

The Happy Prince

Introduction

This story has been written by Oscar Wilde who is an Irish poet and playwright. In this poem, the author tells us about a Happy Prince and his friend, a swallow bird.

Summary

High above the city, on a tall column stood the statue of the Happy Prince. His statue was gilded with thin leaves of fine gold. He had sapphires for his eyes. He had a ruby in his sword.

One night, a little swallow flew over the city. He alighted between the feet of the Happy Prince to spend the night. He was getting ready to sleep. Just then a large drop of water fell on him. Then another drop of water fell on him. The swallow was curious as to how it was raining even without any clouds and decided to fly to look for another place. Just then, a third drop fell on him and he looked up and saw that those were the tear drops from the eyes of the statue of Happy Prince. It filled the swallow with pity. He asked the statue who was he and why was he crying.

The Happy Prince told the swallow that he lived in a palace while he was alive. There was no sorrow at all and he was always happy. After his death, his statue had been set up on a high pillar. From there, he can see the ugliness and misery of this city and this made even his leaden heart weep with misery.

He told the swallow that he can see that a little boy of a seamstress was sick. He was crying. His poor mother could not give him oranges to eat. He asked the swallow to give his ruby to the poor woman. The swallow was going to Egypt. But he agreed to carry out the command of the Happy Prince. He flew to the house of the poor woman and laid the ruby on the table.

The next day, the swallow came again to bid farewell to the Happy Prince and informs him that he is going to Egypt as it is getting cold here. The Happy Prince urges the swallow to stay back one more day and help him. He says that he sees a writer who was cold and hungry. He had no food and firewood. The Happy Prince asked the swallow to give sapphire from one of his eye to the writer. The swallow obeyed him unwillingly.

The next day, the swallow once again comes to bid the Happy Prince goodbye and once again the Prince implores him to stay back and help him as he has seen a match girl who is crying because her matches has fallen into a gutter. Her father will beat her if she does not bring home some money. So, the Happy Prince wants the swallow to pick out the sapphire from his other eye and give it to the girl. The swallow refuses saying that it will make the Prince blind but the Prince forces him to fulfil his desire. Then

the Happy Prince allows the swallow to fly away to Egypt. But the swallow decides to stay with the blind Prince forever, as he could no longer see. The swallow then keeps company to the Prince and tells him about the stories of what he had seen in strange lands. But the Happy Prince asks her to narrate to him the suffering of the people.

So, the swallow reported about the sufferings of the starving people and at the command of the Happy Prince the swallow took off the golden leaves from the statue and distributed them among the poor. Now the statue was dull and grey. But the people of the city were happy. The frost made the swallow colder and colder and he was about to die. He flew to the Happy Prince who bade to kiss him on the lips. After kissing the swallow fell down dead at the feet of the statue. At that instance the lead heart of the Happy Prince broke into two.

The next morning, the Mayor ordered that the statue should be pulled down because it was neither beautiful nor useful. The statue was put in a furnace. However, the broken lead heart did not melt even in the furnace. It was thrown away on a dust heap where the dead swallow was also lying.

God asked his angels to bring the two most precious things from the city. God praised the angels choice in bringing him the leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead swallow. God then says that in the garden of Paradise the little bird would sing forever and the Happy Prince shall praise him.

Message

The story conveys the message that happiness does not come from worldly possessions but from helping others.



Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow.

- "Where shall I put up?" he said. "I hope the town has made preparations."
 - is speaking these words in the above extract.
 - Where was the little swallow?
 - On the shoulder of the happy prince
 - On the feet of the happy prince
 - In the sky over the river
 - In the air over the city
 - The speaker said, "where shall I put up?" because
 - An antonym of 'hope' is



Answers

- (a) A little swallow
(b) (iv) In the air over the city
(c) he flew all day long
(d) despair
2. His face was so beautiful in the moonlight that the little swallow was filled with pity.
- (a) 'His' in the above extract refers to
- (b) The little swallow was filled with pity because he saw the eyes of the Happy Prince full of
- (c) 'Filled with pity' means
- (d) Choose the word that can replace 'pity' in the extract.
- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| (i) Indifference | (ii) Cruelty |
| (iii) Compassion | (iv) Grudge |

