

The Trumpet of the Swan Study Guide

The Trumpet of the Swan by E. B. White

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Plot Summary

The Special Edition of *The Trumpet of the Swan* by E.B. White, illustrated by Fred Marcellino, is a delightful story with charming illustrations. While it is essentially a children's book, it can be read by all ages. There are moral lessons to be learned all through the book. The main character in the book is the swan, Louis. Louis was born without a voice. A swan needs a voice in order to find his mate. Swans mate for a lifetime, so it is important to be able to court a lady swan by trumpeting to her. White calls the swan defective. Today we would say disabled. Louis overcomes his disability and wins his lady before the story ends.

White gives the reader a hero with a flaw. Our hero, Louis, does not sit around and whine. He does not give up. He attempts to find a way to overcome his problem. He spends over a year learning to read and write. Reading and writing does not work because the other swans cannot read. His father moves into the act at this point and breaks into a music store to steal a trumpet. Louis has a hard time discovering how to make a sound with the trumpet. Finally he finds a way, and he begins to practice. Once he can play a little, Louis goes to visit Sam Beaver. Sam convinced the teacher to allow a swan into the school so he could learn to read. He decided that Sam might know how to get a job. Sam gives him the idea of playing for a camp. Sam is going to Camp Kookooskoos. Sam gets Louis a music book of bugle calls, and Louis learns the different calls. The Camp agrees to hire him. He plays the bugle at the camp. Louis saves a boy who falls out of a canoe.

At the end of camp, Sam tells Louis about the Swan Boat in Boston Public Gardens. Louis goes to Boston. He is hired to swim before the boat and play his trumpet. He does this for the season. As the season ends, Louis gets a telegram asking him to come to Philadelphia and play in a night club. He will get five hundred dollars a week for ten weeks. Louis goes to the Philadelphia Zoo to live and goes to the night club to work. He plays concerts on Sunday at the Zoo. The concert is part of a deal made with the Zoo so the Zoo will not clip his wing and make him unable to fly.

He is almost finished with his night club engagement when there is a terribly bad storm and Serena is blown to Philadelphia. She comes down in the Zoo's lake. Louis is wise enough to let her rest and get herself together before he approaches her. He decides to awaken her by playing "Beautiful Dreamer" to her. He plays it and she wakes up to really see him. They began to flirt in a swan way. They swim around each other and then duck heads to one side and then the other of the opposite swan. Louis picks up his horn and plays the song he had written for her. Serena is in love. Finally his lady is in love with him.

Unfortunately, the Zoo wants to clip her wing. Louis convinces the Head Man not to clip her wings until Louis can get a friend to talk for him. He telegraphs Sam and Sam comes. Sam sees the Zoo and knows what he wants to do with his life. Sam makes a deal with the Zoo that Louis and Serena will stay free but Louis will bring any little cygnet that needs special care to the zoo.



Serena and Louis go back to Red Rock Lakes and find their families. Louis gives the money to his father so his father can pay the music storekeeper for his trumpet and any damage. Father swan goes back to Billings. Unfortunately, the storekeeper sees the swan coming and gets his gun. He only nicks the father swan, but when the swan sees his own blood, he faints. They hospitalize the swan but he is able to fly out the window at the hospital. The music storekeeper decides to donate any remaining money after he pays for the horn and the repairs to the Audubon Society. The father swan gets back home and is able to brag about his dangerous adventure.

The last chapter is mainly happily ever after. Serena and Louis go back to his birthplace pond every year. Louis takes his family on a trip around the country to all the places he worked each summer. The swans settle down in Red Rock Lakes for the winter, and they have many years together. Sam gets his job at the Philadelphia Zoo and everyone is happy.



Chapter One — Sam, Chapter Two — The Pond

Chapter One — Sam, Chapter Two — The Pond Summary

The Trumpet of the Swan is the story of the journey from birth to maturity. Louis is our hero and a trumpeter swan. Unfortunately, Louis is born with a disability. He has no voice. Louis must overcome his disability and develop that disability into an asset. There are many lessons in the book, The Trumpet of the Swan. While it is written for children, its lessons apply universally to all ages. The story by E.B. White is charming and the illustrations by Fred Marcellino are delightful.

In chapter one, the reader meets Sam. Sam is eleven and looks as if he has Native American blood. He has dark eyes and dark hair. He walks in the woods like a Native American, and he enjoys being alone with nature. Sam loves the animals and learns as much about them as he can. In the beginning, Sam and his father, Mr. Beaver, are camping in Canada. They live in Montana. Sam goes exploring by himself to a pond. Sam is very prepared to be by himself in the woods. He carries a compass and knows how to use it. Sam discovers a trumpeter swan's nest. Finding a nest in the wild is very unusual. Sam likes to notice things and then keep them to himself. Other than asking his father to return for another camping trip in thirty-five days, he does not hint he found the swan's nest. Sam is curious about nature, and he is also curious about himself. Sam thinks about what he wants to be when he grows up. Sam also has the habit of keeping a journal. Every night before bed, Sam writes in his journal and ends the piece with a question to think about as he goes to sleep.

In chapter two, The Pond, there is a description of the sleeping animals who awaken with the earth as spring comes. The two swans fly over the pond, circle it, and land. The swans are a beautiful sight. They are very big, white birds with black feet and bills. They are tired as they first arrive and are glad to swim around and feed. They duck their heads under the water for weeds and grass. They drink a lot of water. Eventually they agree to build a nest. The female swan selects the spot and begins by turning around and patting down the ground around her. She will add sticks and grass. The male swan will help gather the material. When the nest is finished it will measure six feet across. It is the biggest bird nest that is on the ground.

While choosing the spot, the swans took in the safety of the final spot. They were on a small peninsula that would give the swans a chance to see any enemy coming toward them from the land. The male swan, the cob, could protect the nest. The wings of the trumpeter swan are so big and so strong that being hit by one would be like being hit by a baseball bat.



Chapter One — Sam, Chapter Two — The Pond Analysis

In chapter one, the reader learns that Sam is a good boy. He is obedient to his parent and has a good relationship with him. By explaining Sam's use of the compass, the author has made sure that a child reading this story would not think he should simply go into the woods with no preparation. Sam is respectful of all nature. He observes the animals without interrupting them or scaring them. Sam is no bully.

Sam's journal keeping is a particularly good ploy to illustrate one little boy's thinking about his future as well as life around him. Not only does Sam question why foxes bark, the reader thinks about it too. The question gives a nudge to the imagination. Imagination makes the reader smarter.

