

The Little Prince (1943)

by **Antoine de Saint-Exupéry**

Written after the defeat of France in 1940 in the world War II

Summary

The narrator, **the pilot**, crashes in the Sahara desert. He attempts to fix his engine, knowing that he only has a limited supply of **water**. As he begins to work on the engine, however, he hears a small voice asking him to draw a sheep. The narrator turns around to meet the little prince, and after making several attempts at drawing the sheep, he settles on sketching a box—he tells the little prince that the box contains a sheep, and to the pilot's astonishment, the little prince is delighted.

The pilot begins to learn more about the little prince, discovering that he comes from the asteroid known as B-612. Eventually, he begins to learn other details of the little prince's planet as well, including the fact that **baobab trees** are a major menace and that the object of the little prince's affection is a **rose**. This rose is very vain, however, and tells lies, making the little prince unhappy. He decides that he cannot trust her anymore and leaves his planet.

The little prince first encounters a king who claims to rule over everything, including the **stars**. He has no subjects on his own planet to rule, however, and the little prince grows bored and leaves. The second person the little prince meets is a conceited man who enjoys applause and admiration. The third is a tippler who says that he drinks to forget that he is ashamed of drinking. The fourth grownup is a businessman who is busy counting the stars so that he may own them. At this point, the little prince finds all the grownups very strange, and he continues onto the planet of the lamplighter, who lights a lamp on his planet when night falls and puts it out again when the sun rises. The little prince finds the lamplighter to be the least ridiculous of all the grownups because he thinks of something other than himself.

The little prince then comes across a geographer who tells the little prince that his rose is "ephemeral," or in other words, "in danger of speedy disappearance." This alarms the little prince

and makes him regret leaving his rose. Nevertheless, he continues on his journey to the planet Earth.

The little prince lands in the middle of the Sahara desert, where he encounters a snake. The snake speaks in riddles, hinting that he has a powerful poison that can take the little prince back to his planet. The little prince continues to travel on Earth, however, eventually discovering a bed of roses, all identical to his own rose on asteroid B-612, making him question his own rose's contention that it is unique.

He then meets a fox, who teaches the little prince what it means to tame—or to establish ties—with another. The little prince realizes that his rose has tamed him, making her unique in the universe, even if she's outwardly identical to all the other roses on Earth.

The little prince goes on to meet a railway switchman and a merchant before returning to the Sahara where he meets the pilot. By the end of his story, the little prince and the pilot are both very thirsty, and they decide to walk and find water. They discover a well around daybreak, and together they savor the drink as well as their time together.

The little prince explains that the next day is the anniversary of his descent to Earth. He sends the pilot away to fix his plane and tells him to come meet him at the same spot the following evening. The pilot fixes his engine and returns the next evening to find the little prince conversing with the poisonous snake. The little prince warns the pilot that he must return to his planet and that it will "look a little as if I were dying." The little prince allows the snake to poison him, and he falls gently to the sand. The narrator is reassured by the fact that the little prince's body is gone the following day and believes that it means he made it back to asteroid B-612. He worries, however, whether the sheep he drew will eat the prince's rose.

Character sketch

The Little Prince

- The title character of the story
- Exceptionally small physique- Comes from the asteroid B-612
- Represent the childlike perspective- contrary perspective to that of the grown ups
- Sole inhabitant of the asteroid- cleans his volcanoes frequently and cherishes his Rose (his object of love)
- The little prince ventures to other planets in the universe after discovering that **the rose** he loves has lied to him.
- Innocent and curious- always raises questions and never stop questioning till getting an answer
- The little prince begins to miss his rose as he explores more, learning that his rose's lies were less essential than the time they had spent together.
- He tells his story to **the pilot**, helping the pilot regain the perspective of childhood as well.

One of the two protagonists of the story. After leaving his home planet and his beloved rose, the prince journeys around the universe, ending up on Earth. Frequently perplexed by the behavior of grown-ups, the prince symbolizes the hope, love, innocence, and insight of childhood that lie dormant in all of us. Though the prince is sociable and meets a number of characters as he travels, he never stops loving and missing the rose on his home planet.

The title character of *The Little Prince* is a pure and innocent traveler from outer space whom the narrator encounters in the Sahara desert. Before the little prince lands on Earth, Saint-Exupéry contrasts the prince's childlike character with different adult characters by having the prince hop from one neighboring planet to another. On each planet, the prince meets a different type of adult and reveals that character's frivolities and weaknesses. Once on Earth, however, the little prince becomes a student as well as a teacher. From his friend the fox, the little prince learns what love entails, and in turn he passes on those lessons to the narrator.

