

The Happy Prince
(fragment)
by **Oscar Wilde**

Note: *The Happy Prince* is a fairy tale taken from *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*' collection where we can find other compelling fairy tales such as *The Selfish Giant*, *The Nightingale and the Rose*, or *The Remarkable Rocket*.

Oscar Wilde was born in Dublin Ireland, in 1854 and he wrote in the late Victorian period being one of the most iconic figures of that time.

The scenes prior to this episode are the description of the Happy Prince's statue „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, for eyes he had two bright sapphires, and a large ruby glowed on his sword-hilt”, the admiration of this statue and the swallow's plan to go away in Egypt for the winter. His plan doesn't come true because the Happy Prince needs his help and he is willing to offer him his kindness.

One of the best introductions out there

Age category: 13, 14 years – 7th or 8th grade

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 alighted¹ 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 dreadful². The Reed³ 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-pot⁴," 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?

¹ to alight (on, upon) = a se a□eza, a poposi (pe)

² dreadful = înspăimântător, înfrico□ător

³ reed = stuf, trestie

⁴ chimney-pot = □eava unui horn

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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 then?" asked the Swallow; "you have quite drenched⁵ me."

"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 sorrow⁶ 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 lofty⁷ wall, but I never cared to ask what lay beyond it, everything about me was so beautiful. My courtiers⁸ 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 lead⁹ yet I cannot choose but weep¹⁰."

"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 worn¹¹, and she has coarse¹², red hands, all pricked¹³ by the needle, for she is a seamstress¹⁴. She is embroidering passion-flowers on a satin gown¹⁵ 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 lying¹⁶ 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

⁵ *to drench* = a uda până la piele

⁶ *sorrow* = durere, mâhnire, amărăciune

⁷ *lofty* = înalt

⁸ *courtier* = curtean

⁹ *lead* = plumb

¹⁰ *to weep* = a plânge

¹¹ *worn* = îndurerat, mâhnit, necăjit

¹² *coarse hands* = mâini aspre

¹³ *to prick* = a înțepa

¹⁴ *seamstress* = cusătoreasă

¹⁵ *gown* = rochie (lungă, de seară)

¹⁶ *to lie, lay, lain* = a zăcea, a sta culcat

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ruby out of my sword-hilt¹⁷? My feet are fastened¹⁸ 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. He is wrapped in yellow linen¹⁹, and embalmed²⁰ with spices²¹. Round his neck is a chain of pale green jade, and his hands are like withered²² 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 rude²³ boys, the miller²⁴'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, 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 beak²⁵ over the roofs of the town.

Tasks

¹⁷ *sword-hilt* = mânerul sabiei

¹⁸ *to fasten* = a în□epeni

¹⁹ *linen* = pânză (de in)

²⁰ *to embalm* = a îmbălsăma

²¹ *spices* = mirodenii

²² *withered* = ofilit, ve□tejit

²³ *rude* = obraznic

²⁴ *miller* = morar

²⁵ *beak* = cioc, plisc

A. Vocabulary

1. Match the words from column A with the right synonyms from column B.

A	B
1.to alight	a)high
2.dreadful	b)cloth
3.lofty	c)to rest on
4.to drench	d)dress
5.gown	e)flavours
6.linen	f)to get wet
7.spices	g)frightening

2. Match the words from column A with the right antonyms from column B.

A	B
1.to fasten	a)green
2.rude	b)happiness
3.withered	c)gold
4.lead	d)to unfasten
5.to weep	e)to smile
6.sorrow	f)soft hands
7.coarse hands	g)polite

3. Choose three words from column A and make sentences.
4. Complete the following sentences with the right given words: *to prick, courtiers, to lie, chimney-pot, miller, seamstress, reed, to embalm, beak, sword-hilt, lead.*
- a) I love to see the _____ in the wind when I go in the country side.

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- b) I once saw a bat entering the _____ - _____.
- c) The _____ called the prince the Happy Prince.
- d) The Prince's heart is made of _____ and of gold.
- e) When she was young, my mother used to be a _____; she often _____ herself with the needle.
- f) The large ruby glowed on the Prince's _____ - _____.
- g) Egyptians used to _____ their pharaohs.
- h) My grandfather was a _____; a lot of our neighbours came to him to buy good corn-flour.
- i) My cousin saw an eagle with a fish in his _____.
- j) I had to _____ down because I had a headache.

