

The Little Prince Director's Notes for School's educational package

Antoine de Saint Exupéry and the Mysteries of Life

How is it possible for a powerful creature like an elephant to be consumed by a boa constrictor?

Antoine St. Exupery answers: the same way as its possible for a powerful adult to be consumed by the necessities, duties and power-plays of everyday life.

How easily we confuse the priorities of life and lose our sense of wonder! In terms of keeping the imaginative spirit alive, life is a dangerous business; whether you live on the little prince's imaginary planet where he must clean out three volcanoes daily and uproot life sucking baobab trees, or whether, like the pilot, you fly over the deserts of the world.

As the flower says, "the danger is so little understood" that people are often consumed without even knowing it. The Pilot tells us early in the play that understanding the dangers of life's boa constrictors, as a child does vividly, can make a person lonely and misunderstood. We all feel this way at times, and the power of the story is that it can help guide us out of the lonely desert.

THE LITTLE PRINCE gives us the story of two very lonely people, a pilot and a fantastical little prince. They have lost the balance between their inner imaginations and the external demands of life, and they have both sought to explore their feelings by flying to other lands. The realities of balance and flight can both be shown by a teeter-totter, and we felt it was so important for audiences to feel them in action that we used one for the set.

Trying to right a wrong balance can be exhausting, and both the Pilot and the Little Prince are at the end of their endurance when they meet up in a desert. Here, they help each other rediscover what it means to live a life that matters. To find THE LIFE THAT MATTERS was St. Exupéry's own life-long quest.

Antoine de Saint Exupéry's life expressed in the story

St. Exupéry was a pilot himself as well as a writer. Before the second world war he was a test pilot, and during the second world war he flew reconnaissance missions for the Allies, so he was used to embracing danger. However, he told his friends that he considered physical danger as nothing when compared to the emotional risks that are part of daily family life. The temptation to withdraw and give up on your family can be overwhelming--yet the rewards of staying open and giving to them despite the pain they give you, are immense. This is what the pilot discovers when, about to die of thirst in the desert, he finds the energy to survive by loving the Little Prince.

St. Exupéry was born into an impoverished aristocratic family in France in 1900, but he lacked an affinity for his social class. He felt the old European idea that the nobility were superior and fit to lead governments had been exhausted by the First World War: the Little Prince introduces a new notion of nobility which St. Exupéry could believe in. In company with other artists of the modern art movement in France, he sought a new ARTISTIC perspective that would emphasize values he believed could transform peoples lives, and ultimately the world, into a better place. Out of all Exupéry's books, the Little Prince is the character who best personifies these values.

Who is The Little Prince?

The Prince embodies the spontaneous joy you get from creative imagination, and from loving unselfishly. For the Prince, as we see throughout the play, a relationship is a work of art: it must be created with joy and persistence, loyal discipline and attention to

playfulness. It must also be created out of an honest, acknowledged need, presented straightforwardly to the other person.

St Exupéry believed passionately in peoples' need for one another. In Citadelle he wrote, "I'm nothing but a grouchy manager. That's what it is to be an individual. But Humankind...replaces me, quite simply, fills me up. I look at the crowd and I see a people, my people. Humankind, our common denominator, joins me to them". Alone, you can't experience the common spirit humans share because it is expressed through the free exchange of love and understanding.

Since he is a child, the Little Prince lives close to this understanding: he serves his planet which in turn nourishes him. But when the safety of his planet is breached by the arrival of a sophisticated Rose, he becomes bewildered by her world which is too busy with egotistical "matters of consequence" to attend to the sunset.

As the Little Prince describes his journey through the bizarre egotistical worlds of adulthood represented by the King, Conceited man, Businessman and Lamplighter, the Pilot comes to understand his own predicament. The act of sharing his journey with the Pilot enables the Little Prince to reach a better understanding of where he has arrived. Both characters are reminded they have a duty to keep their spontaneity and love alive. In fact, the Pilot finds that his only companion, his only source of strength, and his only guide to the water which will save his life is his childish understanding, which allows him to befriend the Prince. Together, they recognize that the human spirit has to resist the forces of greed, laziness and insecurity that make us opt for an easy but spiritually empty life, or the ability to love cannot survive.

Through the Fox, they learn that they must be prepared to work responsibly through the routine drudgery that is part of any relationship. The Fox teaches the Little Prince about the forms and disciplined rituals which provide the framework for any creative art or spontaneous relationship.

The Little Prince' s Return Home

St. Exupéry ends his story on a sad note when the Little Prince decides to leave his heavy body on earth in order to return to the flower he loves. It isn't an easy decision for him, and neither is it easy for us to understand in a prosaic way. This is not a case of suicide, for the Little Prince is not strictly human in the first place. And the snake cannot be understood as simply evil, the way the Pilot sees him. The snake appreciates the Prince's pure heart, and helps him get home by administering the deadly bite. Phases of life do come to an end, and while change is always difficult, understanding can help us face them with good heart, like the Little Prince.

In our production, we have understood the ending to be necessary because the Little Prince cannot survive in the everyday world that the Pilot must return to, now his plane is repaired. Therefore, he must return home. The Little Prince has rescued the Pilot from the loneliness of a deprived imagination, and the Pilot has rescued the Little Prince from the loneliness of pride which made him leave his beloved flower. Although parting is sweet sorrow, they belong in different realms. As the Little Prince observes, both of them will feel great comfort in looking out at the stars and knowing that the other is there, laughing and thinking of them.

