

The Little Prince

By Antoine de Saint-Exupery

This novel can be read on two distinct levels. On one level it is certainly a charming children's book, but it is never really meant for children. The second level, the adult level, is written almost entirely figuratively, or if you will, metaphorically. Ironically, Saint-Exupery does not use a great deal of specific figurative language, instead the figures of speech are generally much larger and yet, simultaneously much more subtle than you may have encountered in earlier novels. The deeper, figurative level requires much reflective thinking to draw the important nuances out of the novel. Be aware! Nothing is as simple as it seems. You must open your mind and your heart to understand this novel on the adult level. As the pilot journeys inward to rediscover the joy of life, you too must journey inward to understand the meaning of this novel.

As you read, pause often to contemplate both what Saint-Exupery is saying in a larger sense and the multiplicity of meanings he is offering in a smaller, more intimate sense. Do not just write down the first idea that pops into your head; examine your answers and be very thoughtful in your responses. By the way, it's not a bad thing to do a little research on Saint-Exupery and *The Little Prince*.

Notes: 1) The quotations and page numbers are based on Richard Howard's translation (Harcourt 2000). Your copy may be slightly different. 2) You might also want to download these questions and type your responses in the spaces provided. However, don't mosh everything together. 3) And, as you will always want to do for Mr. Erickson, answer using complete thoughts and questions.

1. Read a short biography of Saint-Exupery (there may be one in your book). Saint-Exupery really does crash in the Sahara Desert and he really does undergo some sort of spiritual trial and growth while he is there. How does that effect what you think about the novel?

2. After the adults fail to understand drawing number one, the pilot makes a drawing number two, which clearly demonstrates his point. Why then do the grown-ups dismiss him and tell him to focus on traditional learning instead of drawing? **Warning! This is one of those questions where I will expect you to dig deeper for an answer.**

3. **Clarify:** What is bothering the pilot when he first encounters the little prince? Reread the paragraph in chapter 2 which begins “So, I stared wide-eyed at this apparition . . .” (4) for additional insight.

4. Do you think the little prince is really there, or is the pilot hallucinating? Does it really matter? Explain. (You might want to use the word “fable” in your answer.

5. The little prince immediately recognizes the pilot’s drawing number one as a boa constrictor devouring an elephant? Why is this important?

6. According to the little prince, the drawing of the box better than the previous drawings of the sheep. What does this say about children versus adults?

7. Saint-Exupery writes in chapter 3, “Straight ahead you can’t go very far.” (8) When you examine this sentence, it makes no sense. How else can you get somewhere without going straight ahead of you? Analyze the sentence. What does Saint-Exupery really mean?

8. In chapter 4 we’re told about an astronomer. What is Saint-Exupery saying about the adult view of the world through this episode?

9. The pilot says that he is inspired to teach an important lesson when he drew the baobabs, and that's why they are the best drawing in the book. What is the lesson he is trying to teach?

10. In chapter 7 the little prince becomes very angry with the pilot. The subject is what constitutes "something serious." What is "something serious" to the pilot? What is "something serious" to the little prince? Symbolically, who does the pilot represent? Who does the little prince represent?

11. In chapter 8 we learn more about the relationship between the little prince and the flower. To you, does this seem like a broken relationship? Explain.

12. In contemplating chapter 8, do you think the rose really loves the little prince? What lines from the text lead you to that conclusion? Would the little prince agree with you? Why or why not?

13. In chapter 9, the rose says, "I need to put up with two or three caterpillars if I want to get to know the butterflies" (27). Metaphorically speaking, what does this mean?

14. In chapter 9 why does the rose not want the little prince to see her cry? Is this a positive or negative defense mechanism? Explain? Do you know anyone in your own life who utilizes the same defense mechanism?

15. Spend some thinking about the points the king makes about ordering people. In what ways is right? What are some problems with his philosophy? Considering how quickly does the little prince learn how to get around the king, how much power does the king really have?

16. In chapter 11, Saint-Exupery writes, “But the vain man did not hear him. Vain men never hear anything but praise” (34). How is the rose like, or perhaps unlike, the Vain Man?

17. What does the little prince find so depressing in chapter 12? What’s so ironic about the drunkard’s reasoning?

18. How is the Little Prince’s idea of ownership different than the Businessman’s?

19. The Lamplighter seems terribly absurd, so why does the Little Prince admire him?

20. What is ironic about the geographer in chapter 15? State the kind of irony and explain why it is ironic?
21. Metaphorically speaking, what do the geographer and the explorer represent? Which one are you most like? Why?
22. Reread the first paragraph of chapter 17. What point is Saint-Exupery making about the importance of humanity on the earth? Why would his profession as a pilot have affected this particular perspective?
23. What can the snake do for the little prince? Explain how this is either good or bad?
24. In what way might the snake be able to solve all the riddles?
25. At the end of chapter 19, the little prince encounters his own echo and jumps to the conclusion that the people are unimaginative. Compare the little prince's response to all of this to the flower in chapter 18. How are the Little Prince and the three petaled flower similar and different?
26. In chapter 20 the little prince comes upon a rose garden and is struck with sadness. Why would his rose be very much annoyed if she knew about the rose garden?

27. According to the fox, what does, “to tame” mean? How does taming someone or something make them, “unique in all the world?”

28. Translate the fox’s secret in your own words (page 63). Discuss whether you believe this is true or not.

29. Saint-Exupery is giving us quite a different perspective on love and friendship here. The fox says, “It is the time you spent (some translations say “wasted”) on your rose that makes your rose so important” (64). What does he mean by *spent*? Is this time really wasted? What point is Saint-Exupery making about love and friendship?

30. Are we responsible for what we have tamed (64)? Is this true? Why or why not?

31. In chapter 22 why do the adults sleep? Why do the children press their faces to the window?

32. Why does Saint-Exupery have the salesclerk selling a pill for water instead of a pill for food? (Think symbolically.)

33. Symbolically, what does the well represent? Think about water itself. It is used in many important spiritual rituals, specifically baptism. What does it represent in those rituals? How do the two symbols connect?

34. The last sentence of chapter 25 reads, “You risk tears if one let yourself be tamed?” (73) Why? Is it worth it?

35. Reread the paragraph, which begins, “I had loosened the yellow scarf...” (74). Why does the pilot dare not ask the little prince any more questions?

36. According to the little prince, in chapter 26, the stars will have changed for the pilot. What does he mean by this? (Think of the fox and the wheat field.)

37. Why does the little prince let the snake bite him?

38. Reread the paragraph in chapter 27 which discusses how the pilot has been somewhat consoled (Second Paragraph). What happened to the little prince's body? Is he ever really there? How do you know?

39. So, what is the great Mystery?

41. Is the snake evil or good? How do you know?

42. Is the pilot better off for having known the little prince? Why or why not?

