**THE HAPPY PRINCE**

**by Oscar Wilde**

**Look at the title. What kind of text could it be? Why?**

High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was **gilded**[[1]](#footnote-1) all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright **sapphires[[2]](#footnote-2),** and a large red **ruby[[3]](#footnote-3)** **glowed[[4]](#footnote-4)** on his **sword-hilt[[5]](#footnote-5).**

He was very admired. “He is as beautiful as a **weathercock[[6]](#footnote-6),**” said one of the Town Councillors, “only not so useful,” he added as he didn't want people think he was unpractical, which he really was not.

“Why can’t you be like the Happy Prince?” asked a sensible mother of her little boy who was crying for the moon. “The Happy Prince never dreams of crying for anything.”

“I am glad there is someone in the world who is quite happy,” said a disappointed man as he looked at the wonderful statue.

“He looks just like an angel,” said the Charity Children as they came out of the cathedral in their bright scarlet cloaks and their clean white pinafores[[7]](#footnote-7).

“How do you know?” said the Mathematical Master, “you have never seen one.”

“Ah! but we have, in our dreams,” answered the children; and the Mathematical Master **frowned**[[8]](#footnote-8) and looked very severe, for he did not approve of children dreaming.

One night a little **Swallow[[9]](#footnote-9)** flew over the city**.** His friends had gone away to Egypt six weeks before, but he had stayed behind, for he was in love with the most beautiful **Reed**[[10]](#footnote-10). He had met her early in the spring as he was flying down the river after a big yellow **moth**[[11]](#footnote-11), and had been so attracted by her slender waist that he had stopped to talk to her.

“Shall I love you?” said the Swallow, who liked to come to the point at once, and the Reed made him a low bow. So he flew round and round her, touching the water with his wings, and making silver ripples. This was his courtship, and it lasted all through the summer.

“It is a ridiculous attachment,” **twittered**[[12]](#footnote-12) the other Swallows; “she has no money, and far too many relations”; and indeed the river was quite full of Reeds. Then, when the autumn came they all flew away.

After they had gone he felt lonely, and became tired of his lady-love. “She has no conversation,” he said, “and I am afraid that she is a coquette, for she is always flirting with the wind.” And certainly, whenever the wind blew, the Reed made the most graceful **curtseys**[[13]](#footnote-13). “I admit that she is domestic,” he continued, “but I love travelling, and my wife, consequently, should love travelling also.”

“Will you come away with me?” he said finally to her; but the Reed shook her head, she was so attached to her home.

“You have made fun of me,” he cried. “I am going to the Pyramids. Good- bye!” and he flew away.

All day long he flew, and at night-time he arrived at the city. “Where shall I **put up**[[14]](#footnote-14)?” he said; “I hope the town has made preparations.”

Then he saw the statue on the tall column.

“I will put up there,” he cried; “it is a fine position, with plenty of fresh air.” So he alighted[[15]](#footnote-15) just between the feet of the Happy Prince.

“I have a golden bedroom,” he said softly to himself as he looked round, and he prepared to go to sleep; but just as he was putting his head under his wing a large drop of water fell on him. “What a curious thing!” he cried; “there is not a single cloud in the sky, the stars are quite clear and bright, and yet it is raining. The climate in the north of Europe is really dreadful. The Reed used to like the rain, but that was merely her selfishness.”

Then another drop fell.

“What is the use of a statue if it cannot keep the rain off?” he said; “I must look for a good chimney-pot,” and he determined to fly away.

But before he had opened his wings, a third drop fell, and he looked up, and saw—Ah! what did he see?

**GROUP WORK**

**1. Discuss with your classmates of the following statements are TRUE or FALSE. Give reasons quoting the lines of the text.**

1. The setting of the first part of the story is a city
2. The Happy Prince was a real person before they made a statue to remember him
3. Everybody in the town admired the statue of the Happy Prince
4. A Swallow decided to stay in town because he didn't want to leave his beloved Reed.
5. The Swallow realized he wanted to spend all his life with his beloved.
6. The Swallow found shelter on the top of the statue of the Happy Prince but it started to rain and he flew away.
7. The Swallow liked the climate in northern Europe.

**2. Write one or more adjectives from the text to define the characters appearing in the first part of the story.**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_statue \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_the Town Councillor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_mother \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_boy

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_man \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Charity Children \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Mathematical Master

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Swallow \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_Reed

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The eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, and tears were running down his golden cheeks. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little Swallow was filled with pity.

“Who are you?” he said. “I am the Happy Prince.”

“Why are you **weeping**[[16]](#footnote-16) then?” asked the Swallow; “I am all wet".