Answers

- (a) the statue of the Happy Prince
(b) tears
(c) felt sorry
(d) (iii) Compassion
3. "My friends are flying up and down the Nile, and talking to the large lotus flowers. Soon they will go to sleep."
- (a) State whether the given statement is True or False. The Happy Prince is speaking these words to the little swallow.
- (b) Why did the speaker say these words?
- (i) Because he wanted to take rest
(ii) Because he wanted to spend the night
(iii) Because he wanted to resume his winter migration to Egypt
(iv) Because he wanted to stop near the statue of the Happy Prince
- (c) The Nile is a/an
- (d) The word that means the same as 'buddies' in the extract is

Answers

- (a) False
(b) (iii) Because he wanted to resume his winter migration to Egypt
(c) river
(d) friends
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."
- (a) 'He' in the given extract refers to
- (b) Who spoke the words in the above extract to whom?
- (i) The Happy Prince to the little swallow
(ii) The little swallow to the Happy Prince
(iii) The little swallow to the old playwright
(iv) The Happy Prince to the young playwright
- (c) "He is leaning over a desk covered with papers, ..." In this line, the speaker will use the papers for
- (d) A word from the extract which is an antonym of 'bloomed' is

Answers

- (a) the young playwright
(b) (i) The Happy Prince to the little swallow
(c) writing a play for the Director of the Theatre
(d) withered
5. "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."
- (a) "What a lovely bit of glass!"
In the above line, a lovely bit of glass is
- (b) By getting a lovely bit of glass the little girl was happy because before it she was:
- (i) sad due to the loss of money
(ii) sad due to the wet clothes and shoes
(iii) crying due to the wet matches falling into the gutter and afraid of the beating of her father
(iv) weeping due to the theft of her matches
- (c) The Prince became blind as both the sapphires of his eyes were taken out
- (d) Which part of speech is 'stay' here?

Answers

- (a) a sapphire
(b) (iii) crying due to the wet matches falling into the gutter and afraid of the beating of her father
(c) by the swallow
(d) Verb



Short Answer Type Questions

- Q 1. Describe briefly the statue of the Happy Prince.
- Ans. High above the city, on a tall column, stood the statue of the Happy Prince. He was gilded all over with thin leaves of fine gold. He had two bright sapphires for his eyes and a large red ruby glowed on his sword's hilt.
- Q 2. Why did the courtiers call the Prince 'The Happy Prince'?
- Ans. The Happy Prince lived in a palace where sorrow was not allowed to enter. He was always happy and because of this his courtiers called him 'Happy Prince'. He did not know about sadness and misery.
- Q 3. Where was the swallow going? Why was he going there?
- Ans. The swallow was going to Egypt. His friends had left for Egypt six weeks before and now he was also planning to go there to escape the frost and cold of the city. In Egypt, the climate was warm and the green palm trees there promised to provide the swallow birds with food and shelter.
- Q 4. Why was the Happy Prince crying?
- Ans. When the Happy Prince was alive and had a human heart he did not know the meaning of sorrow. He lived happily in his palace. After his death, his statue was mounted on a tall column. From the height, he could see the ugliness and all the misery of his city. This made him weep.



Q 5. Why did the Happy Prince ask the swallow to stay?

Ans. The Happy Prince had a kind heart. He had a great will to help those in adverse circumstances. It was not possible for him to move from there as his statue was fastened. So, he requested the swallow to stay with him and help those in need.

Q 6. To whom did the Happy Prince send his great ruby and why?

Ans. The Happy Prince sent his great ruby to a poor seamstress. She had a little sick boy who wanted to have oranges. But the seamstress was too poor to buy oranges for him, so she gives him river water to drink and because of this the boy is crying. She herself was thin and worn and had coarse, red hands all pricked by the needle. So, the Happy Prince asked the swallow to bring her the great ruby. So that her problems could be resolved.