St. Exupéry's Life

1900 Born Lyon into an impoverished family of "la petite noblesse", 1904 he lost his father to illness and spent his childhood with his mother, 3 sisters and brother at their maternal grandmother's home in Chateau de la Mole (Var) and at their great aunts home, the Chateau de Saint -Maurice-des-remens (Ain). His early childhood seems to've been happy, and he remembers his mother as gay, laughing & devoted to her children. 1922 After various setbacks including a failure to get into L'ecole Navale" Saint Exupery became a pilot.

1926 After brief unsuccessful attempts to settle down at 2 other jobs, he joined the Compagnie Airienne founded by Pierre Latecoere. 1927 Flew mail planes between Toulouse and Casablanca. He was sent as airport chief (chef d'aeroplance) to Cap Juby on the Rio 'Oro in North Africa.

1928 Wrote first novel, Courrier Sud, it was an immediate success

1929 signed contract with the Nouvelle Revue Francaise.

Also named Director of the newly formed branch of the Compagnie Generale Aeropostale of Argentina. While organizing and pioneering this line, he wrote Vol de Nuit.

1931 He married Consuelo Suncin, widow of the journalist Gomez Carillo. The marriage was stormy. Many have speculated that the relationship of the petit prince with the flower was their relationship at its best. The same year, he resigned from Argentina Post and returned to France. In the fall, Vol de Nuit (preface by Andre Gide) it received the Prix Femina.

1932 plagued by financial difficulties he rejoined Lacotiere as a test pilot.

1934 when all the companies amalgamated he was attached to the publicity department and flew around France giving lectures.

1935 Paris Soir sent him to Moscow

1937 he went to Madrid for them where he watched and reported on the Spanish Civil War.

1938 attempting a record flight between New York and Terra del Fuego (top of S. America) he crashed and was badly hurt.

1939 published his 3rd work, Terre des Hommes

1939 Outbreak of war-- joined Reconnaissance group 2/33 in Champagne.

1941-2 went to America after the defeat of France, and wrote @ war "Pilote de Guerre"-- in US titled "Flight to Arras". Describes the pathetically illequipped French Airforce and the fleeing refugees--with great compassion, not condemnation. This book banned by the Germans

1943 Le Petit Prince published. "The gentle irony whereby the child depicts the serious adult world is sustained throughout most of the book. It is the child, paradoxically, who is mature and sensitive enough to be able to adapt to the adult world (?) It is the petit prince who has the vision and love that could transform the world; but the world is too busy and serious to notice him.

He rejoined some of his old Airforce friends at Oudja in April doing reconnaissance for the Allied Army. There's been a great deal of speculation @ how exactly he died, but no definite proof of where he crashed or was shot down.

1948

His notes for Citadelle published posthumously.

The idea of exchange is at the very heart of his philosophy of life. All creative artists spin their works of art out of their very substance. The selfish, noncreative person feeds his own ego greedily and leaves nothing behind him but husks and old bones sucked dry. Joy comes from creative activity and even the humblest craftsman can be transformed by it. All the rest is ashes.

As Bertrand Russel wrote to Colette,

"The centre of me is always and eternally a terrible pain--a curious wild pain-- a searching for something beyond what the world contains, something transfigured and infinite--the beatific visions--God--I do not find it, I do not think it is to be found--but the love of it is my life--it's like passionate love for a ghost. t times it fills me with rage, at times with wild despair, it is the source of gentleness and cruelty and work, it fills every passion that I have--it is the actual spring of life within me."

He wrote in Flight to Arras

"I longed for the night, so that I might perhaps advance a step forwards fixing it in my unimaginable language. I longed for the night as the poet might do, the true poet who feels inhabited by a thing obscure but powerful, and who strives to erect images like a ramparts round the thing in order to capture it. To capture it in a snare of images.

St. Exupery often compared with Albert Camus for themes of absurdity, revolt and love-tendresse.

St Exupery wrote " La meme evenement est a la fois absurde at non absurde, confus et clair, contradictoire et coherant"-the world can't be absurd because man's thirst for immortality can be quenched in creative activity.

St Exupery was one of the few modern writers that Sartre approved of-- as a forerunner of a litterature of work and technology "Une litterature de construction qui tend a remplacer la litterature de la consommation".

St Exupery hated pop. heroic writing, the "rude guerrier qui ecrase une larme". Here's his account in Pilot de guerre of his best friend's death "Ainsi j'ai perdu Guillaumet, tue en vol-le meilleur ami que j'aie eu--et j'evite de parler de lui. Nous avons pilote sur les memes lignes, participe aux memes creations. Nous etions de la meme substance. Je me sens un peu mort en lui. J'ai fait de Guillaumet un des compagnons de mon silence. Je suis de Guillaumet".

He despaired often,

L'autre jour j'ai eu la panne d'un moteur, a dix milles metres d'altitude, au-dessus d'Annecy, a l'heure meme ou j'avais quarante-quatre ans! Tandis que je ramais sur les Alpes, a vitesse de tortue, a la merci de toute la chasses allemande, je rigolais doucement en songeant aux super-patriotes qui interdisent mes livres en Afrique du Nord. C'est drole, si je suis descendu, je ne regretterai rien. La termitiere future m'epouvante et je hais leur vertu de robots. Moi j'etais fais pour etre jardinier".

But his hope for humankind and hi profound optimism in the creative spirit of the species dominated his thinking.

The vision he had flying over Arras had tranforme dhim:

"C'est le tir d'Arras...le tir a brisé un ecorce. Toute cette journee ci j'ai sans doute preparer en moi la demeure. Je n'etais que gerant grincheux. C'est ca la individu. Mais Homme est apparu. Il s'est installé a ma place, tout simplement. Il a regarde la foule en vrac et il a vu un peuple, son peuple. L'Homme, commune mesure se ce peuple et de moi".