“When I was alive and had a human heart,” answered the statue, “I did not know what tears were, for I lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow is not allowed to enter. In the daytime I played with my companions in the garden, and in the evening I led the dance in the Great Hall. Round the garden ran a very **lofty**[[17]](#footnote-17) wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers called me the Happy Prince, and happy indeed I was, if pleasure be happiness. So I lived, and so I died. And now that I am dead they have set me up here so high that I can see all the ugliness and all the misery of my city, and though my heart is made of **lead[[18]](#footnote-18)** yet I cannot chose but weep.”

“What! is he not solid gold?” said the Swallow to himself. He was too polite to make any personal remarks out loud.

“Far away,” continued the statue in a low musical voice, “far away in a little street there is a poor house. One of the windows is open, and through it I can see a woman seated at a table. Her face is thin and worn, and she has coarse, red hands, all **prick**ed[[19]](#footnote-19) by the needle, for she is a seamstress. She is **embroidering[[20]](#footnote-20)** passion-flowers on a satin gown for the loveliest of the Queen’s maids-of-honour to wear at the next Court-ball. In a bed in the corner of the room her little boy is lying ill. He has a fever, and is asking for oranges. His mother has nothing to give him but river water, so he is crying. Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow, will you not bring her the ruby out of my sword-hilt? My feet are fastened[[21]](#footnote-21) to this pedestal and I cannot move.”

“I am waited for in Egypt,” said the Swallow. “My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus-flowers. Soon they will go to sleep in the tomb of the great King. The King is there himself in his painted **coffin**[[22]](#footnote-22). He is **wrapped**[[23]](#footnote-23) in yellow linen, and embalmed[[24]](#footnote-24) with spices. Round his neck is a chain of pale green **jade[[25]](#footnote-25)**, and his hands are like **withered**[[26]](#footnote-26) leaves.”

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me for one night, and be my messenger? The boy is so thirsty, and the mother so sad.”

“I don’t think I like boys,” answered the Swallow. “Last summer, when I was staying on the river, there were two rude boys, the miller’s sons, who were always throwing stones at me. They never hit me, of course; we swallows fly far too well for that, and **besides**[[27]](#footnote-27), I come of a family famous for its agility; but still, it was a mark of disrespect.”

But the Happy Prince looked so sad that the little Swallow was sorry. “It is very cold here,” he said; “but I will stay with you for one night, and be your messenger.”

“Thank you, little Swallow,” said the Prince.

So the Swallow picked out the great ruby from the Prince’s sword, and flew away with it in his beak over the roofs of the town.

He passed by the cathedral tower, where the white marble angels were sculptured. He passed by the palace and heard the sound of dancing. A beautiful girl came out on the balcony with her lover. “How wonderful the stars are,” he said to her, “and how wonderful is the power of love!”

“I hope my dress will be ready in time for the State-ball,” she answered; “I have ordered passion-flowers to be embroidered on it; but the seamstresses are so lazy.”

He passed over the river, and saw the lanterns hanging to the **masts**[[28]](#footnote-28) of the ships. He passed over the Ghetto, and saw the old Jews **bargaining** [[29]](#footnote-29)with each other. At last he came to the poor house and looked in. The boy was tossing feverishly on his bed, and the mother had fallen asleep, she was so tired. In he hopped, and laid the great ruby on the table beside the woman’s **thimble**[[30]](#footnote-30). Then he flew gently round the bed, caressing the boy’s forehead with his wings. “How cool I feel,” said the boy, “I think I am getting better”; and he fell asleep.

Then the Swallow flew back to the Happy Prince, and told him what he had done. “It is curious,” he remarked, “but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold.”

“That is because you have done a good action,” said the Prince. And the little Swallow began to think, and then he fell asleep. Thinking always made him sleepy.

When day broke he flew down to the river and had a bath. “What a remarkable phenomenon,” said the Professor of Ornithology as he was passing over the bridge. “A swallow in winter!” And he wrote a long letter about it to the local newspaper.

“Tonight I go to Egypt,” said the Swallow. He visited all the public monuments, and sat a long time on top of the church **steeple**[[31]](#footnote-31)..

When the moon came up he flew back to the Happy Prince. “Have you any commissions for Egypt?” he cried; “I am just starting.”

**GROUP WORK**

**Answer the questions.**

1. Why is the statue crying?
2. What was the life of the Prince like when he was alive?
3. Who lives in the little street and why is the Prince so worried for her?
4. What is she doing?
5. What does the Prince has the Swallow and how does he answer?
6. Who does the Swallow meet while is on the way to the seamstress' house?
7. How does he feel when he returns to the Prince?
8. Which decision does the Swallow make?

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“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me one night longer?”

“They wait for me in Egypt,” answered the Swallow.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “far away across the city I see a young man in a **garret**[[32]](#footnote-32). He is l**eaning**[[33]](#footnote-33) over a desk covered with papers, and in a glass by his side there is a bunch of withered violets. His hair is brown and crisp, and his lips are red as a pomegranate, and he has large and dreamy eyes. He is trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre, but he is too cold to write any more. There is no fire in the grate, and hunger has made him **faint**[[34]](#footnote-34).”

