie's house. The philosopher stays there at first, and later some of the lectures take place there.

The White Rabbit

The white rabbit is a metaphor from when a magician pulls a rabbit from nowhere out of a hat. It is also used as a metaphor for the universe, where philosophers stay on the outer rabbit hairs and try to see what is going on. The White Rabbit is also a literary reference from the book "Alice in Wonderland."

Hermes, the dog

Hermes is Alberto's dog. Hermes delivers letters to Sophie, leads Sophie to the philosopher and at one point even talks.

The Antique Mirror

The antique mirror is found in the cabin. Sophie sees Hilde behind Sophie's own reflection in the mirror.

Hilde's Golden Crucifix

Sophie finds Hilde's crucifix in the story. In turn, Hilde loses the crucifix in her world.



The Norwegian UN Mission in Lebanon

Major Albert Knag is stationed with Norwegian troops in a peacekeeping force in Lebanon, in the Middle East.

New Square, the Old Town

This is the center of Sophie's town, where Alberto has an attic apartment.

The Red Boathouse

The red boathouse is by a bay at the Major's and Hilde's house, Bjerkely.

Bjerkely

Bjerkely is the Major's and Hilde's house by a bay in Lillesand, Norway.

Lillesand

Lillesand is a town where Hilde lives, located several hundred miles away from where Sophie lives.

Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen is the capital of Denmark and the location of Kastrup airport, which the Major passes through on his way home.

Kjevik, Norway

Kjevik is the airport where the Major lands in Norway.

The Hedge

The hedge surrounds Sophie's house. Inside the hedge is located the den.

St. Mary's Church

St. Mary's Church is a Medieval church in the Old Town.

Alberto's attic apartment

Alberto's attic apartment is on the top floor of a building in the Old Town. It is filled with historical furniture and pieces.



Themes

Coming of Age

Sophie in the beginning of the book is just a normal school girl. When she is introduced to philosophy, she quickly changes. Sophie realizes that she doesn't know who she is or why she does things. By learning philosophy, Sophie begins to learn why people do things and different theories of how the world and the universe work. Each philosopher has a different theme and project that he studies. At the same time, Sophie begins to realize that she and her teacher Alberto don't have a real-world existence. They exist as part of a book by the Major, to help his daughter become interested in Philosophy. The Major finds out that there are no books available to interest young people in Philosophy, so he decides to write one. The reader then sees Hilde reading the book about Sophie and Alberto. Hilde closely identifies with Sophie, who is of the same age as Hilde. Hilde does become interested in Philosophy by reading the book, but at the same time, Hilde realizes she is being treated like a little girl by her father, the Major. Just as Sophie and Alberto are manipulated, Hilde realizes that she is being treated in a too authoritative way by her father. Hilde plays practical jokes on her father on his way home, asserting herself as an adult.

Learning Something New

Sophie, and later Hilde, through reading about Sophie, learns about philosophy and the history of philosophy. At first Sophie finds this somewhat disturbing, but she quickly becomes excited about learning to think in a philosophical manner. However, quickly going through the different philosophers and their project causes the reader to realize that just because a philosopher is interesting and creative, doesn't mean that he is right about everything. In fact, many of the philosophers contradict each other. The exciting thing for Sophie, and through her, both Hilde and the reader, is to go through the historical experience of learning something and exposure to new ideas. This way, the reader sees how old ideas are superseded and/or developed later by other people. In fact, ancient ideas can be just as attractive to young people as newer ideas, and indeed, may be more correct than some newer ideas. The turning point in the book is when philosophical ideas become for Sophie and Alberto a practical way to understand their situation and what to do about it. Alberto and Sophie particularly study the philosophy of Berkeley in order to understand their situation—that of being characters that exist because they perceive and are perceived, even though they are part of a story. Alberto and Sophie then also understand that what they should do is escape from the Major's book.



Pride

The Major seems to be a very clever man and one with strong opinions. He is very proud of being a Norwegian Major and serving with the Norwegian forces in the U.N. Peacekeeping forces in Lebanon. The Major sees himself as part of a vanguard that is putting in place a world government through the United Nations that will benefit humankind. Yet, at the same time, the reader sees he is an authoritative man full of pride, who is used to ordering people around. The way he pushes Sophie and Alberto around in the story is a metaphor of how full of pride he is in his authority in real life.