In chapter two, The Pond, White brings the pond alive as he paints the picture with words of all the animals that awaken. To discuss the chickadee's delight in almost anything brings a smile to the reader. White names the animals and the baby animals' names. He talks about the male animals and their names. He does tell us that cob for the swan is the only one the reader needs to remember. After he awakens all the animals, he brings the swans onto the pond.

The swans interact as if they are two humans. They talk to each other. The mother swan is patient with her mate. She is a bit amused by him but does not hurt his feelings by telling him to quit being a showoff. The cob is a showoff. White uses the adverb majestically to describe the cob's characteristics. White will chose like adverbs throughout the book. The cob considers himself king of the birds. He only agrees with his mate that eagles might come close. The swans obviously mate for life and the two swans take care of their young. It starts with cooperation to build the nest and continues through life.



Chapter Three — A Visitor, Chapter Four — The Cygnets

Chapter Three — A Visitor, Chapter Four — The Cygnets Summary

In chapter three, A Visitor, the swans are in the midst of laying their eggs. The cob swims around the nest and the female lays one egg a day into the nest. She keeps the eggs warm and seldom leaves the nest. After the fourth egg is laid, one warm day she leaves the nest. Unfortunately, a fox has heard splashing at the pond and has decided to have a nice bird dinner. The swan has her back to the fox as he slithers through the grass toward her. The cob sees him but is too far away to hit him before the fox attacks his wife. Suddenly a stick comes from nowhere and hits the fox on the nose. The fox runs and the swan is saved. The swans turn and see the boy. He has saved them from the fox. He says "Hello" and the swans trumpet back to him. The male comes very close to Sam. Sam goes back to camp and this time writes about seeing the eggs and thinking about eggs. Eggs are a miracle. They become a different kind of life.

In chapter four, The Cygnets, all five of the eggs hatched and all the babies are ready to swim. They are gray with mustard-colored feet and bills. Father swan decides it is time for a speech. He is proud of his family and wants to show them off. The boy has been visiting daily. He sits on a log and quietly watches. The day Sam brings the field glasses, the father swan is very impressed. He likes anything that makes him look bigger. He only hopes it makes him more graceful too. On the first swim with the little cygnets, the father swan leads them over to Sam. The father gets out of the pond, and the cygnets follow him. The father swan speaks to Sam. Each little cygnet says, "Beep" until they get to the fifth cygnet. The fifth one opens his beak and nothing comes out. He tries more than once. Finally the fifth one steps up and pulls on Sam's shoelace. After the swans return to their mother to warm up again, Sam goes back to his camp. He and his father leave for Montana.

Chapter Three — A Visitor, Chapter Four — The Cygnets Analysis

In chapter three, A Visitor, White returns us to the home building and the laying of eggs. During the chapter, the reader is shown two visitors to the pond. The dangerous one, the fox, and the savior, Sam. This is a foreshadowing of a life. There will be dangers, and there will be times that one is saved. Everyone sometimes need someone to help us. The solitary swans and the solitary boy come together and Sam helps the swans. This is also a foreshadowing of Sam's life and his helping his baby buddy in later years.



In chapter four, The Cygnets, the babies are born. White paints the cob as a very vain bird. The cob makes speeches and puffs himself up in his own eyes. The cob tries to create and quote poetry as he swims around, "swanlike". His wife makes him think as she asks if he could swim around "mooselike". Since the father swan wants to show off his babies and Sam has become a friend, he takes the little ones to Sam. The reader has the first hint that something may be wrong with the fifth little cygnet's lack of voice. There is also a foreshadowing of what is to come. The little cygnet finds a way to communicate with Sam even though he cannot "beep".

Sam leaves the camp and when he gets home, he still writes in his journal. His question sets us up for what is to come. What will I be when I grow up? Sam does not know yet that he will see the swans again.



Chapter Five — Louis, Chapter Six — Off to Montana

Chapter Five — Louis, Chapter Six — Off to Montana Summary

In chapter five, Louis, the mother swan draws the father's attention to Louis's lack of voice. At first the father swan is very distressed that he would have a defective son. He wanted a perfect family. He did not want a problem in his family. After realizing that they had a couple of years before Louis has to have a voice in order to mate, he calms down. He does take Louis off on his own to talk to him. He asks Louis to make a beep or a burble. When Louis cannot make any noise, the cob tells him not to worry, that things will take care of itself. The cob tells Louis that he is dumb. The cob sees that Louis is upset and explains multiple meanings of words to him. Louis is very intelligent as well as athletic. He simply cannot speak. The father and son return to the others and Louis goes back to splashing his brothers and sisters.

In chapter six, Off to Montana, the father swan tells his little cygnets that must go to Montana for the winter. There are warm springs there that never freeze. The father gives the little ones three steps to flying. Louis is afraid that he will not be able to fly. With no voice, Louis will not be able to let them know if they leave him behind. While Louis is afraid that he will not be able to fly just as he cannot talk, he is determined to try to fly harder than anyone else. Louis is very strong and when he beats his wings and uses his feet as his father has said, he is the first cygnet in the air. Once up, he finds he is meant to fly just as swans are meant to swim. The swans fly over Sam's camp. Sam and his father are having a last campout and Mr. Beaver says he did not realize that swans migrated any longer.

Chapter Five — Louis, Chapter Six — Off to Montana Analysis

In chapter five, Louis, the father swan says the one thing that all people feel about their families and lives. Everyone wants things to be perfect and relatively easy. The first reaction to the problem is horror. "Why me?" or "This can't happen to me." After that initial response, the adult in everyone comes to the fore and the situation is handled. Here, the father swan takes Louis aside to be sure that Louis cannot speak. Once the problem is established, the father gives a name to it. While the father calls it "dumb" and explains the word, "dumb". Today the common term is "mute". There were several things in this book that had not been updated to match current politically correct ideas. For instance, White uses the term "Indian" instead of "Native American" as well as the word "dumb" for being unable to speak. The father does give Louis hope for the future.



He tells Louis about trumpets and promises him one. A foreshadowing of something to come. How does a swan get a trumpet?

In chapter six, Off to Montana, the father swan gives the little cygnets a view of life as he talks about change and the need to change. He wants them to understand that it is a part of life. As the father teaches flying, he tells the little ones to stick their necks out and look forward. This is good advice for everyone. White teaches one lesson after another as he writes his story.

Louis shows fear about flying. Until this point, the reader does not think that Louis knows he has a problem. Once he has learned that the voice is a true problem, he then questions the next thing that a swan has to do. What if he cannot fly? His brothers and sisters have some anxiety about it but they have not discovered that they can be defective yet. Louis is now aware. What other challenge will he have to face? What other challenge will beat him because he cannot yell for help?