The little prince has few of the glaring flaws evident in the other characters, and he is immediately shown to be a character of high caliber by his ability to recognize the narrator's Drawing Number One as a picture of a boa constrictor that has eaten a snake. Nevertheless, the prince's fear as he prepares to be sent back to his planet by a snakebite shows that he is susceptible to the same emotions as the rest of us. Most notably, the prince is bound by his love for the rose he has left on his home planet. His constant questioning also indicates that one's search for answers can be more important than the answers themselves.

The Pilot/Narrator

- The narrator of the story- the pilot- An explorer
- His plane crashes in the middle of the Sahara desert when his engine fails- he's desperate to fix his engine so that he won't die of thirst in the desert.
- The pilot is a grownup who still wonders at the ways of the grown-ups and their concern for “matters of consequences”.
- He becomes close with **the little prince**- regains his child like innocent perspective about life.
- He decides to write and illustrate the book in order to remember his friendship with the little prince.

A lonely pilot who, while stranded in the desert, befriends the little prince. They spend eight days together in the desert before the little prince returns to his home planet. Although he is discouraged from drawing early in his life because adults cannot understand his drawings, the narrator illustrates his own story and makes several drawings for the little prince. The narrator is a grown-up, but his view of the world is more like a child's than an adult's. After the little prince departs, the narrator feels both refreshed and saddened.

The narrator of *The Little Prince* is an adult in years, but he explains that he was rejuvenated six years earlier after he crashed his plane in the desert. He was an imaginative child whose first drawing was a cryptic interpretation of a boa constrictor that had swallowed an elephant. Eventually, he abandoned art for the grown-up profession of pilot, and he lives a lonely life until he encounters the little prince. He serves as the prince's confidant and relays the prince's story to us, but the narrator also undergoes transformations of his own. After listening to the prince's story about the knowledge the prince has learned from the fox, the narrator himself learns the fox's lessons about what makes things important when he searches for water in the desert. The narrator's search for the well indicates that lessons must be learned through personal exploration and not only from books or others' teachings.

Both the narrator and the prince are protagonists of the story, but they differ in significant ways. Whereas the prince is mystical and supernatural, the pilot is a human being who grows and develops over time. When the narrator first encounters the prince, he cannot grasp the subtle truths that the prince presents to him, whereas the prince is able to comprehend instantly the lessons his explorations teach him. This shortcoming on the narrator's part makes him a

character we can relate to as human beings more easily than we can relate to the otherworldly, extraordinarily perceptive little prince.

The Fox

- Important character in the novella
- The fox teaches the little prince the importance of his rose- How his rose is unique among the rest hundreds of flowers though they seem similar.
- He teaches the prince how to tame him.- that is “to establish ties” with him
- he shares his secret with the little prince in the novella's iconic phrase, "One sees clearly only with the heart. What is essential is invisible to the eye."

Although the fox asks the little prince to tame him, the fox is in some ways the more knowledgeable of the two characters, and he helps steer the prince toward what is important in life. In the secret the fox tells the little prince before they say their good-byes, the fox sums up three important lessons: only the heart can see correctly; the prince's time away from his planet has made him appreciate his rose more; and love entails responsibility.

The fox appears quite suddenly and inexplicably while the prince is mourning the ordinariness of his rose after having come across the rose garden. When the fox immediately sets about establishing a friendship between himself and the prince, it seems that instruction is the fox's sole purpose. Yet when he begs the little prince to tame him, the fox appears to be the little prince's pupil as well as his instructor. In his lessons about taming, the fox argues for the importance of ceremonies and rituals, showing that such tools are important even outside the strict world of grown-ups. In his final encounter with the prince, the fox facilitates the prince's departure by making sure the prince understands why his rose is so important to him. This encounter displays an ideal type of friendship because even though the prince's departure causes the fox great pain, the fox behaves unselfishly, encouraging the prince to act in his own best interest

The Rose

- The rose is the object of the little prince's affection.
- She is beautiful and vain.
- Tells dramatic lies, which prompts the little prince to leave his planet and set off on his journey.
- She apologizes right before he leaves, but he decides to go anyway-eventually, he feels sorry for leaving her and tries to return to his planet to protect her.

A coquettish flower who has trouble expressing her love for the little prince and consequently drives him away. Simultaneously vain and naïve, she informs the little prince of her love for him too late to persuade him to stay home and not to travel. Throughout the story, she occupies the prince's thoughts and heart.

