**Plot summary**

The narrator introduces himself as a man who learned when he was a child that adults lack imagination and understanding. He is now a pilot who has crash-landed in a desert. He encounters a small boy who asks him for a drawing of a sheep, and the narrator obliges. The narrator, who calls the child the little prince, learns that the boy comes from a very small planet, which the narrator believes to be [asteroid](https://www.britannica.com/science/asteroid) B-612. Over the course of the next few days, the little prince tells the narrator about his life. On his asteroid-planet, which is no bigger than a house, the prince spends his time pulling up [baobab](https://www.britannica.com/plant/baobab-tree-genus) seedlings, lest they grow big enough to engulf the tiny planet. One day an [anthropomorphic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/anthropomorphic) rose grows on the planet, and the prince loves her with all his heart. However, her vanity and demands become too much for the prince, and he leaves.

The prince travels to a series of asteroids, each featuring a grown-up who has been reduced to a function. The first is a king who requires obedience but has no subjects until the arrival of the prince. The sole inhabitant of the next planet is a conceited man who wants nothing from the prince but flattery. The prince subsequently meets a drunkard, who explains that he must drink to forget how ashamed he is of drinking. The fourth planet introduces the prince to a businessman, who maintains that he owns the stars, which makes it very important that he know exactly how many stars there are. The prince then encounters a lamplighter, who follows orders that require him to light a lamp each evening and put it out each morning, even though his planet spins so fast that dusk and dawn both occur once every minute. Finally the prince comes to a planet inhabited by a geographer. The geographer, however, knows nothing of his own planet, because it is his sole function to record what he learns from explorers. He asks the prince to describe his home planet, but when the prince mentions the flower, the geographer says that flowers are not recorded because they are [ephemeral](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ephemeral). The geographer recommends that the little prince visit [Earth](https://www.britannica.com/place/Earth).

On Earth the prince meets a snake, who says that he can return him to his home, and a flower, who tells him that people lack roots. He comes across a rose garden, and he finds it very depressing to learn that his beloved rose is not, as she claimed, unique in the universe. A [fox](https://www.britannica.com/animal/fox-mammal) then tells him that if he tames the fox—that is, establishes ties with the fox—then they will be unique and a source of joy to each other.

The narrator and little prince have now spent eight days in the desert and have run out of water. The two then [traverse](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/traverse) the desert in search of a well, which, miraculously, they find. The little prince tells the narrator that he plans to return that night to his planet and flower and that now the stars will be meaningful to the narrator, because he will know that his friend is living on one of them. Returning to his planet requires allowing the poisonous snake to bite him. The story resumes six years later. The narrator says that the prince’s body was missing in the morning, so he knows that he returned to his planet, and he wonders whether the sheep that he drew him ate his flower. He ends by imploring the reader to contact him if they ever spot the little prince.

**Analysis and reception**

*The Little Prince* draws unflattering portraits of grown-ups as being hopelessly narrow-minded. In contrast, children come to wisdom through open-mindedness and a willingness to explore the world around them and within themselves. The main theme of the fable is expressed in the secret that the fox tells the little prince: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly: what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

French- and English-language versions of the novella were published in 1943 (though the book did not appear in France until 1946). Critics were unsure what to make of *The Little Prince*, and it was not immediately popular. It was unclear whether the book was meant for children or adults, though British writer [P.L. Travers](https://www.britannica.com/biography/P-L-Travers) said that it had the necessary ingredients for a children’s book in that “it is true in the most inward sense, it offers no explanations and it has a moral.”

Many critics drew parallels between the characters and events of *The Little Prince* and the life of its author, who wrote the book while living in [New York City](https://www.britannica.com/place/New-York-City), having fled the turmoil of [World War II](https://www.britannica.com/event/World-War-II) in [France](https://www.britannica.com/place/France). Like the narrator, Saint-Exupéry was a pilot who experienced a plane crash in a desert ([Libya](https://www.britannica.com/place/Libya)). His wife, Consuelo, is also said to have had erratic behaviour similar to that of the prince’s rose—a parallel further emphasized by Consuelo’s later autobiography, *The Tale of the Rose* (written in 1945 and published 2000). Thus, the narrator and little prince have been viewed as expressions of different aspects of Saint-Exupéry himself.

*The Little Prince* was translated into more than 250 languages. It was also adapted into radio plays and films—among them animated and musical versions—as well as operas, ballets, and [theatre](https://www.britannica.com/art/theatre-art) in countries throughout the world.