Chapter Seven — School Days, Chapter Eight — Love

Chapter Seven — School Days, Chapter Eight — Love Summary

In chapter seven, School Days, Louis thinks about his communication problem and thinks of his own answer. He will learn to read and write. He will carry a slate and chalk and be able to talk to anyone who can read. He thinks about how to do that and decides to look for Sam. He takes off from the warm springs and looks for Sam. After looking at a number of schools and not discovering Sam, Louis finally finds Sam on a ranch. Louis pulls Sam's shoestring. Sam recognizes Louis and figures out that Louis cannot speak. With questions from Sam and head nods and shakes from Louis, they decide that Louis needs to go to school. Sam's dad gets in touch with the game warden and gets permission to keep Louis. At school, the teacher has a little problem with a swan in class. Sam and Louis convinces her to let him stay. Louis proves that he can take the chalk and copy whatever was on the board. The teacher starts with "a" and "cat" and moves to catastrophe. Sam is sent on to his fifth grade class. Louis remained in the first grade. Sam gets to class in time for arithmetic. Sam uses his imagination to make the story problem unsolvable.

In chapter eight, Love, the swans realize that Louis is no longer with them. Since no one saw Louis disappear, no one knows in which direction to go to find him. Life goes on for the swans. Finally Louis returns. He has his slate and chalk around his neck. Louis tries to say hello. No one can read the slate. Louis is unhappy that he has stayed away from his family for more than a year and it has done no good. A man who brings grain to the birds comes by to spread grain. Louis tries writing on his slate and the man can read the words. Louis knows he can talk to people. With a bit more time, love comes to Louis. He falls in love with a beautiful little swan but she pays no attention to him. The voice is always used in the courting rituals. Louis swims and dives and plays around her but she ignores him. Louis' mother notices and points it out to the father swan. The father decides it is time to find a trumpet and heads for Billings.

Chapter Seven — School Days, Chapter Eight — Love Analysis

In chapter seven, School Days, Louis takes responsibility for solving his own problem. He considers the means of achieving his goal and then he sets out to reach that goal. The first couple of places he searches for Sam, Louis does not find him. Louis does not give up. He keeps looking until he finds him. Because Sam had been around from the beginning, Sam is able to figure out the problem and help to solve it. Sam's imagination has no bounds. The idea that Sam would take a swan to school and then fight for the



swan's right to learn is amazing. His imagination continues to be shown when he goes to his own classroom and talks about the arithmetic problem in a new way of looking at things. Figures are not always cut and dried. During this chapter, White once again shows obedience to rules as Sam's father calls the game warden about keeping the swan. Sam appears again in the life of Louis. White does not allow us to forget about Sam.

In chapter eight, Love, Louis's mother shows her love and trust of Louis when she believes that Louis will do whatever he has to do and then return to them. His mother is proven right when Louis returns. Once back in the fold with all the other swans who winter at Red Rock, Louis falls in love. Louis does all the normal courting rituals in an attempt to get Serena's notice. Of course, Louis cannot speak. Serena does not seem to be aware that Louis cannot speak.

Mother and Father swan discuss Louis and his love and father decides to fix things.



Chapter Nine — The Trumpet, Chapter Ten — Money Trouble

Chapter Nine — The Trumpet, Chapter Ten — Money Trouble Summary

In chapter nine, The Trumpet, the father swan goes after a trumpet. He heads for Billings and flies around in the city until he finds a music store. Since trumpeter swans are such big birds and can fly at such speed, the father sails right through the big glass window in the front of the store. Of course a swan flying through the window causes all kinds of chaos. The sales people fall into the bass drum and the piano. The owner grabs his gun and shoots it at the ceiling. The swan grabs the trumpet and sails right back out the window. The swan is too far away by the time the owner gets outside with the gun and can take aim. The newspaper writes up the story of the trumpet-stealing swan. Some believes it and some do not. It is announced that the loss to the store is \$900. The father swan goes home and gives the trumpet to Louis. The father gives a speech as usual and explains to Louis that it was wrong for him to take the trumpet. He has lost his honor. However, his child, Louis, is the most important thing to him. He expects Louis to learn to play the trumpet well and have everything that having a voice gives a swan. Louis nods his head and wiggles his body, trying to express his thanks.

In chapter ten, Money Trouble. Louis is happy with the trumpet. On the first day he has it, Louis tries different positions to hold it and blow it. At first nothing works. Finally he gets one little pitiful sound. He is so encouraged with the one sound that he works harder and harder to learn to play the trumpet. Serena leaves with some friends and Louis feels broken-hearted. He is concerned about his father's stealing the horn. He wants to pay for the instrument. Louis thinks about Sam and goes to find him again. Sam explains that money trouble is not such a big thing. Everyone has money trouble. Sam suggests Louis play the bugle for the wilderness camp that Sam is attending. Sam purchases a book with different bugle calls and Louis learns how to play them. Louis likes the soft, gentle sound of "Taps" the best. Louis and Sam go to camp together. Louis is going to be paid.

Chapter Nine — The Trumpet, Chapter Ten — Money Trouble Analysis

In chapter nine, The Trumpet, the father is in a dilemma. The father swan takes his responsibility of filling the needs of his family very seriously. However, this father is an honorable, honest man who would not usually steal from another. He does not know how to get what he needs from a human being. He has an idea that he needs money but he does not know how to get it. He cannot talk with a human so he cannot have made a deal. The father knows that Louis needs a trumpet and he takes it. Looking at



this chapter, the reader can see the need. Yet, how does a bird communicate with a human? Where does a bird get money? The father does not excuse himself but it is obvious that he would do it again if Louis needed it.

In chapter ten, Money Trouble, Louis has a better understanding of humans. He has spent over a year in a public school. He knows that his father should have paid for the trumpet, and he has to find a way to get his father out of debt. Louis thinks of Sam. Sam always helps him. Sam will help him again. Sam immediately points out that money trouble is not a new problem. Everyone has money problems. Sam helps Louis prepare for a job that uses that trumpet. Sam always helps Louis to do something himself. Sam does not just say, "Louis, you are a swan and you cannot do that."



Chapter Eleven — Camp Kookooskoos, Chapter Twelve — A Rescue

Chapter Eleven — Camp Kookooskoos, Chapter Twelve — A Rescue Summary

In chapter eleven, Camp Kookooskoos. The camp is a real wilderness camp. There is not even a road to it. Sam and Louis have to be dropped at the end of a lane and then have to walk to the edge of a lake. A canoe awaits them there. Sam paddles across the lake and Louis jumps out of the canoe. He is immediately surrounded by boys. Sam has to shoo them back to give Louis room to breathe. Louis is introduced and one boy, Applegate, declares he does not like birds. The camp director, Mr. Brickle, tells Applegate he can dislike birds if he wants but he has to respect Louis. In this chapter the reader learns that Camp Kookooskoos in English means Camp Great Horned Owl. When asked why it was not called the English name, Mr. Brickle explains that a boys' camp has to have an interesting name to be any fun. To end the first day, Louis plays "Taps".

