

CHAPTER 05

The Happy Prince

by Oscar Wilde

Chapter Sketch

The story 'The Happy Prince' by Oscar Wilde is a story of a prince and a little swallow. The Happy Prince was a beautiful statue on a tall column in the city. The story throws light on the problems of social inequality, the healing power of love and the loss of innocence. The statue of Happy Prince used to be very happy when alive because he was kept ignorant of any sadness or suffering outside his palace walls. He was kept on a high pedestal after his death. His statue was made of gold, ruby and other jewels. His placement atop allows him to witness for the first time the pain and misery experienced by the poor of the city of whom he had remained ignorant.

A swallow bird and the statue of a prince sacrificed their happiness and wealth for the good of others who are more needy than them.

About the Characters

The Happy Prince He is a beautiful statue which parts with all its wealth to help the poor and needy.

The Swallow He is a migrant bird who sacrifices his life to help the Prince in distributing his valuables among the poor.

Summary of the Chapter

The Statue of Happy Prince

A statue of a Prince is installed at the top of a tall column in the city. He was a real Prince at one time. He was happy when alive because he was kept ignorant of any sadness or suffering outside his palace walls. His life was one of joy and fulfilled desires. Upon his death, a statue was made depicting him which was covered in gold, had beautiful sapphires for eyes and had a ruby attached to the handle of his sword. Because of the value society places on gold and jewels, he was thought to be quite beautiful. 'Useless', remarked a Town Councillor, 'but beautiful.'

He is adored by all who see him. Unfortunately for the statue, his placement atop a high hill allows him to witness, for the first time, the pain and misery experienced by the poor of the city, of whom he had remained ignorant when alive.

The Swallow Arrives the Statue

The statue, once happy, now weeps with sadness to see the plight of so many who have so little. A self-serving swallow bird, on its annual winter migration to Egypt, arrives to take overnight shelter beneath this statue and eventually becomes affected with gratitude by the statue's kindness and desire to help others.

Swallow becomes Messenger to the Prince

The swallow becomes the statue's messenger and agrees to remove the jewels and the gold from it on the Prince's commands to bring contentment (satisfaction) badly needed financial security and compassion to the needy people seen by the Prince. These needy people include

- a seamstress, who has no money to feed her ill child, who is given the ruby,
- a young man who is too poor to buy coal for his fireplace in the winter, who is given a sapphire,

- a poor young girl who is barefoot and without a covering for the head in winter, who is given the other sapphire and
- many poor and starving people, who were given parts of the gold leaf covering the Prince's statue.

The swallow acts as a messenger of the Prince to carry the jewels and gold to these needy people. As the statue's gold and jewels are taken and distributed among the poor, the Prince is no longer able to see the impoverished people around him as his eyes have been removed. He knows that poverty is there, and he is not blind to the sufferings of others as he once was. Even without eyes to see, he knows that poverty exists.

Winter Sets in and Swallow Dies

Eventually, as winter comes and it starts snowing, the swallow lies at the feet of the statue and dies from exposure (to the acute cold) and exhaustion (tired). He could never reach Egypt because he exchanged his dream of a warm climate and comfort with a bigger dream - to bring help to those who are in need.

Statue Breaks and is Melted

The heart of the sculpture cracks with sadness at the loss of his friend the swallow. The most beautiful part of the statue, the kind and giving heart-could not be seen from the outside.

Upon seeing the statue in such despair, the powerful people of the city - the Town Councillors and the Mayor - decide that he is no longer useful, because he is no longer beautiful. Much like the poor, who were exploited and tossed away by the rich, the statue is taken down. When the statue is melted in a furnace, the broken heart made of lead does not melt. It is thrown away onto a dust heap where the dead swallow also lay.

God Asks for Two Most Precious Things

God asked for one of his Angels to bring him the two most precious things in the city. The Angel brought leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead swallow. God praised the choice of Angel. God said that the little bird should sing forever in his garden of paradise and the Happy Prince would praise him forever in his city of gold.

