The Little Prince

by Antoine De Saint-Exupery · Language: EN

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Overview

The Little Prince by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry is a philosophical novella disguised as a children's story, exploring themes of loneliness, friendship, love, and loss. The narrative begins with a pilot, stranded in the Sahara Desert, who encounters a mysterious young boy from another planet, the Little Prince. Through their conversations, the pilot learns about the Prince's journey from his tiny asteroid, B-612, which he left due to a complicated relationship with a unique, demanding rose.

As the Little Prince recounts his travels across various asteroids, each inhabited by a single, peculiar adult (a king, a vain man, a drunkard, a businessman, a lamplighter, and a geographer), he offers a poignant critique of the narrow-mindedness, materialism, and lack of imagination prevalent in the adult world. His eventual arrival on Earth and his encounters with a snake, a garden of roses, a fox, a railway switchman, and a merchant further deepen his understanding of life, love, and the true meaning of connection. The book ultimately champions the innocent, imaginative perspective of childhood over the often-jaded and superficial views of adults, emphasizing that what is essential is invisible to the eye.

Key Takeaways

- Cultivate and protect your imagination, as it allows for deeper understanding and connection beyond superficial appearances.
- Recognize that true value often lies in the unique bond and effort invested in something, rather than its inherent rarity or quantity.
- Question societal norms and the pursuits of adults that often lead to isolation and a loss of genuine wonder.
- Embrace the vulnerability of forming attachments, understanding that love and friendship come with both joy and the potential for sorrow.
- Look beyond the surface to perceive the essential qualities of people and things, as true beauty and meaning are often hidden.
- Take responsibility for the relationships you cultivate, as you become accountable for those you choose to 'tame'.
- Remember that all grown-ups were once children, and try to retain a childlike sense of curiosity and open-mindedness.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter 1: The Narrator's Childhood Drawings

The narrator recounts his childhood experience of drawing a boa constrictor digesting an elephant, which adults mistook for a hat. This led him to abandon a career as an artist and become a pilot. He laments the inability of grown-ups to understand things "by themselves" and their constant need for explanations, forcing him to choose a practical profession. He carries this understanding of adults' limitations throughout his life, feeling isolated in his true perceptions.

Chapter 2: The Crash and the Encounter

Six years before telling his story, the narrator crashes his plane in the Sahara Desert, a thousand miles from any human habitation. With limited water, he faces a life-or-death situation. On his first night, he is startled by a small, extraordinary boy who asks him to draw a sheep. The narrator is amazed by the child's calm demeanor and unusual request, marking the beginning of their profound and unexpected friendship.

Chapters 3-4: The Little Prince's Origins

The narrator attempts to draw a sheep for the Little Prince, who rejects several attempts before accepting a drawing of a box, claiming the sheep is inside. Through their conversations, the narrator gradually learns that the Little Prince comes from a very small planet, Asteroid B-612, which was once discovered by a Turkish astronomer. The narrator emphasizes the absurdity of adults' focus on superficial details like clothing over essential matters, as the astronomer's discovery was only taken seriously after he wore Western clothes.

Chapter 5: The Baobabs

The Little Prince expresses his concern about baobab trees on his planet. He explains that if baobab sprouts are not pulled out immediately when they are tiny, they will grow to enormous sizes, their roots will eventually split his small planet apart. He emphasizes the importance of discipline and taking care of one's planet, likening the baobabs to a serious problem that must be addressed early. This chapter serves as an allegory for dealing with problems before they become insurmountable.

Chapters 6-7: Sunsets and Thorns

The Little Prince reveals his love for sunsets, explaining that on his tiny planet, he could watch them many times a day simply by moving his chair. He shares that he once saw forty-three sunsets in a single day when he was feeling sad. Later, he asks the narrator if sheep eat flowers with thorns, leading to a heated discussion. The narrator, frustrated with his plane repairs, responds harshly, causing the Little Prince to cry and reveal the depth of his love for a particular flower.

Chapters 8-9: The Rose and the Departure

The Little Prince describes the unique and beautiful rose that grew on his planet. She was vain, demanding, and full of self-importance, often fabricating stories to gain attention. Despite her flaws, the Little Prince loved her deeply but was too young to understand how to love her properly. Feeling hurt by her vanity and lies, he decided to leave his planet. Before his departure, he meticulously cleaned his volcanoes and said a poignant goodbye to his rose, who, in a moment of vulnerability, admitted her love for him.