In chapter twelve, A Rescue, there are a couple of rescues. First Sam rescues a skunk from having its head stuck in a can for the rest of its life. Apparently a skunk has been looking for food in their dump and gotten its head stuck. Sam gets a fishing pole and line. He ties a slip knot to the line. Sam climbs up on the roof of the mess hall and waits for the skunk to get in position. He catches the can and pulls it off the skunk's head. Mr. Brickle is in the wrong place and gets a squirt of skunk perfume. Later the boys are teasing Applegate Skinner by calling him Wormy Applegate and Rotten Applegate. Applegate sneaks off and gets in a canoe by himself. It overturns and he tries to swim ashore. His clothes weigh him down. Everyone is running for boats to get to him. Louis hears and sees what is happening. Louis cannot fly because his flight feathers are not in place in the summer. He can still run on top of the water as he flaps his wings. He is faster than any boat can move. He gets to Applegate and dives under Applegate to come up under him. Once Applegate is back on land, Mr. Brickle asks if he still does not like birds. Applegate likes Louis but still does not like birds. Louis is given a medal for his lifesaving.

Chapter Eleven — Camp Kookooskoos, Chapter Twelve — A Rescue Analysis

In chapter eleven, Camp Kookooskoos is made to look like a fun place for boys. It has a strange name. It is wild and far away from other people. The boys learn about nature and to appreciate the wild country. They have camp fires and singing. The whole chapter sells the camp and makes it place that anyone would want to visit.



In chapter twelve, A Rescue, the reader sees the fun when Sam saves the skunk. What could be more fun for a gang of boys than to have to deal with this poor skunk? It is dangerous to help. The worry about stinking badly is worse than the threat of a bite. The fun side ends as the peer group decides to pick on one of the boys. The counselor cannot stop it. Once kids decide to bully another, adults do not have much say in the teasing. Applegate represents that kid who is out of step with the group so he is the one who is teased. Applegate wants to get away. He almost kills himself. Without Louis, it might have been a tragedy. Still, Applegate will not change his stand on birds. Applegate likes to be out of step with the group. White illustrates one life lesson after another. Being different for the sake of being different will not win friends. If one wants to walk to the beat a different drummer, it is essential to have a good, solid reason that others can respect. With no reason, the person appears weak. Weakness is always attacked.



Chapter Thirteen — End of Summer, Chapter Fourteen — Boston

Chapter Thirteen — End of Summer, Chapter Fourteen — Boston Summary

In chapter thirteen, with the End of Summer, Louis is out of a job. He does not have enough money yet. He asks Sam how he can find another job. Sam tells him about the Swan Boats in Boston. Sam thinks that they would like a trumpeter swan on their swan boats. Louis could play some of the music he has learned from the radio. Before the boys leave, Louis has Sam slit the web between his toes so he could play the valves of the trumpet. Sam warns Louis that he will have to adjust his swimming. Louis feels that will be no problem. The boys leave and Louis remains in the camp. He practices his trumpet and dreams of his family and Serena. Finally his flight feathers grow in and Louis is off to Boston.

In chapter fourteen, Boston. Louis arrives in Boston and finds the Swan Boats quickly. The Public Garden is a favorite park of the people of Boston. Louis goes up to the man who is running the Swan Boats and writes a note on his slate. Louis is quick to ask for his pay but the man tells him that he wants a trial run first. Louis looks at the Swan Boats and discovers that a boy sits in the body of the swan and pedals the boat like a bicycle. Louis gets ready to lead the boat around the pond. Louis plays "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and the people sing with him. He plays "Gentle on My Mind" next and finally "Ol' Man River" as he swims along. Someone in the crowd yells that they should call him Louis after Louis Armstrong, the great man with a trumpet. Louis likes that since they have his name correct. The Boatman and Louis make a deal for one hundred dollars a week. Louis sees that he can eventually relieve his father of the debt. As night falls, the Boatman decides that Louis should not stay in the park. The Boatman is afraid that someone will hurt or kidnap Louis. The Boatman takes Louis to the Ritz.

Chapter Thirteen — End of Summer, Chapter Fourteen — Boston Analysis

Chapter thirteen, End of Summer is a transition chapter. Louis practices as he waits for his flight feathers to grow. White impresses the reader with the need to stay busy and work toward a goal even when it seems one could take a vacation. Louis also has a quiet time and time to enjoy nature without people around him.

In chapter fourteen, Boston, Louis takes another step toward meeting his goal. Louis is not afraid to ask for what he wants. Louis never has an internal conflict going on in his mind. He expects to use his horn in place of his voice. He expects to be accepted. Louis is agreeable in the negotiations. He auditions without complaining. When he proves



himself, he expects to be paid fairly. Louis is also always ready to work hard for his dreams and goals.

The Swan Boats are described and explained. Once again, the reader sees the age of the writing. A ride on the Swan Boat is twenty-five and fifty cents. Also, the name of Louis Armstrong means little to many children in our time. Louis Armstrong works well at the time because it gives the people of Boston the name of our swan.

Louis enjoys his work. He loves music and swimming. Louis "follows his bliss" and is achieving his goals.



Chapter Fifteen — A Night at the Ritz, Chapter Sixteen — Philadelphia

Chapter Fifteen — A Night at the Ritz, Chapter Sixteen — Philadelphia Summary

In chapter fifteen, *A Night at the Ritz*, when the Boatman took Louis to the Ritz, the clerk had a difficult time accepting the swan as a guest. The Boatman explained that Louis is a celebrity. When three little girls come over and ask for an autograph, the clerk asks some questions about the care of the room. Finally, Louis is checked in. He plays a song for the people in the lobby before going to his room. A bellboy leads the way and carries Louis's medal, slate, chalk, and money bag. Louis was good to tip the bellboy. After Louis checked the bathroom and taking a shower, he is hungry and orders twelve watercress sandwiches. He stacks the bread to the side and teats the watercress. At first being in the hotel room makes him feel important, but as the evening goes on, he feels lonely. He decides to write to Sam about his Boston experience.