Although the rose appears only in a couple of chapters, she is crucial to the novel as a whole because her melodramatic, proud nature is what causes the prince to leave his planet and begin his explorations. Also, the prince's memory of his rose is what prompts his desire to return. As a character who gains significance because of how much time and effort the prince has invested in caring for her, the rose embodies the fox's statement that love comes from investing in other people. Although the rose is, for the most part, vain and naïve, the prince still loves her deeply because of the time he has spent watering and caring for her.

Much has been written comparing the little prince's relationship with his rose to the relationship between Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and his wife, Consuelo, but the rose can also be read as a symbol of universal love. In literature, the rose has long served as a symbol of the beloved, and Saint-Exupéry takes that image in good stride, giving the prince's flower human characteristics, both good and bad. Because of the rose, the prince learns that what is most essential is invisible, that time away from one's beloved causes a person to better appreciate that love, and that love engenders responsibility—all of which are broad morals that obviously extend beyond the author's personal history.

The Snake

- Golden yellow desert snake with deadly poison.
- The snake speaks in riddles, and he meets **the little prince** at the beginning and the end of his journey on Earth. – it is the snake who tells The Little prince about his location on earth
- The snake possesses a deadly poison that he promises will send the prince back to where he came from.
- At the end of the story, the little prince takes his offer.
- He is bitten by the snake and his body has disappeared assuring the narrator that he was able to make it back to his asteroid.

The first character the prince meets on Earth, who ultimately sends the prince back to the heavens by biting him. A constant enigma, the snake speaks in riddles and evokes the snake of

the Bible, which incites Adam and Eve's eviction from Eden by luring them into eating the forbidden fruit.

Even though the snake the little prince encounters in the desert speaks in riddles, he demands less interpretation than the other symbolic figures in the novel. The snake also has less to learn than many of the other characters. The grown-ups on the various planets are too narrow-minded for their own good, and the prince and the narrator edge closer to enlightenment, but the serpent does not require answers or even ask questions. In fact, the snake is so confident he has mastered life's mysteries that he tells the prince he speaks only in riddles because he can solve all riddles. In a story about mysteries, the snake is the only absolute. His poisonous bite and biblical allusion indicate that he represents the unavoidable phenomenon of death.

- **The Baobabs**

Baobabs, harmless trees on Earth, pose a great threat to smaller planets like the prince's if left unchecked. They can squeeze whole planets to pieces with their roots. Although baobabs have no malicious opinions or intentions, they represent the grave danger that can befall people who are too lazy or indifferent to keep a wary eye on the world around them.

- **The King**

On the first planet the little prince visits, he encounters a king who claims to rule the entire universe. While not unkindly, the king's power is empty. He is able to command people to do only what they already would do.

- **The Vain Man**

The sole resident of the second planet the little prince visits. The vain man is lonely and craves admiration from all who pass by. However, only by being alone is he assured of being the richest and best-looking man on his planet.

- **The Drunkard**

The third person the little prince encounters after leaving home is a drunkard, who spends his days and nights lost in a stupor. The drunkard is a sad figure, but he is also foolish because he drinks to forget that he is ashamed of drinking.

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- **The Businessman**

A caricature of grown-ups who is the fourth person the little prince visits. Too busy even to greet his visitor, the businessman owns all the stars. Yet he cannot remember what they are called and contributes nothing to them. Although the little prince comments on the oddity of the grown-ups he meets, the businessman is the only character the prince actively chastises.

- **The Lamplighter**

The fifth and most complex figure the prince encounters before landing on Earth. At first, the lamplighter appears to be yet another ridiculous character with no real purpose, but his selfless devotion to his orders earns him the little prince's admiration. Of all the adults the little prince encounters before reaching Earth, the lamplighter is the only one the prince thinks he could befriend.

- **The Geographer**

The sixth and final character the little prince encounters before he lands on Earth. Although the geographer is apparently well-read, he refuses to learn about his own planet, saying it is a job for explorers. He recommends that the little prince visit Earth, and his comments on the ephemeral nature of flowers reveal to the prince that his own flower will not last forever.

- **The Railway Switchman**

The railway switchman works at the hub for the enormous trains that rush back and forth carrying dissatisfied adults from one place to the other. He has more perspective on life than the unhappy, thoughtless passengers his trains ferry. He agrees with the prince that the children are the only ones who appreciate and enjoy the beauty of the train rides.

- **The Salesclerk**

The salesclerk sells pills that quench thirst on the grounds that people can save up to fifty-three minutes a day if they don't have to stop to drink. He symbolizes the modern world's misplaced emphasis on saving time and taking shortcuts.