Chapters 10-12: The First Three Planets

The Little Prince begins his journey, visiting several asteroids inhabited by solitary adults. On the first planet, he meets a King who believes he reigns over everything, even the stars, but only gives reasonable commands. On the second, he encounters a Vain Man who only wants to be admired and applauded. On the third, he finds a Drunkard who drinks to forget that he is ashamed of drinking. The Little Prince finds these adults utterly perplexing and absorbed in their own peculiar worlds.

Chapters 13-15: The Next Three Planets

Continuing his journey, the Little Prince visits a Businessman who is constantly counting and "owning" the stars, believing this makes him serious and important. Next, he meets a Lamplighter on a tiny planet who diligently lights and extinguishes his lamp every minute, following an absurd but dutiful command. Finally, he encounters a Geographer who records information about planets but never explores them himself, relying on explorers. The Geographer advises him to visit Earth, as it has a good reputation.

Chapters 16-17: Arrival on Earth and the Snake

The Little Prince arrives on Earth, landing in the Sahara Desert. He is initially surprised by the vastness and emptiness, having expected a more populated planet. He first encounters a Snake, who speaks in riddles and hints at his power to send people back to where they came from, suggesting he can help the Little Prince return to his planet. The Snake's mysterious words foreshadow the Little Prince's eventual departure.

Chapters 18-20: The Desert Flower and the Rose Garden

The Little Prince meets a lonely three-petaled desert flower, who tells him that humans have no roots and are easily blown about. He then climbs a high mountain, hoping to see all of humanity, but only hears his own echo, which he mistakes for humans repeating his words. Later, he discovers a garden full of thousands of roses, identical to his own. This sight deeply saddens him, as he had believed his rose was unique in the universe, making him feel less special.

Chapter 21: The Fox and the Art of Taming

The Little Prince meets a Fox, who teaches him the profound meaning of "taming." The Fox explains that taming creates bonds and makes individuals unique and important to one another. He describes the ritual involved in building a relationship, emphasizing patience and consistency.

Through this encounter, the Little Prince understands that his rose is indeed unique to him because he has "tamed" her and invested his time and love in her, making her special.

Chapters 22-23: The Switchman and the Merchant

The Little Prince encounters a railway switchman, observing the trains full of people rushing back and forth, never truly knowing where they are going or what they are seeking. The switchman notes that only children truly look out the windows and appreciate the journey. He then meets a merchant selling thirst-quenching pills, claiming they save fifty-three minutes a week. The Little Prince muses that if he had those minutes, he would simply walk slowly towards a spring of fresh water.

Chapters 24-25: The Search for Water and the Well

The narrator and the Little Prince are both desperately thirsty in the desert. The Little Prince speaks of the beauty of the desert because "somewhere it hides a well." They walk through the night, and the narrator carries the sleeping Little Prince, feeling the fragility of the child. They eventually find an old well, which miraculously appears in the sand. The water they draw is not just for thirst but tastes like a "gift," symbolizing the effort and meaning behind their search. The Little Prince then reveals his plan to return to his planet.

Chapters 26-27: The Farewell and the Narrator's Reflection

The Little Prince returns to the spot where he first landed, ready for the Snake to send him back. He comforts the narrator, explaining that his body will be left behind, but he will be alive among the stars. The narrator is heartbroken but understands. The Snake bites the Little Prince, who falls silently. The narrator finds solace in the stars, imagining the Little Prince's laughter. Six years later, the narrator still looks at the stars, wondering if the sheep he drew ate the Little Prince's rose, and asks readers to look up and remember his friend.

Themes

- Childlike innocence vs. adult rigidity
- The essence of true love
- Loneliness and friendship
- The importance of imagination
- Critique of adult society
- Loss and remembrance

Frequently Asked Questions

What is The Little Prince about?

The Little Prince is about a pilot stranded in the Sahara Desert who meets a young prince from another planet. Through their conversations, the story explores themes of love, loss, friendship, and the contrast between childlike innocence and the often-absurd preoccupations of adults. It's a philosophical tale about seeing with the heart.

Is The Little Prince worth reading?

Yes, The Little Prince is widely considered a timeless classic worth reading for all ages. Its simple language belies profound philosophical insights into human nature, relationships, and the importance of imagination. It offers a unique perspective on life that resonates deeply and encourages introspection.

How does The Little Prince end?

Spoiler: The Little Prince decides to return to his home planet, Asteroid B-612, to be reunited with his beloved rose. He explains to the pilot that he must leave his body behind, and allows a snake to bite him. His body disappears, leaving the pilot heartbroken but with the enduring memory of their friendship and the Prince's laughter in the stars.

Who should read The Little Prince?