» Chapter Highlights

- 1 A statue of a Prince is installed at the top of a tall column in the city. His statue was covered in gold, had beautiful sapphires for eyes and had a ruby attached to the handle of his sword.
- 2 When he was alive, he was happy because he was ignorant of the sadness and suffering of his people.
- 3 The statue's placement allowed him to witness the pain and misery experienced by the poor of the city. This brought tears to his eyes.
- 4 The tears fell on a swallow bird who had taken overnight shelter under the statue on his annual winter migration to Egypt.
- 5 The swallow eventually becomes affected by the statue's kindness and desire to help others. He carries the jewels, on the request of the statue, to the various people who need help.
- 6 These needy people include a seamstress, a young man, a poor young girl and many poor and starving people.
- 7 As the statue's gold and jewels are taken and redistributed among the poor, the Prince is no longer able to see, as his eyes have been removed. But, he knows that poverty exists in the city.
- 8 As winter comes, the swallow dies from exposure and exhaustion. He could never reach Egypt because he exchanged his dream of a warm climate and comfort with a bigger dream - to bring help to those who are in need.
- 9 The heart of the Prince cracks with sadness at the loss of his friend, the swallow.
- 10 Upon seeing the statue in such disrepair, the powerful people of the city decide that it is no longer useful, because it is no longer beautiful.
- 11 So the statue is taken down. When the statue is melted in a furnace, the broken heart, made of lead, does not melt. It is thrown away onto a dust heap where the dead swallow also lay.

Word Meanings

The given page nos. correspond to the pages in the prescribed textbook

Word	Meaning
PAGE 28	
column	pillar
gilded	thinly covered
sapphires	transparent blue precious stones
hilt	handle
alighted	flew down to

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Word	Meaning
PAGE 29	
putting ... under ... wing	preparing to sleep
determined	decided
pity	sympathy
drenched	made completely wet
courtiers	prince's companions
ugliness	unpleasantness
misery	unhappiness
cannot choose but weep	have no choice except to cry
solid gold	fully made of gold
polite	full of respect
personal remarks	comments about a person
worn	old and wrinkled
coarse	rough
pricked	punctured/damaged
seamstress	female tailor
pedestal	platform
PAGE 30	
friends	other swallows
messenger	one who takes message
cathedral	main church
marble angels	marble statues of God's messengers
sculptured	made
state ball	government dance programme
tossing feverishly	unsteady with fever
mast	a tall pole of ship
thimble	cap worn on finger for protection
delicious slumber	peaceful sleep
day broke	morning came
PAGE 31	
prospect	possibility
steeple	top of a church
commissions	work
garret	small room on roof
withered violets	dried up blue-purple flowers
crisp	hard
pomegranate	fruit
director	a person who gives directions in play etc
grate	metal frame of fireplace
playwright	person who writes dramas
PAGE 32	
cannot	do not want to
command	order
flutter	flap wings quickly

Word	Meaning
appreciated	liked / recognised
harbour	place where ships are kept in a port
vessel	ship
palm	a tree
square	open area in a town
matchgirl	girl selling matchsticks
spoiled	not usable
PAGE 33	
bare	without any cap or hat
pluck out	remove
swooped	flew down fast
slipped	dropped carefully
strange lands	various places
marvellous	wonderful
suffering	hardship
misery	hardships
listlessly	as if without life
fine	thin layer of
leaf by / after leaf	part by / after part
starve	to remain hungry
dull and grey	not attractive
PAGE 34	
bread	food
scarlet	bright red
skated	moved on skates
crumbs	fragments of bread flapping
murmur	whisper
the brother of	something like
fell down dead	died
curious crack sounded	strange cracking sound came from
leaden heart	heart made of lead
snapped	broken
dreadfully hard	extremely bad
Mayor	head of the municipal council
Councillors	members of the municipal council
frust	white powdery layer of ice
shabby	worn out and dirty
actually	in reality
proclamation	government order
PAGE 35	
Town Clerk	municipal council secretary
foundry	furnace where metal is melted
garden of Paradise	heaven
city of gold	heavenly city

NCERT FOLDER

(Here we have covered questions given in the NCERT textbook along with their answers.)