In chapter sixteen, *Philadelphia*, as fall comes closer, Louis knows he has to leave Boston. The Swan Boats will be taken out of the water and put away until the next spring. Louis receives a telegram from a man in Philadelphia who offers him five hundred dollars a week. Louis agrees and sends a telegram back to him. He arranges to meet in Philadelphia at the Zoo at a certain time. Louis plays all his old favorite songs in Boston before he leaves. Louis has railroad tracks that he can follow easily to Philadelphia. Once he arrives at the Zoo, he agrees to play in the club and allows the man to be his manager. Louis is not favorably impressed with Lucky Lucas. Since he has to make money, Louis does not let it stop him from taking the job. Lucas tells Louis that he has arranged a deal with the Man in Charge of Birds at the Zoo. The Zoo will not cut Louis's one wing so he cannot fly if Louis will give a concert every Sunday afternoon for the Zoo and the people. Louis agrees.

Chapter Fifteen — A Night at the Ritz, Chapter Sixteen — Philadelphia Analysis

In chapter fifteen, *A Night at the Ritz*, again the book is dated. Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton are named as celebrities. As usual, White describes the action in such a way that the reader believes that swans can stay at the Ritz and swim in bathtubs and order room service. White dates the manuscript again with the six cent stamp it takes to mail a letter. White takes the reader through the hotel room and the evening with Louis step by step. It is easy for the reader to feel as if he is Louis.

In chapter sixteen, *Philadelphia*, White outlines the last day in Boston and shows Louis's emotion. Louis always makes friends and hates to leave them. For the first time, Louis



has trouble with a little boy with a BB gun. The boy is on the boat and shoots at the trumpet. He makes the metal ping. White describes the trip and explains how Louis can find his way to Philadelphia. Railroad tracks make a fine map. Louis lands at the Zoo exactly on time. The reader suspects Lucas of being underhanded in his dealings from the first introduction. Louis even thinks Lucas is not a good person. Lucas is the first person who Louis has talked to that has not been an upstanding character. The reader wonders... will he be a villain? Will he steal from Louis? Was he telling the truth about the wing clipping? The reader feels unrest about this character.



Chapter Seventeen — Serena, Chapter Eighteen — Freedom

Chapter Seventeen — Serena, Chapter Eighteen — Freedom Summary

In chapter seventeen, Serena, the reader learns that Louis does not like his job. Swans like to go to sleep when the sun goes down, but musicians seem to wake up at sundown and play most of the night. Louis did not enjoy the noise and chaos of the club. He does enjoy playing on Sundays and likes it when he is invited to play with the Philadelphia Symphony Orchestra. It is near the end of his ten weeks when a very big storm blows in. It is bad enough to make all the animals nervous. All of them seek shelter.

At some of the darkest hours of the storm, Louis sees something come out of the sky. At first he thinks it was a space ship. Then he realizes it is a trumpeter swan. Next, he realizes it is Serena. Even though he is so glad to see her, and even though he wants to run right up to her, he is wise. He waits and gives her a chance to recover and rest. He waits through the next day as she goes to the water to eat and bathe and get her feathers unmussed. Louis goes to work after he plans awakening Serena the next morning. When Louis gets home around 2 a.m., he cannot sleep. He waits until almost dawn. As the sun comes up, Louis plays "Beautiful Dreamer" as he had planned. His notes are truer and sweeter than he has ever played. Serena wakes to the sound and sees the beautiful and masculine young swan before her. After some swan flirting by dipping their heads back and forth and swimming around each other, Louis plays the song that he had written for her. That does it. Serena is in love. Louis is in love. At last he is winning his own true love.

Chapter eighteen, Freedom, concerns Serena's freedom. The Man in Charge of the Birds learns about Serena and sends two men to clip her wing. Louis sees what is about to happen and sneaks up on the man with the net. The man with the net had been sneaking up on Serena. Louis sticks his neck straight out and aims for the man's behind. Before the man can net Serena, Louis pokes his beak right into the man's bottom. The man howls and forgets about the net. The other man is still trying to grab Serena's neck. Louis begins flapping his strong wings and running at the man. He beats both men away from Serena. Louis goes to the Man in Charge of the Birds and talks to him about clipping the wings. The man wants to keep Serena. He believes the swans would be safer at the zoo. Louis finally convinces the Man to agree to wait until after Christmas and to send a telegram for him. The man had never sent a telegram for one of his birds before, but he does so. Sam is fourteen now and he flies to Philadelphia. Louis explains that Serena and he want their freedom. Sam thinks about the problem and comes up with a compromise. Louis agrees that when he and Serena has a little cygnet that needed extra care and protection, Louis would bring that swan to the zoo. The Bird Man agrees and Serena is left free.



Chapter Seventeen — Serena, Chapter Eighteen — Freedom Analysis

Chapter seventeen, Serena, is the most important chapter of the story. Louis has finally found his love. He has his horn and is able to get her attention and communicate with her. Serena falls in love with him. The biggest problem of Louis's lack of a voice was his inability to find his mate. The mother swan has worried, the father has stolen, and Louis has had several adventures attempting to find ways to communicate. Now, Louis has achieved his heart's desire. Louis is an unselfish swan. He tries to solve his own problem. When writing on the slate does not work, he does not expect his father to steal the horn. Once the horn is stolen, Louis makes it his duty to learn to play very, very well. He does not chase after Serena but goes to Sam to find a way to make money. Now that Serena has been sent into his life, he gives her time to rest and put herself together. If Louis had been only thinking of himself, he would have run up to her and grabbed her. Instead he waits and plans. He is a real romantic. Our hero deserves to win the lady.

In chapter eighteen, Freedom, this concept is important to Louis. He wants it for Serena. He is willing to fight for it and to find compromises in order to find it. Of course, winning the lady could not be the end of the book. The hero always has to have some type of conflict happening. Of course, the Zoo wants his lady love just as he does. When is it okay to keep wild things caged? If they are weak and need protected? Apparently Louis believes that. However, he is willing to be free and run the risks that freedom brings with it. Serena and he are willing to face hunters, bad storms, and wild predators. Being free to fly together and establish their family where they choose is more important than total safety and security.



Chapter Nineteen — A Talk about Money, Chapter Twenty — Billings

Chapter Nineteen — A Talk about Money, Chapter Twenty — Billings Summary

Chapter nineteen, A Talk about Money, begins with Sam talking to the Head Man of the Birds about Louis and his money. They go through how much money Louis has and how little swans have to spend. The man is surprised that the swan has so much money. Sam tells the Head Man how he met Louis and all Louis has done. When the Head Man says that the trumpet would not cost thousands of dollars, Sam tells him that Louis wants to be sure to pay for the damage that his father had done as he went through the music store window. Sam assures the Head Man that Louis and Serena would pine away in captivity. As Sam describes the pond where Louis was hatched, the Head Man leans back in his chair and remembers his own time in the woods.