For most of the book, until the end, the Major is an unseen character. The only way the reader knows about him is through his postcards and other flashing messages to Hilde, Sophie and others. Later, the reader hears him on telephone calls to Hilde from Lebanon and Hilde's thoughts about him. Finally the reader sees the Major as he is coming home through airports to his house, Bjerkely. When Hilde arranges to play a practical joke on him, he gets extremely upset and paranoid. The Major cannot believe that someone, much less his daughter, can manipulate him like this. He is very destabilized even after he knows who is responsible, but he seems to take this in a philosophical manner.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of the book is third person. There is a narrator who knows the thoughts of Sophie. In the beginning of the book, until the chapter "Bjerkely," we are told the story through Sophie's eyes and her inner thoughts. After Hilde is introduced in the chapter "Bjerkely," the story alternates point of view between Hilde and Sophie, as Hilde reads the book about Sophie and philosophy. As the Major finally comes home from Lebanon, the point of view in that section is from the Major's point of view.

The last chapters are complicated with the point of view shifting rapidly from Sophie and Alberto after their escape, when they have joined the invisible people, and Hilde and her father. Finally, the last chapter, "The Big Bang," is written in mimicry of a Platonic dialogue, which is between Hilde and her father, Major Knag, with Sophie and Alberto as unseen observers, who say and do things unseen by the others.

The point of view of the book is complicated in that it presents a book within a book. Long passages are philosophy lectures by Alberto. They seem to be taken in large sections from an actual history of philosophy textbook. However, they are also part of the story of Sophie's education in philosophy, and her reaction to the strange events around her. The shift in point of view is in the chapter "Berkeley" to the chapter "Bjerkely." First the stage is set for the transition, and then there is a transition to the point of view of Hilde. It is made known to the reader that Hilde is reading a book about Sophie and Alberto's adventure in philosophy. In turn, the story of Hilde is part of a book about her relationship with her father, and her father's desire to educate her.

Setting

The setting is a suburban town in Norway, probably on the outskirts of the capital, Oslo. Sophie's home, at 3 Clover Close is at the edge of a woods. This gives the author a chance to describe an interesting country area and various animals, while still including a nearby town. Sophie's backyard has rabbits, and nearby there are grouse on a hill and a cabin by a lake. The first indication that the book will have varied settings is when Sophie watches the videotape from Athens, Greece, at the Acropolis. The modern ruins are first seen, but then the film goes to a reconstructed depiction of a restored Acropolis, complete with the philosopher Plato.

Much of the other action of the book occurs at Sophie's school and in the center of town. Alberto's apartment is in the Old Town after he moves out of the Major's cabin. Later, other philosophy classes take place in the cabin, which is from where Alberto and Sophie escape. Sophie first meets Alberto at St. Mary's Church in town. This is a fairly large town that has bus service. Other chapters include magical views of storybook



characters, television news flashes from Lebanon, downtown Oslo, a drive to Lillesand and the Major's house, Bjerkely.

Language and Meaning

The reader gets the feeling of the ordinary speech of teenage girls, and a father speaking to a daughter, interspersed with the language of a philosophy textbook. The language is fairly clear and conversational, except in the use of certain philosophical terms in the philosophy course sections of the book. It can become difficult in explaining complex philosophical concepts. The most difficult and interesting aspect of the book is understanding the applications of certain of the philosophical concepts taught in the textbook sections, to the experience of Alberto and Sophie. In this sense, the meaning of the philosophy of George Berkeley, Kierkegaard and other existentialist philosophers described is key for understanding how Alberto and Sophie act. Only from the standpoint of a philosophy based totally on the validity of the perception by the perceiver could characters be taken seriously that go around saying they are explicitly fictional. The author draws the reader into taking characters seriously, who state that they do not exist, quite an amazing literary accomplishment.

Structure

The book is grouped into 35 chapters. The book begins with the day-to-day life of Sophie going to school, going home and so on. Once Sophie begins to get the philosophy course, there are long sections that are almost purely a history of philosophy textbook. These textbook sections become more often interspersed by events experienced by Sophie and Alberto as various odd things happen to them. This exposure of Sophie and Alberto's reality reaches a climax in the Chapter "Berkeley." After the chapter "Bjerkely," Hilde is introduced as a real person. The rest of the book is composed of short sections about Hilde, which break up long sections of the remaining philosophy lessons. In the chapter "The Garden Party," there is a wild break from the philosophy course. In "Counterpoint," the reader meets the major going through the airport and sees what Hilde does to him. In the final chapter "The Big Bang" the four main characters are brought together, though two of them cannot see the other two.