Think About It (Page 36)

- 1 Why do the courtiers call the prince 'the Happy Prince'? Is he really happy? What does he see all around him?

Or Why was the prince called the 'Happy Prince' by the courtiers?

Ans. The courtiers called the Prince 'the Happy Prince' because he was always happy when he was alive. He did not know what sadness was because he lived in a palace where sorrow was not allowed to enter. However, when he died and was made into a statue installed on a tall column overlooking the city, he could see the sorrow and poverty in many homes. Thus, he was not happy and tears flowed down his eyes on seeing the state of his city, as he could see all the misery and ugliness of the city around him.

- 2 Why does the Happy Prince send a ruby for the seamstress? What does the swallow do in the seamstress' house?

Ans. The Happy Prince sent a ruby for the seamstress as she was extremely poor and could not feed her child who was suffering from fever. The swallow, on being persuaded by the prince, went to the seamstress' house. But, the seamstress had fallen asleep, so the swallow kept the ruby on the table where the woman worked. He then flew around the bed, fanning the boy's forehead with his wings. This made the boy feel cool and relaxed and he went to sleep.

- 3 For whom does the Prince send the sapphires and why?

Ans. The prince sent the sapphires for two people: the young writer across the city and the poor girl selling matches, who had lost all the matches she had.

The young man was trying to finish a play for the Director of the theatre. However, he became too cold to write anymore, there was no coal in his fireplace and hunger had made him faint. The sapphire was sent to the young playwright so that he could sell it to the jeweller buy firewood and finish his play. On seeing the sapphire, the young man felt appreciated and believed that he could finish his play.

The Happy Prince then saw a poor little girl selling matches, who was standing in the square just below him. She had let her matches fall in the gutter because of which they were all spoiled. The prince knew that her father would beat her if she did not bring home some money. When the swallow slipped the jewel into the palm of the little girl's hand, she ran home happy and laughing.

- 4 What does the swallow see when it flies over the city?

Ans. When the swallow flies over the city he sees the stark contrast of riches and poverty. He saw rich men enjoying life, unaware of the plight of the poor nearby. The swallow saw the worst conditions of life of the poor when they were denied even a sound sleep by police patrolling the street.

- 5 Why did the swallow not leave the Prince and go to Egypt?

Or Why did the swallow decide not to leave the Prince?

Or Why did the swallow decide to stay with Happy Prince?

Ans. As the Prince had given away the two sapphires of his eyes, he had become blind. Therefore, the swallow decided to stay forever with the Prince and not to migrate to Egypt.

This shows that the swallow was so affected by the Prince's kindness that he decided to stay back with the Prince, particularly as he was now blind, rather than flying to Egypt to be with his friends. What this suggests is that kind-hearted people always attract friends who will stay with them forever.

- 6 What were the two precious things brought to God by the angels?

Or What are the precious things mentioned in the story and why are they precious? (The Happy Prince)

Or What were the two precious things in the story of 'Happy Prince'? Why were they so precious?

Or In the story "The Happy Prince" what are the two most precious things? What makes them so precious?

Ans. The precious things mentioned in the story are the heart of the Prince made of lead and the dead bird. They are precious because both the Prince and the swallow were very kind, generous and selfless. The Prince could not bear to see the ugliness, misery and suffering in his city and gave away all his precious stones and gold to make his people happy.

Similarly the swallow sacrificed his migration to Egypt and acted as the Prince's messenger, carrying the precious stones and gold to the needy, spreading happiness all around. When the Prince was blind, he still loved him so much that he never left him, even though it kept getting colder and colder with winter approaching. Finally when he could no longer bear the cold, he died at the feet of the statue and the statue loved him so much that its lead heart broke into two.

That is why, when God asked one of the angels to bring him the two precious things in the garden, the angel took the lead heart and the dead bird and God said that in his garden of Paradise the little bird shall sing forever and in the city of gold the Happy Prince shall praise God.

Talk About It (Page 36)

- 1 The little swallow says, "It is curious, but I feel quite warm now, although it is so cold." Have you ever had such a feeling? Share your experience with your friends.