Q 7. How did the Prince help the matchgirl?

Ans. The Happy Prince helped the matchgirl with one of the sapphires from his eyes. The matchgirl was selling matches in the square and accidentally all her matches fell in the gutter and were spoiled. She was crying because if she did not take any money home then her father would beat her. So, the Happy Prince decided to give a sapphire to the little girl so that she could escape her father's beating.

Q 8. Why did the swallow not leave the Prince and go to Egypt?

Ans. The Prince had donated the sapphires that made his eyes. He had become totally blind. The swallow was impressed by his selfless actions and his will to help others. He loved the Prince for his generosity. So, the swallow decided to stay back and keep him company. He wanted to become the eyes of the statue of Happy Prince. So, he did not leave the Prince and go to Egypt.

Q 9. What did the swallow see when it flew over the city?

Ans. The Prince asked the swallow to fly over the city and tell him what it saw there. The swallow flew over the great city. He saw the rich making merry in their beautiful houses, while the beggars were sitting at the gates. He flew into dark lanes. He saw the white faces of starving children looking out listlessly at the black streets. Under the archway of a bridge, he saw two hungry boys lying in each other's arms to try and keep themselves warm.

Q 10. How did the poor children feel when they got the gold?

Ans. The poor children's faces grew rosier. They laughed with great joy. They also played in the street. Earlier they were hungry. But now they were able to buy bread. They were also able to buy caps and fur coats to keep themselves warm.

Q 11. Why was the statue of the Happy Prince dismantled?

Ans. The Happy Prince had given away the precious stones and gold leaves that adorned his statue. He looked quite shabby. The Mayor of the town thought that he looked like a beggar. So, they decided to dismantle his statue because they thought that anything which is not beautiful is not useful.



Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. It should be our aim to help the suffering humanity. Discuss.

Ans. The best deed to do is to serve humanity. The Happy Prince could see the sufferings of the people and wanted to help them. But he was not able to help others in his immobile condition. In order to help the people he requested the swallow to stay with him. The swallow conceded to his request. The Happy Prince and the swallow helped the suffering people as much as they could. The Happy Prince gave away all precious stones engraved on his statue to help others. On the other hand, the swallow sacrificed his life in the services of others. He was obedient to the Happy Prince till his death. God also applauded their deeds and gave them a place in Heaven. So, like the Happy Prince and the swallow, we should help the suffering humanity. It should be our aim to help the suffering people who are in dire need of help.

Q 2. For whom did the Prince send the sapphires and why?

Ans. The Prince sent the sapphires which served as his eyes to the young playwright and for the matchgirl. The young playwright was trying to finish a play for the Director of the Theatre but he was too cold to write anything. There was no fire in his grate and he was feeling faint due to hunger. The Prince sent him a sapphire so that he could sell it and buy firewood and food for himself and complete his play.

The second sapphire was sent to a matchgirl. Her matches had fallen in the gutter and she was crying in fear of her father. So, the Prince sent a sapphire to her so that her father could be happy and she was able to escape his beating.

Q 3. What are the precious things mentioned in the story? Why are they precious?

Ans. The precious thing mentioned are the leaden heart of the Happy Prince and the dead bird.

These are precious because the Happy Prince and the swallow sacrificed themselves for the service of the poor. The Happy Prince was generous and selfless and was greatly moved by the misery of the poor and helpless people. He gave away all the precious stones and gold which adorned his statue to make the poor people happy. In the same manner, the swallow gave up his journey to Egypt to help the Happy Prince. He became his messenger and carried the precious stones and gold to the poor and needy people. When the Prince became blind, he decided not to leave him and stayed by his side. It became colder and colder but still the swallow did not leave the Prince's side and at the end he died at the feet of the statue of Happy Prince. On his death, the Happy Prince's leaden heart broke into two pieces. So, when God asked his angels to bring the two most precious things, from the world below they brought the dead swallow and the broken leaden heart. God also praised them for their choice and said that indeed these were the most precious things. ●