Quotes

"You can't experience being alive without realizing that you have to die, she thought. But it's just as impossible to realize you have to die without thinking how incredibly amazing it is to be alive."

Chapter 1, "The Garden of Eden," p. 7

"The only thing that we require to be good philosophers is the faculty of wonder."

Chapter 2, "The Top Hat," p. 17

"When Sophie got upstairs to her room, she found three new questions: Is there a basic substance that everything is made of? Can water turn into wine? How can earth and water produce a frog?"

Chapter 4, "The Natural Philosophers," p. 31

"The idea of free will made Sophie think of something else. Why should she put up with this mysterious philosopher playing cat and mouse with her? Why couldn't she write a letter to him?"

Chapter 6, "Fate," p. 50

"Socrates was this joker in Athens. He was neither certain nor indifferent. All he knew was that he knew nothing—and it troubled him. So he became a philosopher—someone who does not give up but tirelessly pursues his quest for the truth."

Chapter 7, "Socrates," p. 70.

"Plato now imagines a state built up exactly like the tripartite human body. Where the body has head, chest, and abdomen, the State has rulers, auxiliaries and laborers (farmers, for example)."

Chapter 9, "Plato," p. 91.

"Aristotle pointed out that nothing exists in consciousness that has not first been experienced by the senses. Plato would have said that there is nothing in the natural world that has not first existed in the world of ideas."

Chapter 11, "Aristotle," p. 107.

"So here was the situation: a great many people at the time of Jesus were waiting for a Messiah who would reestablish the Kingdom of God...The expression 'Kingdom of God' was indeed a recurring theme in the preaching of Jesus—but in a much broader sense. Jesus said that the 'Kingdom of God' is loving thy neighbor, compassion for the weak



and the poor, and forgiveness of those who have erred."
Chapter 14, "Two Cultures," p. 156.

"We can recognize that there is a God just by walking around in the natural world. We can easily see that He loves flowers and animals, otherwise He would not have made them. But information about God, the person, is only found in the Bible—or in God's 'autobiography,' if you like."
Chapter 15, "The Middle Ages," p. 180.

"One of the central figures of the Renaissance was Marsilio Ficino, who exclaimed: 'Know thyself, O divine lineage in mortal guise!'"
Chapter 16, "The Renaissance," p. 196

"'When I consider this carefully, I find not a single property which with certainty separates the waking state from the dream,' writes Descartes. And he goes on: 'How can you be certain that your whole life is not a dream?'"
Chapter 18, "Descartes," p. 235.

"God controls the world through natural laws. So God—or nature—is the 'inner cause' of everything that happens. This means that everything in the material world happens through necessity. Spinoza had a determinist view of the material, or natural, world."
Chapter 19, "Spinoza," p. 249.

"An agnostic is someone who holds that the existence of God or a god can neither be proved nor disproved. When Hume was dying a friend asked him if he believed in life after death. He is said to have answered: 'It is also possible that a knob of coal placed upon the fire will not burn.'"
Chapter 21, "Hume," p. 270.

"According to Berkeley, my own soul can be the cause of my own ideas—just as when I dream—but only another will or spirit can be the cause of the ideas that make up the 'corporeal' world. ...God is far more clearly perceived than the existence of man"
Chapter 22, "Berkeley," p. 280.

"Berkeley was a philosopher who denied the existence of a material world beyond the human mind. That was certainly very strange, one had to admit. But it was not easy to disprove such claims, either. As regards Sophie, it fitted very well. After all, Hilde's father was responsible for her 'sense perceptions."
Chapter 23, "Berkeley," p. 292.



"Kant also formulates the 'categorical imperative' in this way: Act in such a way that you always treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never simply as a means, but always at the same time as an end."
Chapter 25, "Kant," p. 331.

"The fairy tale was the absolute literary ideal of the Romantics—in the same way that the absolute art form of the Baroque period was the theater. It gave the poet full scope to explore his own creativity."
Chapter 26, "Romanticism," p. 349.

"But others make a new leap to the religious stage. They take the 'jump into the abyss' of Faith's 'seventy thousand fathoms.' They choose faith in preference to aesthetic pleasure and reason's call of duty."
Chapter 28, "Kierkegaard," p. 380.

"The key words from the middle of the last century were nature, environment, history, evolution, and growth. Marx had pointed out that human ideologies were a product of the basis of society. Darwin showed that mankind was the result of a slow biological evolution, and Freud's studies of the unconscious revealed that people's actions were often the result of 'animal' urges or instincts."
Chapter 30, "Darwin," p. 401.