B. Reading Comprehension

1. State the truthfulness (T)/falseness (F) of the following statements and correct the false ones:
 - a) When the Swallow arrived in town and saw the statue he alighted right on his shoulders. (...)
 - b) The Swallow flew away from the statue because it could not protect him from the rain. (...)
 - c) The Prince could not see the sorrow of the people because of the high wall. (...)
 - d) Although the Prince's heart was made by lead he could still have feelings and cry. (...)
 - e) The woman he is seeing is a seamstress with soft hands who works very hard to take care of her child. (...)
 - f) The child of the seamstress has fever and asks for oranges. (...)
 - g) The Swallow wanted to fly to Egypt with his friends but he changed his mind because of the Prince. (...)
 - h) The Swallow did not like boys because the miller's boy hurt him. (...)

C. Creative Tasks

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1. Why do you think the statue cries? Are the tears a way of relief for the Prince? Do you think he cried before? Bring arguments from the text.
2. Do you think the Prince was a hero? Give your arguments for and/or against. Make a brief characterization for your personal hero and use as many adjectives as you can. Be aware of the right order of the adjectives! (3-8 lines)
3. How do you describe the relationship between the two? Find one word that characterizes it. (3 lines)
4. Do you think the Swallow flew to Egypt after he helped the Prince? Imagine you are a writer and give an end to this fragment. Illustrations are appreciated!

Teacher's Guide**Oscar Wilde – Short Biography**

Oscar Wilde was born on October 16, 1854 and during his life he managed to write a successful novel *The Picture of Dorian Grey* – where he combines the supernatural elements of the Gothic novel with the downfall of French fiction, some comic masterpieces such as *Lady Windermere's Fan* – by this play he demonstrated that he could regenerate the French drama, and *The Importance of Being Earnest*; and poetry – his debut was with *Ravenna* written in 1878 for to which he won the Newdigate Prize.

The Happy Prince and Other Tales (1888) revealed Wilde's gift for writing fairy tales.

Thanks to his writings he enjoyed a rise to the top of society but this was tainted by an accusation of marquis of Queensberry who declared him a sodomite. Despite his brilliant defense he was found guilty and sentenced to two years of hard labor.

After his release he went to France where he hoped to regenerate the writer hidden inside him but he only succeeded to write *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) where he revealed the inhumane conditions in prison.

He died on November 30, 1900 in Paris, France of acute meningitis and he was received into the Roman Catholic Church.

Note: I would give this fragment for students to read at home as homework because it is quite long.

A. Vocabulary

- | | | | |
|--------|-----|--------|-----|
| 1. 1-c | 4-f | 2. 1-d | 4-c |
| 2-g | 5-d | 2-g | 5-e |
| 3-a | 6-b | 3-a | 6-b |
| | 7-e | | 7-f |

Note: The teacher gives the table with the synonyms **for to** half of the class and the table with the antonyms **for to** the other half of the class.

3. “Close your eyes and pick a word” After the students finished their work they exchange their tables; working in pairs they have to choose a word with their eyes closed and then make sentences with 3 of them.
4. a-reeds
b-chimney-pot
c-courtiers
d-lead
e-seamstress; pricked
- f-sword-hilt
g-embalm
h-miller
i-beak
j-lie

B. Reading Comprehension

a-F →The Swallow alighted between his feet.

b-F →The Swallow remained with the statue and they became friends.

c-T

d-T

e-F →The hands of the seamstress are coarse and red.

f-T

g-T

h-F →Indeed the Swallow did not like boys because the boys of the miller were rude to him; but they did not hurt him at all.

C. Creative Tasks

1. The statue begins to cry because it is a way of relief and it marks the true beginning of his life. He has never cried because he thought that what he lived was happiness: *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 yet I cannot choose but weep .*
2. At the beginning the Prince was not a hero because he did not care to ask what was behind that lofty wall. Through the meeting with the Swallow he was given the gift to tell a story which offered him the chance to become a hero – he gave up everything to help the people in need.

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Note: Through the characterization of the personal hero the teacher wants the students to use as many adjectives as possible but they have to pay attention to the usage/order of them.

3. FRIENDSHIP characterizes best the relationship between the two. The Swallow is really devoted to the Prince and helps him with all his heart. He is ready to die for him and for his belief.
4. I think the Swallow remained beside the Prince because their relationship was too strong and special.

Note: The teacher wants the students not only to write an end to the fragment but also to illustrate some scenes present in their imagination. In this way the teacher develops also their drawing skills.

Reference List

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