Ans. Whenever we help others, we get a feeling of satisfaction. Here the swallow feels good i.e. warm, despite the cold, because he has helped others in their time of need. He did these acts of selfless service with devotion. Thus, he does not feel the cold; instead, he feels good.

(Students can share their personal experiences here.)

Read the following extracts carefully and choose the correct option.

- 1** "Where shall I put up?" he said. "I hope the town has made preparations."
- (i) Who is speaking the words in the above extract?
 (a) The Happy Prince (b) The Swallow
 (c) The Peacock (d) The Pigeon
- (ii) Why did 'he' want to 'put up'?
 (a) Because he wanted to party
 (b) Because he wanted to rest
 (c) Because he wanted to play
 (d) Because he wanted to meet a friend
- (iii) What word in the extract is a synonym of 'arrangements'?
 (a) Put up (b) Hope
 (c) Preparations (d) Meetings
- (iv) What part of speech is 'preparations'?
 (a) Adjective (b) Preposition
 (c) Pronoun (d) Noun

Ans. (i) (b) The Swallow
 (ii) (b) Because he wanted to rest
 (iii) (c) Preparations
 (iv) (d) Noun

- 2** His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little swallow was filled with pity.
- (i) Who is 'his' in the above extract?
 (a) The statue of the Happy Prince
 (b) The photo of the Happy Prince
 (c) The toy of the Happy Prince
 (d) The horse of the Happy Prince
- (ii) Why was the little swallow filled with pity?
 (a) Because he saw the Happy Prince playing
 (b) Because he saw the Happy Prince being beaten by his friends
 (c) Because he saw the eyes of the Happy Prince full of tears
 (d) Because he saw the Happy Prince wounded
- (iii) Find a word in the extract which is a synonym of 'compassion'.
 (a) Kindness (b) Pity
 (c) Sympathy (d) Understanding
- (iv) The word 'so' in the extract is a/an.
 (a) Verb (b) Adverb (c) Noun (d) Adjective

Ans. (i) (a) The statue of the Happy Prince
 (ii) (c) Because he saw the eyes of the Happy Prince full of tears
 (iii) (b) Pity
 (iv) (b) Adverb

- 3** "My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus flowers. Soon they will go to sleep."
- (i) Who is speaking the words in the above extract to whom?
 (a) The Happy Prince to the little swallow
 (b) The little swallow to the Happy Prince
 (c) The little fly to the Happy Prince
 (d) The Happy Prince to the little fly
- (ii) Why did the speaker say these words?
 (a) Because he wanted to get the Prince's attention
 (b) Because he was not in his senses
 (c) Because he wanted to resume his winter migration to Sweden
 (d) Because he wanted to resume his winter migration to Egypt
- (iii) Find a word in the extract which is a synonym of 'buddies'.
 (a) Pals (b) Confidant
 (c) Friends (d) Playmate
- (iv) What part of speech is 'large'?
 (a) Adjective (b) Adverb
 (c) Verb (d) Noun

Ans. (i) (b) The little swallow to the Happy Prince
 (ii) (d) Because he wanted to resume his winter migration to Egypt
 (iii) (c) Friends
 (iv) (a) Adjective

- 4** "He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, and in the 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."
- (i) Who spoke the words in the above extract and to whom?
 (a) The Happy Prince to the little swallow
 (b) The little swallow to the Happy Prince
 (c) The Happy Prince to his father
 (d) The Happy Prince to his sister
- (ii) Who does the speaker refer to as 'he'?
 (a) A young man in a garret
 (b) An old man in a garret
 (c) Happy Prince's friend
 (d) Happy Prince's father

(iii) Which word in the extract is an antonym of 'blooming'?

- (a) Flowering (b) Munching
(c) Drooping (d) Withered

(iv) What part of speech is 'over' in the extract?

- (a) Adverb
(b) Adjective

(c) Preposition

(d) Conjunction

Ans. (i) (a) The Happy Prince to the little swallow

(ii) (a) A young man in a garret

(iii) (d) Withered

(iv) (c) Preposition

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

[2 Marks each]

1 Give a brief description of the statue of the Happy Prince.

Or Describe the statue of the Happy Prince as described in the beginning of the story.