The Little Prince is suitable for readers of all ages. While often categorized as children's literature, its deep philosophical themes and critiques of society make it particularly resonant for adults. Anyone interested in stories about friendship, love, imagination, and the meaning of life will find it rewarding.

How long does it take to read The Little Prince?

The Little Prince is a relatively short novella. Most readers can complete it in about 1 to 2 hours, depending on their reading speed. Its brevity makes it accessible, but its depth encourages rereading and reflection.

Best Quotes

“It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

21

This profound statement from the Fox teaches the Little Prince, and the reader, that true understanding and value come from emotional connection and intuition, not superficial appearances. It's a central theme about perception and the importance of inner qualities.

“You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.”

21

Spoken by the Fox, this line emphasizes the enduring commitment and duty that comes with forming a bond or relationship. It highlights the Little Prince's unique responsibility towards his rose, despite finding a garden full of similar flowers.

“All grown-ups were once children—although few of them remember it.”

Dedication / 1

This is a key introductory statement from the narrator, setting the stage for the book's critique of adult perspectives. It suggests that adults lose touch with imagination, wonder, and the essential truths understood by children.

“What makes the desert beautiful is that somewhere it hides a well.”

24

The Little Prince shares this insight with the narrator, suggesting that true beauty often lies in hidden potential, hope, or meaning, rather than obvious features. It speaks to the idea of searching for deeper value beneath the surface.

“Men have no more time to understand anything. They buy things all ready made at the shops. But there is no shop anywhere where one can buy friendship, and so men have no friends any more.”

21

The Fox laments the superficiality and hurried pace of adult life, where convenience has replaced the effort required to cultivate meaningful relationships. This quote underscores the value of patience and personal investment in forming bonds.

“It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.”

21

The Fox explains to the Little Prince that the unique value of his rose comes not from its inherent qualities, but from the love, care, and time he invested in it. This highlights the transformative power of personal connection and effort.

“You are beautiful, but you are empty. One could not die for you.”

20

The Little Prince says this to the garden of roses, realizing that while they look like his own flower, they lack the unique bond and history he shares with his rose. This moment clarifies his understanding of true love and uniqueness.

“I ought to have judged her by her acts and not by her words.”

21

The Little Prince reflects on his relationship with his rose, acknowledging his mistake in taking her boasts and complaints too seriously. This shows his growth in understanding that true affection is demonstrated through actions, not just spoken words.

“One runs the risk of weeping a little, if one allows himself to be tamed.”

21

The Fox warns the Little Prince about the emotional vulnerability that comes with forming deep connections. While taming brings joy and uniqueness, it also opens one up to the pain of separation and loss, a natural part of love.

“You know, one loves the sunset when one is so sad...”

6

The Little Prince shares this poignant observation with the narrator, revealing his deep loneliness and melancholy on his home planet. Sunsets become a symbol of his quiet sorrow and the simple comforts he sought in solitude.

“It is a question of discipline," the little prince said to me later on. "When you've finished your own toilet in the morning, then it is time to attend to the toilet of your planet, just so, with the greatest care.”

5

The Little Prince explains the importance of daily, diligent care for his planet, specifically removing baobab shoots. This metaphor emphasizes responsibility, foresight, and the need to address small problems before they become overwhelming.

“The stars are beautiful, because of a flower that cannot be seen.”

26

The Little Prince tells the narrator this, explaining how his love for his unique rose makes the entire universe more meaningful and beautiful. It illustrates how personal connections can imbue the vast, indifferent world with profound significance.

“I have always loved the desert. One sits down on a dune, sees nothing, hears nothing. Yet something shines, silently.”

24

The narrator expresses his deep affection for the desert, highlighting its quiet mystery and the hidden beauty or meaning it holds. This reflects the book's theme of finding the essential and invisible amidst apparent emptiness.

“Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.”

1

The narrator's frustration with adult literal-mindedness is evident here. This statement underscores the chasm between the imaginative, intuitive world of children and the practical, fact-oriented world of adults, a central conflict in the book.

“It is much more difficult to judge oneself than to judge others. If you succeed in judging yourself rightly, then you are indeed a man of true wisdom.”

10

The King on the first planet offers this advice, highlighting the challenge of self-awareness and self-critique. It's a subtle jab at the self-important adults the Little Prince encounters, who are quick to judge others but lack introspection.

“I wonder if the stars are lit up so that everybody will find his own one day.”

26

The Little Prince muses on the purpose of the stars, suggesting a universal longing for connection and belonging. This reflects his own search for understanding and the idea that everyone has a unique place or meaning to discover.

“The little prince never let go of a question once he had asked it.”