Sam's visit to the Philadelphia Zoo has given him an answer to one of his biggest questions. He now knows that he wants to work at the Zoo. All the animals he loves to study live at the Zoo and Sam would be right at home. Sam writes a poem before he goes to bed and leaves the poem on the Head Man's desk the next morning. After leaving his poem, he and Louis and Serena go to the airport so Sam can go home. The airport personnel get all alarmed as they see the big white birds. Louis plays "Off We Go into the Wild Blue Yonder" and the plane and the swans take off into the wind. Sam heads for home. At first, Louis and Serena travel with the plane before they turn off to take the Southern route home.

In chapter twenty, Billings, the father swan takes the money that Louis has earned to the storekeeper. Louis writes a note on his slate so the owner of the music store would know that it was payment. The father swan was anxious to retrieve his honor. He says it is never right to steal and he is glad to pay his debt. The mother warns the father that it might be dangerous. The father swan claims that he lives for danger. When he arrives in Billings, a clerk sees the swan coming. He warns the storekeeper. The storekeeper gets his gun and shoots at the swan. The storekeeper only nicks the swan, but when the father swan sees a bit of his own blood, he faints on the sidewalk. The people who come running to the swan see the slate. The storekeeper has grabbed the money. The police and a game warden get into the situation. Everyone wants to keep the money. A judge comes up and settles the matter of the money. The swan is taken to the hospital. As night comes, the nurse has opened the window and when she comes back to the room, the swan is gone. The father swan gets back to Red Rock and tells his story. He cannot wait to tell his wife that the wound was superficial which he is sure means that he was near death. She tells him it could not have been much or he could not have flown home.



Chapter Nineteen — A Talk about Money, Chapter Twenty — Billings Analysis

In chapter nineteen, A Talk about Money, the story is started to be wrapped up. Louis has won his love. He has conquered his disability and can use a trumpet for a voice. He has overachieved since he can read and write and communicate with people as well as swans. Now, he has to deal with his father's debt. White needs to answer Sam's question of what he will be when he grows up. Sam has asked this more than once so the reader can expect to see an answer. As Sam tells the story of Louis's life, the reader has a summary of the book so far. This is also a transitional chapter to move Louis and Serena back home to Montana and their families.

In chapter twenty, Billings, the reader sees the family again. The father swan is the star of this chapter. He is an exaggerated character. Everything he does is a grand drama and he is very good at it. The mother swan always has to pull him back to the real world. Of course, after the father's big speech about danger being an important part of his life, he is shot. He is only nicked, but upon seeing his own blood, he faints. The father swan is a comic but a very lovable character. White shows the greed of the humans as everyone wants the money. Finally, the storekeeper redeems the human race as he takes the money to repair his store and then donates the remaining part of the money to the Audubon Society. White explains about extinct animals with this donation. White gives many lessons throughout this book. He uses the method of repeating information, which young children enjoy. They like the feeling of reading the same book over and over again. They like the book to have familiar passages in it. White paints the picture and then gives the reader that familiar feeling

The father swan is impressed with himself in the hospital. He thinks he looks wonderful on the white sheets with his black bill making him stand out. He feels very important to be fussed over and loves his new word. To have a superficial wound is just super. Not everyone has a superficial wound. One would think that the Band-Aid on the wound was a six foot bandage covering a hundred stitches. White uses the favorite bandage of young children, Band-Aids. Kids love Band-Aids and so does the father swan.



Chapter Twenty-One — The Greening Spring

Chapter Twenty-One — The Greening Spring Summary

Chapter twenty-one, The Greening Spring, is the finale. Louis and Serena are all set for a wonderful life. They fly to Canada to the same pond where Louis was hatched. They are able to visit with Sam at times. Sam never told his father about the pond and the swans. The first time at the pond, Louis hoped that Serena would build her nest in the same place as his mother had. Serena had her own ideas and built on a muskrat home. The reader learns that swans live a long life and that Louis and Serena enjoyed their time together.

Louis guides his family to all the places he worked and lived each year. They return to the Swan Boats in Boston. Louis and Serena spend a night at the Ritz. Serena enjoys going around the hotel room and clicking the lights off and on. They take the cygnets back by the Southern route and they see all the states.

Louis was glad to have had music so he could win Serena. White also tells us that Sam gets a job at the Philadelphia Zoo when he was twenty. This is the happily ever after chapter.

Chapter Twenty-One — The Greening Spring Analysis

Chapter twenty-one, The Greening Spring, is the final chapter. It assures the reader that Louis has overcome all his problems and can now live the life of a regular swan. He and Serena can raise families and be happy. The family travels all over the United States and enjoy life. Louis continues playing all his life. He always puts his children to bed with "Taps".



Characters

Father Swan... the cob

The father swan is a good father and husband. He is a man of principle. He cares about his children. He is the character we count on to always give us a smile or a laugh. He makes drama out of every thing. He loves and loves greatly. He will do whatever he has to do to help his children or his wife. He may have to make speeches about what he does but he is not just a man of words. The father swan is a man of action. The father swan takes the risk to get a trumpet for his son. He sees Louis's need and does something about it.

Mother Swan

The mother swan is another loving character. She takes care of her young and her eggs. She notices their needs and she is the one who sees that Louis has no voice. While the father is dramatic, she is calm and able to calm others. She often has to settle the father as he goes into his long speeches. She trusts that they will find a way to make life good. She sees things that will cause a problem in the future and attempts to find ways to fix them.

Louis

Louis is the defective swan without a voice. Louis does not give up. He thinks of ways to fix his problems and then makes them happen. He is able to go to school and learn to read and write. When this does not help his situation with swans, he listens to his father. The father steals the trumpet for Louis. Louis does not give up at the first try when he attempts to play the trumpet. He goes beyond just playing a few notes; he learns more and more actual music. He goes to Sam for help when he does not know how to make money. He gets his first job and then another. Louis is ready to do anything legal to pay his father's debt. He never gives up. He wins. He gets money for the trumpet. He wins his lady love, Serena.

Sam Beaver

Sam is a young boy of eleven when the reader first meets him. He is a quiet boy who loves animals and the wild. He is present when Louis is born. Sam is the helper for the swan all through Sam's life. Sam is smart and figures out ways for Louis to achieve his goals. Sam does not do things for him but allows Louis to work for himself. Sam is a good example for young people reading the book. He knows how to find himself in the wild with the use of a compass. Sam thinks. Sam keeps a journal from the first chapter to the last. His journal helps make him think. Sometimes he thinks about very important things and sometimes he uses questions to allow his imagination to fly. Sam figures out



what he wants to do with his life. Being friends with Louis, the disabled swan, helps Sam to find his own way. His lesson is to help others and you always get more back for yourself without even trying.