Ans. In the beginning of the story, the statue of the Happy Prince was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold, for eyes he had two bright sapphires and a large red ruby glowed on his sword hilt. The statue was mounted on a tall column from where it could oversee the city.

2 What filled the Happy Prince's eyes with tears?

Ans. When he was alive, the Happy Prince never had any tears in his eyes because he lived in a palace far from where he could see the misery of the people. After death, his courtiers set his statue on a high column from where he could see all the ugliness and the misery of his city. This made the Happy Prince's eyes fill with tears.

3 What did the Prince request the swallow to do with one of the sapphires from his eye?

Ans. The Prince requested the swallow to give the sapphire to the young man in the garret who had become too cold to write further and fainted due to hunger. By selling the sapphire to the jeweller, he would buy firewood to warm himself up and complete his play.

4 Why was the seamstress distressed?

Ans. The seamstress was distressed because she had to complete a dress, but her son was sick. She was very exhausted due to lack of food and as she had no money to buy food. Apart from that, she had to complete a dress that belonged to queen.

5 How did the Happy Prince help the seamstress?

Ans. The Happy Prince asked the swallow to take the ruby out of the handle of his sword and give it to the poor seamstress whose son was lying in bed with high fever. Thus, she could sell the jewel and buy food for her son. That way, she would be able to do the work.

6 What did the Happy Prince ask the swallow to do for helping the young man in the garret?

Ans. The Happy Prince asked the swallow to pluck out one of his eyes made of sapphire and take it to the young man in the garret so that he could buy firewood to warm himself and complete the play he had been writing. The swallow did so to help the needy man.

7 How did the Prince and the swallow enable the playwright to finish his work?

Ans. The playwright was feeling cold and hungry but he did not have any money to buy firewood or food. The prince asked the swallow to take one of his sapphires to the playwright, so that he could sell it, buy what he required and finish his work.

8 What did the swallow see as the third drop of water fell on his wings?

Or What were the drops of the rain actually? Why did they fall?

Ans. When the third drop of water fell on his wings, the swallow looked upwards and saw that the eyes of the Happy Prince were filled with tears, which were running down his golden cheeks. The drops of water were actually the tears of the Happy Prince. He was weeping on seeing the misery and suffering of the people.

9 How did the Happy Prince help the poor children in the city?

Ans. The Happy Prince distributed the gold leaves on his body to the poor people in the city and thus helped their children also. Everybody was happy on getting the leaves of gold which they could sell.

10 What happened when the little swallow was getting ready to sleep?

Ans. When the little swallow was getting ready to sleep, a large drop of water fell on him. Two more drops fell before he looked up and realised that they were

Short Answer (SA) Type Questions

- 2 Where was the swallow going? Why did he stop at the Prince's statue?
- 3 Why was the swallow always in high spirits when he used to tell the prince, "Tonight I go to Egypt"?
- 4 Why was the swallow hesitant to pluck out the sapphires from the Prince's statue?
- 5 How would the sapphire help the playwright to solve his problem?
- 6 How would the ruby help to solve the seamstress' problem?
- 7 What did the swallow do at the harbour?
- 8 How is Egypt described by the swallow in comparison to the Prince's city?
- 9 Why did the girl selling matches run home laughing?
- 10 How did the Prince's statue look after its gold leaf was removed? What was its fate?
- 11 Why did the swallow not continue his migration to Egypt?
- 12 Why did God approve of the angel's choices for the two most precious things in the city?
- 13 Why did the workmen at the foundry throw away the leaden heart?

Long Answer (LA) Type Questions

- 14 Why could the Happy Prince not see the misery and ugliness of his city when he was alive? What does this show about his character at that time?
- 15 How did the Happy Prince help the seamstress? What values in his character are brought out by his action?
- 16 How did the swallow come to know that the Prince had compassion for the poor and needy?
- 17 'Goodness can never be destroyed'. Justify this statement with reference to this lesson.
- 18 List all the people who were helped by the Prince and the swallow and what problems of the people helped were solved in each case?