"According to Freud, the royal road to the unconscious is our dreams. His main work was written on this subject—The Interpretation of Dreams, published in 1900, in which he showed that our dreams are not random. Our unconscious tries to communicate with our conscious through dreams."
Chapter 31, "Freud," p. 433.

"Suddenly Joanna got up, walked determinedly over to Jeremy, and gave him a resounding kiss on the lips. He responded by trying to topple her backward over the table so as to get a better grip as he returned her kiss."
Chapter 33, "The Garden Party," p. 471.

"There were Snow White and some of the seven dwarfs, Mary Poppins and Sherlock Holmes, Peter Pan and Pippi Longstocking, Little Red Ridinghood and Cinderella. A lot of familiar figures without names had also gathered around the bonfire—there were gnomes and elves, fauns and witches, angels and imps. Sophie also caught sight of a real live troll."
Chapter 34, "Counterpoint," p. 490.



"You and I also began with the Big Bang, because all substance in the universe is an organic unity. Once in a primeval age all matter was gathered in a clump so enormously massive that a pinhead weighed many billions of tons. This 'primeval atom' exploded because of the enormous gravitation."
Chapter 35, "The Big Bang," p. 505-6.

Topics for Discussion

Discuss identity. Sophie and Hilde are both similar young girls with the same birthday. At the end, when Sophie sees Hilde, Sophie notes that Hilde is prettier than she. Likewise Alberto, the philosophy teacher and Major Knag have similarities. What differences, if any, do you see in these pairs of people. What effect does this have on the book's dealing with two parallel universes?

Compare Alberto and Major Knag. Is Major Knag as good a philosophy teacher in the last chapter as Alberto has been to Sophie? Does Alberto seem like a direct projection of Major Knag into the story, or is Alberto an ideal philosophy teacher created in the mind of Major Knag?

Sophie feels she is learning much more in her private philosophy course than she does at school. What is distinct about the philosophy course from ordinary school learning? Could the usual school learning be improved by adopting philosophic principles?

A theme of the book is that there are practical uses for philosophical learning. In fact, Sophie and Alberto are able to escape from Hilde's father story by relying on philosophical principles, especially the philosophy of Berkeley. What do you think of the philosophy of Berkeley, that there exists no material world beyond the human mind? Is this philosophy absurd or could it have practical uses?

There is a thorough discussion of the cultural philosophy of Sigmund Freud. In it Freud points out that most people suppress their desires in favor of what society expects from them, creating the super-ego, but this suppression is not always successful. What happens at the Mid Summer Eve party? Is this a warning to Hilde from her father, the writer, of what can happen if people, under modern existentialist philosophy just "let themselves go?" What is this scene's meaning?

Discuss the language of the book. In part, the book is a description of the life of a teenage girl who takes a course and then is plunged into a mystery. Large sections of the book are monologues by Alberto to Sophie on the history of Philosophy. Do these two sections of the book, which alternate, mesh together well? Do the scenes from Sophie's life and later Hilde's life help make the philosophy lessons more interesting?

Discuss the point of view. There is a narrator who tells the story from first Sophie's point of view and later from Hilde's point of view. In between the parts from Sophie and Hilde's point of view are Alberto's long philosophical lessons. For part of one chapter, the story is told from Major Knag's point of view. Is the tone of the story believable from the standpoint of a 14-year old going on 15-year old girl?

Discuss pride. Although the reader only meets Major Knag at the end of the story, he is a presence in the entire book. His messages first appear in postcards as greetings to



Hilde, while later he goes as far as having Aladdin bring in a genie with his features to Sophie and Alberto. Hilde becomes upset with the way the Major lords over his characters and torments them. Hilde finds the Major too authoritarian and bossy with her as well. Is the Major's pride deflated by the tricks that Hilde plays on him on the way home? Does the Major's intellectual pride help keep the story moving or is it a distraction?

The book *Sophie's World* describes philosophy over a 3,000 year time frame from the ancient peoples, to Plato and Aristotle up to our own time. Is there any period of philosophy that the reader prefers? Is modern and more recent philosophy necessarily an advancement over older philosophy?

The philosophy course discusses contrasting philosophies? Can one choose between the more theoretical philosophy of Plato versus the more materialist philosophy of Aristotle? Which is a better philosophy? Are they complementary or opposing?

Are there large differences between the philosophy of Renaissance figures such as Marsilio Ficino and the modern existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre? Compare the oneness of philosophy of Spinoza against the individualism of Kierkegaard. Can one find other philosophical examples to contrast?