Mr. Beaver

Mr. Beaver is Sam's father. He has always taught Sam how to camp and ranch. He has given him his freedom to roam and be himself. Mr. Beaver has no trouble in allowing Sam to take Louis to school. Readers do not see much of Mr. Beaver. He never gets in Sam's way of helping Louis.

Mrs. Hammerbotham

Mrs. Hammerbotham is the first grade teacher who takes Louis into her classroom and teaches him to read and write. She has to be convinced but she goes along with it once she sees Louis is really trying and can copy the letters she puts on the board.

Serena

Serena is the young female trumpeter swan that Louis falls in love with. She pays no attention to him because he has no voice. The most important part of courting for the swans is the voice. She is the catalyst that forces the father swan to do something. Serena will eventually come back into Louis's life later after he learns to play the horn and has the money to pay for it. With the horn, Louis is able to court her. Serena becomes his mate.

Music storekeeper

The music storekeeper will appear twice in the book. The first time the father swan flies through the window and steals the trumpet. The storekeeper tries to shoot the swan for damaging his store and stealing the trumpet. The second time the storekeeper shoots the swan and nicks his wing as the swan comes back to pay for the trumpet and the damages. The storekeeper accepts the swan's money and even donates the amount over and above his costs to the Audubon Society.

Mr. Brickle

Mr. Brickle is the counselor at Camp Kookooskoos. Mr. Brickle treats the boys well. He is a good sport when the skunk sprays him. Mr. Brickle gives Louis a chance. He also makes sure that all the boys respect Louis. Mr. Brickle sees that Louis gets a medal for saving Applegate Skinner.



Applegate Skinner

Applegate Skinner is the camper who is a bit contrary. He does not like birds and says so to Louis. The other boys in his tent tease him. He is the character who gets bullied. Applegate takes a canoe out and then capsizes it. Louis saves him. Applegate will admit to liking Louis but still refuses to like birds.

Boatman of the Swan Boats

The Boatman hires Louis to swim ahead of the Swan Boat and play his trumpet. The Boatman pays him and even puts him up at the Ritz for a night.

Abe Lucas — Lucky

Mr. Lucas is a rather sleazy character. He never cheats Louis, but Louis is careful around him. Mr. Lucas is his agent and gets him the job in the night club for \$500 a week. Mr. Lucas also makes a deal with the Zoo so they would not clip Louis's wing. While he does good things for Louis, there is just something about Mr. Lucas that is not quite right. Mr. Lucas's dialogue makes him appear a little sneaky.

Head Man of the Birds

The Head Man of the Birds made the first deal not to clip Louis's wing. He also makes the deal for Louis to play a concert every Sunday afternoon. When Serena comes to the zoo, the Head Man has to make another deal with Louis so Serena would not have her wing clipped. The Head Man talks to Sam and is able to make a deal with him in Serena's favor.



Objects/Places

Pond in Canada

The book opens in the wild. The trumpeter swans have come to build a nest up north after the winter in Montana. The pond is in Canada and not too far from the place where Sam and his father are camping. There is all kinds of wild life around the pond. White has all the animals awoken. The swans find a good place for the nest and the mother swan builds her nest. The nest is big. It is six feet across. They have one predator who almost gets the mother. A fox. That was the only close call at this pond.

Red Rock Lakes, Montana

Many swans and other birds stay at Red Rock Lakes in the winter. There is a hot springs there, so the water does not freeze. Louis and his family always spend the winter there but go north in the summer. Louis goes to Red Rock as his first destination after he can fly. He will return to Red Rock several more times throughout the book. He always comes back to Red Rock to find his family.

Sam Beaver's Home

Louis goes to Sam Beaver's ranch and stays there while he goes to school. It is a working ranch.

Camp Kookooskoos

This is a wilderness camp. It has one big mess hall and several tents for the boys. There is a privy. It is located so far into the woods that the road does not go that far. There is a lake and plenty of wild life. The boys have a good time there.

Boston—Public Gardens

The Public Gardens in Boston are the home of the Swan Boats. There is a nice little lake and manicured park grass all around it. The Swan Boat has a swan on it that is large enough for a young man to get into the body of the swan and pedal it like a bicycle. Louis swims in front of the boat and plays his trumpet.



Ritz

Louis spends the night in the Ritz. He is most impressed with the bathtub. He also likes the light switches. Serena and Louis both stay one night at the Ritz after they have a family and go back each year.

Philadelphia Zoo

Louis stays at the Philadelphia Zoo while he is working at a night club in Philadelphia. Serena is blown off course and ends up at the Zoo. Louis has about finished at the night club and has his money for his father. The Philadelphia Zoo is the romantic spot where Serena finally notices Louis and falls in love with him. Louis and his family will visit the Zoo throughout their lifetime.



Themes

Family Is the Most Important Thing

From the beginning of the book, there is the concern for Louis. The male and female swan care for their little ones. They are particularly concerned about Louis. The father swan will do whatever he can to help his son. The swan will even steal to help him. Even though it makes the father feel bad to steal, he puts Louis first.

Never Give Up

The father swan, Louis, and Sam all show a persistence. The father does not give up until he has something that Louis can use as a voice. Louis will not give up until he can play the trumpet and not only earn money for his father but court Serena. Sam always comes to Louis's aid no matter when Louis asks him to come. Through the persistence and all of them not giving up, Louis wins over his "defect".

Hard Work is Essential

Louis is always ready to work. He does not just sit and feel sorry for himself. He first studied on his own to learn to read and write. He accepted the trumpet and worked very hard to learn to play it. When he got jobs, he always met his responsibility. Louis gets enough money for his father and have a beautiful voice that wins Serena.

Friends Help One Another

Throughout the story, Louis is helped by a number of people. His friends helped him find jobs. Sam came to help him at the Zoo when Louis needed to save Serena from having her wing clipped. Louis always had friends or family who helped him find a way to stand on his own two feet. For instance, Sam got him into school and helped him find two jobs. Louis had to make the jobs work.

In Your Weakness Is Your Strength

Louis had no voice. This was definitely a weakness for a swan. He learned to overcome that weakness and he became a musician. His trumpet and his ability made him become famous. The trumpet music made him victorious over his weakness.



Music Soothes

Louis plays "Taps" to help the boys settle for the night at the camp. The Head Man at the Philadelphia Zoo says that Louis's playing calms the animals. Louis uses "Taps" to help settle his own little cygnets.