“I will wait with you one night longer,” said the Swallow, who really had a good heart. “Shall I take him another ruby?”

“Alas! I have no ruby now,” said the Prince; “my eyes are all that I have left. They are made of rare sapphires, which were brought out of India a thousand years ago. Pluck out one of them and take it to him. He will sell it to the jeweller, and buy food and firewood, and finish his play.”

“Dear Prince,” said the Swallow, “I cannot do that”; and he began to weep. “Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “do as I command you.”

So the Swallow plucked out the Prince’s eye, and flew away to the student’s garret. It was easy enough to get in, as there was a hole in the roof. Through this he darted, and came into the room. The young man had his head buried in his hands, so he did not hear the flutter of the bird’s wings, and when he looked up he found the beautiful sapphire lying on the withered violets.

“I am beginning to be appreciated,” he cried; “this is from some great admirer. Now I can finish my play,” and he looked quite happy.

The next day the Swallow flew down to the **harbour**[[35]](#footnote-35). He sat on the mast of a large **vessel**[[36]](#footnote-36) and watched the sailors working hard. “I am going to Egypt”! cried the Swallow, but nobody minded, and when the moon rose he flew back to the Happy Prince.

“I am come to say you good-bye,” he cried.

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “will you not stay with me one night longer?”

“It is winter,” answered the Swallow, “and the chill snow will soon be here. In Egypt the sun is warm on the green palm-trees, and the crocodiles lie in the mud and look lazily about them. Dear Prince, I must leave you, but I will never forget you, and next spring I will bring you back two beautiful jewels in place of those you have given away. The ruby shall be redder than a red rose, and the sapphire shall be as blue as the great sea.”

“In the square below,” said the Happy Prince, “there stands a little match-girl. She has let her **matches**[[37]](#footnote-37) fall in the **gutter**[[38]](#footnote-38), and they are all **spoiled**[[39]](#footnote-39). Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money, and she is crying. She has no shoes or stockings, and her little head is bare. Pluck out my other eye, and give it to her, and her father will not beat her.”

“I will stay with you one night longer,” said the Swallow, “but I cannot pluck out your eye. You would be quite blind then.”

“Swallow, Swallow, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “do as I command you.”

So he plucked out the Prince’s other eye, and **darted down**[[40]](#footnote-40) with it. He swooped past the match-girl, and **slipped**[[41]](#footnote-41) the jewel into the palm of her hand. “What a lovely bit of glass,” cried the little girl; and she ran home, laughing.

Then the Swallow came back to the Prince. “You are blind now,” he said, “so I will stay with you always.”

“No, little Swallow,” said the poor Prince, “you must go away to Egypt.”

“I will stay with you always,” said the Swallow, and he slept at the Prince’s feet.

**GROUP WORK**

1. Who is the second man the Prince wants to help? What's his job? What does he look like?
2. What does the Prince ask the Swallow to do? How does he react?
3. What does the man think when he sees the sapphire?
4. Who is the girl the Prince wants to help? How does he help her?
5. What happens to the Prince after that?
6. What does the Swallow decide to do?

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All the next day he sat on the Prince’s shoulder, and told him stories of what he had seen in strange lands. He told him of the red ibises, who stand in long rows on the banks of the Nile, and catch gold-fish in their beaks; of the Sphinx, who is as old as the world itself, and lives in the desert, and knows everything; of the merchants, who walk slowly by the side of their camels, and carry amber **beads**[[42]](#footnote-42) in their hands; of the King of the Mountains of the Moon, who is as black as ebony, and worships a large crystal.

“Dear little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you tell me of marvellous things, but more marvellous than anything is the suffering of men and of women. There is no Mystery so great as Misery. Fly over my city, little Swallow, and tell me what you see there.”

So the Swallow flew over the great city, and saw the rich living happily in their beautiful houses, while the **beggars**[[43]](#footnote-43) were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark streets, and saw the white faces of **starving**[[44]](#footnote-44) children looking out at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge two little boys were lying in one another’s arms to try and keep themselves warm. “How hungry we are!” they said. “You must not lie here,” shouted the Watchman, and they wandered out into the rain.

Then he flew back and told the Prince what he had seen.

“I am covered with fine gold,” said the Prince, “you must take it off, leaf by leaf, and give it to my poor; the living always think that gold can make them happy.”

Leaf after leaf of the fine gold the Swallow picked off, till the Happy Prince looked quite dull and grey. Leaf after leaf of the fine gold he brought to the poor, and the children’s faces grew rosier, and they laughed and played games in the street. “We have bread now!” they cried.