3

The narrator describes a key characteristic of the Little Prince: his persistent curiosity and unwavering pursuit of answers. This trait contrasts sharply with the dismissive or superficial attitudes of the adults he meets.

“I am a serious person. I don't play with trifles.”

13

The Businessman on the fourth planet declares this, embodying the adult obsession with material possessions and perceived importance. His words highlight the absurdity of prioritizing accumulation over genuine human experience and connection.

“For, after all, grown-ups were all children once (but few of them remember it).”

Dedication

This dedicatory note sets the tone for the entire book, lamenting the loss of childhood wonder and imagination in adulthood. It serves as a plea for adults to reconnect with their inner child.

“The men where you live," said the little prince, "raise five thousand roses in one garden... Yet they don't find what they're looking for...”

20

The Little Prince observes the futility of seeking happiness or meaning in abundance without personal connection. This highlights the difference between quantity and quality, and the idea that true value comes from unique bonds, not generic possessions.

Questions & Answers

What is the significance of the narrator's drawing of the boa constrictor?

The narrator's drawing of the boa constrictor, first from the outside (a hat) and then from the inside (an elephant being digested), highlights the fundamental difference between adult and child perception. Adults only see the superficial "hat" and lack imagination, requiring literal explanations. This early experience leads the narrator to abandon his artistic ambitions and illustrates the book's central theme: grown-ups often fail to understand what is truly essential, focusing instead on practicalities and appearances.

Why does the Little Prince leave his home planet?

The Little Prince leaves his home planet, Asteroid B-612, primarily due to his complicated and often frustrating relationship with his unique rose. He felt misunderstood and hurt by her vanity and perceived deceit, despite his deep affection. He embarked on a journey through the universe to seek understanding, companionship, and perhaps a clearer perspective on his own feelings and the nature of love, hoping to find answers beyond his small world.

Describe the Little Prince's relationship with his rose.

The Little Prince's relationship with his rose is complex, tender, and central to his character development. He loves her deeply, caring for her meticulously, but is also frustrated by her vanity, demands, and perceived untruthfulness. Their bond is one of unique attachment, despite her flaws. Through his journey, he realizes that his love and the time he invested make her special, teaching him about responsibility, the nature of love, and the pain of attachment.

What does the Fox teach the Little Prince?

The Fox teaches the Little Prince profound lessons about love, friendship, and the meaning of life. He explains the concept of "taming," which signifies forming unique, meaningful bonds through patience and ritual. The Fox reveals that "what is essential is invisible to the eye" and that "you become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed." He helps the Prince understand that the time and effort invested in his rose make her uniquely important to him.

Who are some of the adults the Little Prince meets on other planets, and what do they represent?

The Little Prince meets several adults, each embodying a critique of adult preoccupations. The King represents the desire for absolute power and control, even over nothing. The Vain Man symbolizes the need for constant admiration. The Drunkard is trapped in a cycle of shame and self-pity. The Businessman is obsessed with owning and counting stars, representing material accumulation. The Lamplighter is blindly devoted to duty without purpose. The Geographer is knowledgeable but lacks direct experience. Together, they illustrate the absurdity, isolation, and lack of true understanding in the adult world.

What is the main message or theme of "The Little Prince"?

The main message of "The Little Prince" is a profound critique of adult perspectives and a celebration of childhood innocence, imagination, and the essential truths of life. It emphasizes that true value lies in love, friendship, responsibility, and the unique bonds we form, rather than material possessions, power, or superficial appearances. The book encourages readers to see with their hearts and remember the wonder and wisdom of their inner child.

Why does the Little Prince ultimately decide to return to his planet?

The Little Prince ultimately decides to return to his planet because he realizes his unique responsibility and love for his rose. His journey, particularly his encounter with the Fox and the garden of roses, teaches him that his rose, despite her imperfections, is unique to him because of the time and care he invested. He understands that his true home and purpose are with her, and he must fulfill his commitment to her.

What does "taming" mean in the context of the book?

In "The Little Prince," "taming" refers to the process of forming a unique, meaningful, and reciprocal bond with another being. It involves patience, ritual, and a willingness to invest time and emotion, making each party special and essential to the other. The Fox explains that taming creates responsibility and makes one vulnerable to sorrow, but also brings profound joy and makes the tamed one unique in the world.

How does the narrator's perspective change throughout the story?

The narrator, initially a disillusioned adult who has given up on art and imagination, gradually regains a sense of wonder and understanding through his encounter with the Little Prince. He begins to see the world through the Prince's eyes, appreciating the essential and invisible. By the

end, he is deeply affected by the Prince's departure, cherishing their bond and urging readers to look for signs of his friend, signifying his renewed connection to childhood truths.