- **The Roses in the Rose Garden**

The sight of the rose garden first leads the prince to believe that his flower is not, in fact, unique. However, with the fox's guidance, the prince realizes that even so many similar flowers cannot stop his own rose from being unique.

- **The Turkish Astronomer**

The first human to discover the prince's home, Asteroid B-612. When the Turkish astronomer first presents his discovery, no one believes him on account of his Turkish costume. Years later, he makes the same presentation wearing Western clothes, and his discovery is well received. The scientific community's treatment of the Turkish astronomer reveals that ignorance propels xenophobia (a fear or hatred of foreigners) and racism.

Themes

- ✚ Relationships
- ✚ Childhood vs. Adulthood
- ✚ The True and the Essential
- ✚ Innocence
- ✚ Exploration vs. Narrow mindedness

Relationships

Both **the pilot's** and the prince's stories revolve around their relationships.

He writes the novel to cherish his love and friendship with the little prince

The Little Prince's story also relates his relationship with various people he met on his journey.

The Little Prince's love for the rose- he fails to understand and value it initially but after taming the fox he realizes that you have to see with your heart than with your eyes.

The narrator and the Little Prince also develops a deeper relationship.

The characters grow in the story through their relationships. For the little prince, the main lesson is about responsibility to those you've tamed, or befriended, and for the pilot, the main lesson is about "matters of consequence"—he learns that relationships are of the most consequence, even in a desert with a broken-down plane and limited **water**.

Childhood vs. Adulthood

The story often compares children to grownups, depicting grownups as a group of people who have lost their sense of imagination and the ability to see what's essential. The various grownups presented throughout the story have only utilitarian concerns and are ruled by vices like pride and greed. Unlike children, they've lost the ability to understand the true value of a friendship, the beauty of a house, or the things that aren't explicitly shown in a drawing.

The Dangers of Narrow-Mindedness

The Little Prince exposes the ignorance that accompanies an incomplete and narrow-minded perspective. In Chapter IV, for example, when the Turkish astronomer first presents his discovery of Asteroid B-612, he is ignored because he wears traditional Turkish clothing. Years later, he makes the same presentation wearing European clothing and receives resounding acclaim. Because the three-petaled flower described in Chapter XVI has spent its whole life in the desert, it incorrectly reports that Earth contains very few humans and that they are a rootless, drifting people.

Even the protagonists of *The Little Prince* have their moments of narrow-mindedness. In Chapter XVII, the narrator confesses that his previous description of Earth focused too much on humans. In Chapter XIX, the little prince mistakes the echo of his own voice for that of humans and falsely accuses humans of being too repetitive. Such quick judgments, the story argues, lead to the development of dangerous stereotypes and prejudices. They also prevent the constant questioning and open-mindedness that are important to a well-adjusted and happy life.

For the most part, *The Little Prince* characterizes narrow-mindedness as a trait of adults. In the very first chapter, the narrator draws a sharp contrast between the respective ways grown-ups and children view the world. He depicts grown-ups as unimaginative, dull, superficial, and stubbornly sure that their limited perspective is the only one possible. He depicts children, on the other hand, as imaginative, open-minded, and aware of and sensitive to the mystery and beauty of the world.

In the story's opening pages, the narrator explains that grown-ups lack the imagination to see his Drawing Number One, which represents a boa constrictor swallowing an elephant, as anything other than a hat. As the story progresses, other examples of the blindness of adults emerge. As the little prince travels from planet to planet, the six adults he encounters proudly reveal their character traits, whose contradictions and shortcomings the little prince then exposes.

The little prince represents the open-mindedness of children. He is a wanderer who restlessly asks questions and is willing to engage the invisible, secret mysteries of the universe. The novel suggests that such inquisitiveness is the key to understanding and to happiness. However, *The Little Prince* shows that age is not the main factor separating grown-ups from children. The

narrator, for example, has aged enough to forget how to draw, but he is still enough of a child to understand and befriend the young, foreign little prince.

Enlightenment through Exploration

As the critic James Higgins points out, each of the novel's main characters hungers both for adventure (exploration of the outside world) and for introspection (exploration within himself). It is through his encounter with the lost prince in the lonely, isolated desert that the friendless narrator achieves a newfound understanding of the world. But in his story of the little prince's travels, Saint-Exupéry shows that spiritual growth must also involve active exploration. The narrator and the prince may be stranded in the desert, but they are both explorers who make a point of traveling the world around them. Through a combination of exploring the world and exploring their own feelings, the narrator and the little prince come to understand more clearly their own natures and their places in the world.

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