Then the snow came, and after the snow came the frost. The poor little Swallow was feeling really cold, but he didn't want to leave the Prince, he loved him too well. He picked up crumbs outside the baker’s door when the baker was not looking and tried to keep himself warm by **flapping**[[45]](#footnote-45) his wings.

But at last he knew that he was going to die. He had just strength to fly up to the Prince’s shoulder once more. “Good-bye, dear Prince!” he murmured, “will you let me kiss your hand?”

“I am glad that you are going to Egypt at last, little Swallow,” said the Prince, “you have stayed too long here; but you must kiss me on the lips, for I love you.”

“It is not to Egypt that I am going,” said the Swallow. “I am going to the House of Death. Death is the brother of Sleep, is he not?”

And he kissed the Happy Prince on the lips, and fell down dead at his feet.

At that moment a curious crack sounded inside the statue, as if something had broken. The fact is that the leaden heart had snapped right in two. It certainly was a dreadfully hard frost.

**GROUP WORK**

**1. Make 6 questions about the text you have just read.**

**2. How will the story finish? Write your ideas.**

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Early the next morning the **Mayo**r[[46]](#footnote-46) was walking in the square below with the Town Councillors. As they passed the column he looked up at the statue: “Dear me! how **shabby**[[47]](#footnote-47) the Happy Prince looks!” he said.

“How shabby indeed!” cried the Town Councillors, who always agreed with the Mayor; and they went up to look at it.

“The ruby has fallen out of his sword, his eyes are gone, and he is golden no longer,” said the Mayor in fact, “he is little better than a beggar!”

“Little better than a beggar,” said the Town Councillors.

“And here is actually a dead bird at his feet!” continued the Mayor. “We must really make a law that birds are not to be allowed to die here.”

So they pulled down the statue of the Happy Prince. “As he is no longer beautiful he is no longer useful,” said the Art Professor at the University.

Then they **melted**[[48]](#footnote-48) the statue in a furnace.

“What a strange thing!” said the workmen at the foundry. “This broken lead heart will not melt in the furnace. We must throw it away.” So they threw it on a dust-heap where the dead Swallow was also lying.

“Bring me the two most precious things in the city,” said God to one of His Angels; and the Angel brought Him the leaden heart and the dead bird.

“You have rightly chosen,” said God, “for in my garden of Paradise this little bird shall sing for evermore, and in my city of gold the Happy will praise me.

**Answer the following questions**

1. Why were the Mayor and the Town Councillor surprised about the statue?
2. What did they decide to do?
3. Where did they bring the statue and what for?
4. How does the story end? Would you say it's a happy ending?

**ANALYSIS (Copy the table it on your exercise book)**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Plot summary**  *Tell in two or three sentences what happens in the story* |  |
| **Protagonist (s)**  *Describe them and say if they have changed throughout the story and why* |  |
| **Minor characters** |  |
| **Setting**  *Describe the place and time, era, season, atmosphere, climate, "world" in which the action occurs* |  |
| **Figurative language** | Look for the underlined phrases in the first part of the text and complete:  1. Simile \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  2. Metaphor \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  3. Personification\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  Is the title symbolic? If so, why? |
| **Themes** | **Choose the themes of the story. Give reason for your choice**  love, sacrifice, beauty, appearance, friendship, corruption, selfishness, social injustice, ........................ |
| **Literary genre** | **Is The Happy Prince a fairy tale or a fable or a short story? Look at the features of these genres and say which fits best.**   |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | | **A fairy tale..**  **- is set in the past**  **-** uses some form or variation of "Once upon a time"  - has fantasy or make-believe elements  - has enchanted setting  - has magical elements  - teaches a lesson  - usually ends happily | **A Fable...**  - provides a moral  - animals are the main characters  - animals are personified | **A Short story...**  - is Shorter than a novel  - has one single plot  - is at least 5000 words long  - has one or two main characters | |
| **Your opinion** |  |

1. dorato [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. zaffiro [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. rubino [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. risplendere [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. impugnatura della spada [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. segnavento [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. scamiciato [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. corrucciò il volto [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. rondine [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. canna, giunco [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. falena [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. cinguettare [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. riverenza [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. alloggiare [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. posarsi [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. piangere [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. elevato [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. piombo [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. punti [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. ricamare [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. fissato [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. bara [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. avvolto [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. imbalsamato [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. giada [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. appassiti [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. inoltre [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. albero (della nave) [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. contrattare [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. ditale [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. campanile [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. soffitta [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. inclinarsi [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. svenire [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. porto [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. nave [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. fiammifero [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. canale di scolo [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. rovinato [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. lanciarsi [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. far scivolare [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. perline di ambra [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. mendicante [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. morire di fame [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. sbattere [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. sindaco [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. trasandato [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. fondere [↑](#footnote-ref-48)