What is the significance of the baobab trees?

The baobab trees symbolize the dangers of unchecked problems and the importance of addressing issues diligently before they become overwhelming. On the Little Prince's tiny planet, if baobab shoots are not uprooted daily, they will eventually overrun and destroy the planet. This serves as a metaphor for the need for discipline, foresight, and consistent effort in tending to one's life, responsibilities, and even one's inner self.

What does the well in the desert symbolize?

The well in the desert symbolizes hope, hidden meaning, and the essential spiritual nourishment found in unexpected places. It represents the profound satisfaction that comes from seeking and discovering deeper truths, rather than superficial comforts. For the narrator and the Little Prince, finding the well is not just about quenching thirst, but about a shared journey and the discovery of something beautiful and meaningful amidst desolation.

Why does the Little Prince cry when he sees the garden of roses?

The Little Prince cries when he sees the garden of five thousand roses because it shatters his belief that his own rose was unique in the universe. He feels betrayed and insignificant, realizing his rose had exaggerated her specialness. This moment of disillusionment is crucial for his growth, as it prepares him to understand the Fox's lesson: true uniqueness comes from the bond and time invested, not from inherent rarity.

What is the role of the snake in the story?

The snake plays a pivotal, enigmatic role as a wise, ancient, and powerful figure who offers a way for the Little Prince to return home. He is the "riddle-solver" and the agent of the Prince's physical departure from Earth. The snake's bite, though fatal, is presented as a means of shedding the physical body to allow the spirit to return to its origin, symbolizing a transition between worlds and a form of liberation.

How does the book critique adult society?

The book critiques adult society by portraying grown-ups as narrow-minded, materialistic, self-important, and lacking imagination and true understanding. The adults the Little Prince encounters are obsessed with numbers, possessions, power, and superficial duties, failing to grasp the essential beauty and meaning of life. They have forgotten their childhood wonder, prioritizing "matters of consequence" over genuine human connection and the invisible truths of the heart.

What happens to the Little Prince at the end of the book?

Spoiler: At the end of the book, the Little Prince arranges for the snake to bite him, allowing his spirit to return to his home planet and his beloved rose. His physical body is left behind in the desert. The narrator is left with the profound grief of his friend's departure but also with the enduring lessons and memories. He asks readers to look for the Little Prince among the stars and to send word if he has returned.

What can readers learn about friendship from "The Little Prince"?

Readers can learn that true friendship requires patience, effort, and responsibility. The book teaches that forming a bond, or "taming," makes individuals unique and essential to each other, creating a deep, irreplaceable connection. It highlights that friendship involves both joy and the risk of sorrow, and that the time and care invested in a relationship are what give it profound value and meaning, making it more precious than any superficial acquaintance.

What is the meaning of the title "The Little Prince"?

The title "The Little Prince" refers to the central character, a young boy from a tiny asteroid who embodies innocence, wonder, and profound wisdom. He is "little" in stature and age, contrasting with the "grown-ups" he encounters, but "prince" in his inherent nobility, purity of heart, and the moral authority of his perspective. The title encapsulates the book's celebration of childhood virtues and its critique of adult folly.

Why does the narrator initially struggle to understand the Little Prince?

The narrator initially struggles to understand the Little Prince because, as a grown-up, he has been conditioned to think logically and practically, having suppressed his own childhood imagination. He tries to interpret the Prince's fantastical stories through an adult lens, focusing on facts and tangible evidence. It takes time, shared experiences, and the Prince's persistent questioning for the narrator to reconnect with his inner child and truly grasp the essential, invisible truths the Prince embodies.

What is the importance of imagination in the book?

Imagination is paramount in "The Little Prince," serving as the gateway to understanding essential truths that are invisible to the eye. The narrator's initial inability to see beyond his "hat" drawing symbolizes the adult loss of imagination. The Little Prince, however, sees sheep in boxes and understands the unique beauty of his rose, demonstrating how imagination allows for deeper connection, empathy, and appreciation of the world's hidden wonders, transcending mere facts.

How does the book suggest one can find happiness or meaning in life?

The book suggests that happiness and meaning in life are found not through material possessions, power, or superficial achievements, but through cultivating genuine relationships, embracing responsibility, and seeing the world with one's heart. It advocates for cherishing unique bonds, appreciating the simple wonders of life, and maintaining a childlike sense of

curiosity and imagination. True fulfillment comes from investing oneself in others and recognizing the essential, invisible beauty around us.