Style

Point of View

The book is written in the third person point of view. The main characters are Louis, Sam, and the father swan. The father swan is the main character in the beginning of the book. He will be lead character again in the Billings chapter. Sam is introduced before Louis. Sam's point of view is the most important through different points in the book. He is particularly important to the journal entries and when he makes deals for Louis. Louis is usually the main character. He is the main character. Main characters need supporting characters and he has good ones.

Setting

Chapters in the book are typically set on or near water. A swan has to be on the water. The first setting is a wild area in Canada. White describes all the different animals as well as the earth and plants coming alive in the spring. The next water base will be the Red Rock Lakes, Montana. Many of the birds remain in Montana year around because of the warm springs. Louis goes to school next. Louis lives on a ranch in Montana. Louis moves next to another lake at Camp Kookooskoos. He remains in the Camp until he goes to Boston's Public Gardens and swims in front of the Swan Boat. From Boston he lives on a lake at the Philadelphia Zoo. When he leaves the Zoo, he goes home to Red Rock Lakes to see his family. He will make a circle of these places with each group of cygnets that he and Serena have throughout his life.

Language and Meaning

White uses language meant for children. When he uses words that he thinks the child will not understand, he explains it right in the text. The language is easy with very common words except for the names of animals. He uses the story to teach many things besides the moral lesson that is obvious. He teaches the names of the adult animal and the name of its young. He teaches the names of the male animal. His lessons are very entertaining.

When describing the father swan, White uses adverbs. The language is overblown. The language matches the bird's characteristics. E.B. White would be the first editor to strike most of the -ly words. In this deliberate use of majestically, gracefully, proudly, and like words, the reader recognizes the father swan immediately. The father swan stands out as a character with this method. It is a clever use of language.

Structure

The structure is straightforward. The story starts at the beginning of the nest building for Louis and go straight through his life. There are no side trips. The goals of the hero are very apparent. The reader should be able to recognize that Louis needs a voice and he wants Serena. If one were drawing a graph of the structure, it would climb a little and then peak with a conflict, then go down a little and come back up again with another conflict. The tallest point in the graph would come when Serena is won. The story would move down a slope with a couple of little jags for conflicts such as the possible clipping of Serena's wing and the other swan's possible real injury when paying the music storekeeper.



Quotes

"Every night, before he turned in, he would write in the book. He wrote about things he had done, things he had seen, and thoughts he had had. Sometimes he drew a picture. He always ended by asking himself a question so he would have something to think about while falling asleep."

pp. 6-7

"'All swans are vain' said the cob. 'It is right for swans to feel proud, graceful—that's what swans are for.'"

p. 34

"'A long word,' he thought, 'is really no harder than a short one. I'll just copy one letter at a time, and pretty soon it will be finished. Besides, my life is a catastrophe. It's a catastrophe to be without a voice.'"

p. 73

"But everyone had learned how careful you have to be when dealing with figures."

p. 77

"Here, Louis, is a trumpet. It will be your voice — a substitute for the voice God failed to give you. Learn to blow it, Louis, and life will be smoother and richer and gayer for you."

p. 97

"Louis realized that there were advantages in traveling light and not having too many possessions clinging to you."

p. 104

"Everyone is entitled to his likes and dislikes and to his prejudices. Come to think of it, I don't care for pistachio ice cream. I don't know why I don't like it, but I don't. "

p. 114

"He was asleep, and he was snoring. People who dislike birds often snore."

p. 117

"'Everybody likes money. It's a crazy world. But, I mean, why would a swan need money?'"

p. 147

"But he needed money badly, and when you need money, you are willing to put up with difficulties and uncertainties."

p. 177

"I'll tell her I love her in a language anybody can understand, the language of music."



"She will hear the trumpet of the swan, and she will be mine. At least, I hope she will."
p. 184

"Some of his notes are like jewels held up to the light. The emotion he transmits is clean and pure and sustained."
p. 180

"His trumpet was gone. Poor Louis! His heart almost stopped."
p. 181

"Philadelphians, waking from sleep in bedrooms where the windows were open, heard the trumpet. Not one person who heard the song realized that this was the moment of triumph for a young swan who had a speech defect and had conquered it."
p. 192

"'The sky,' he wrote on his slate, 'is my living room. The woods are my parlor. The lonely lake is my bath. I can't remain behind a fence all my life. Neither can Serena—she's not built that way. Somehow or other we must persuade the Head Man to let Serena go.'"
p. 209

"Up until that day, he had not been able to decide what he wanted to be when he grew up. The minute he saw the Zoo, all his doubts vanished. He knew he wanted to work in a zoo. Sam loved every living thing, and a zoo is a great storehouse of living things—it has just about every creature that creeps or crawls or jumps or runs or flies or hides."
p. 212

"'An extraordinary adventure. I was shot at just as you predicted. The storekeeper pointed a gun at me and fired. I felt an agonizing pain in my left shoulder—which I've always considered the more beautiful of my two shoulders. Blood gushed from my wound in torrents, and I sank gracefully to the sidewalk, where I handed over the money and thus regained by honor and my decency. I was at death's door. A great multitude of people gathered. Blood was everywhere. I became faint and passed out with dignity in front of all. The police arrived—dozens of them. Game wardens flocked to the scene in great numbers, and there was a tremendous argument about the money.'"
pp. 241-42

Topics for Discussion

Describe Sam. What particular characteristics does he possess? Was there one thing that you would remember about him?

Do you believe it was right for the father swan to steal the trumpet? Was it more acceptable because he was a swan and could not interact with humans?

Do you think E.B White was teaching us a lesson when he talked about being weighted down with things as Louis tried to fly with his slate, chalk, medal, and moneybag? What lesson? Do you agree?

What was your favorite part of this book? Why did you like it best?

Do you believe that a bird should have its wing clipped so it cannot fly away from a zoo? Does a zoo have a right to put a healthy bird into captivity? Are they better off with man's security?

Discuss Mr. Lucas. Mr. Lucas made sure that Louis did not have his wing clipped. Mr. Lucas also paid Louis five hundred dollars a week. If you did not like Mr. Lucas, why? Make your argument with quotes from the story.

Discuss the father swan. Did you like him? What do you think of his personality? Do you know anyone like him?

Was it easy to believe that Louis played a trumpet? Did the story enchant you? Why do you think animated features are so popular at this time? Do you believe Shrek is real or a donkey can talk?

Why would a boy keep a journal? Why for nine years? What advantages do you think journal keeping might have?

Do you think about what you want to be? Have you decided? If so, why have you made this choice?