

Talking about *The Happy Prince and Other Tales*

by Oscar Wilde · the free ebook lives at youngreaderguide.org/books/happy-prince/

Warming up

Easy openers. Anyone at the table can answer these, including the youngest.

1. Which would you rather be: the Happy Prince (loved by the whole city but stuck on a column), the Swallow (free to fly to Egypt but always leaving someone), or the Nightingale (the best singer in the wood that nobody listens to)?
2. Rank the five tales from saddest to funniest. Does everyone at the table have the same list?
3. Charles Robinson painted twelve pictures for this book. If you could hang one on your wall, which one?

The real conversation

Pick two or three, not all of them. Parents answer too, honestly.

1. When the Prince was alive he lived in the Palace of Sans-Souci, where sorrow wasn't allowed in, and he says he was happy there — 'if pleasure be happiness.' Only as a statue, high above the city, can he finally see everything. Would you rather live happily inside the walls or see clearly from the column? Can you do both?
2. The Swallow tells the Prince every single night that he's leaving for Egypt tomorrow — and stays, and stays, and stays. What actually keeps him there? Have you ever kept saying you were about to leave something, and didn't?
3. The Nightingale gives her life to make the red rose, and the student tosses it into the gutter and goes back to his books. Was her gift wasted? Does a gift only count if the person receives it well?
4. The Giant builds a wall, and it stays winter inside; the children creep back in, and spring comes with them. The book says plainly that the children WERE the spring. What's something your family has put a wall around that might need its children back?
5. The Miller has all the best speeches about friendship — 'real friends should have everything in common' — while taking Hans's flowers, his plank, his whole Saturday. Hans never once notices. How do you tell a real friend from a Miller? Could you be someone's Miller without knowing it?

6. The Rocket is certain he's the most remarkable thing at the wedding, and he goes off at midday when no one is watching. The Swallow never gives a single speech about himself, and the whole city ends up mourning him. What's the difference between wanting to matter and mattering?

The big *one*

Save it for last.

At the end of the first tale, God asks an angel to bring the two most precious things in the whole city, and the angel comes back with a cracked lead heart and a dead bird. If an angel had to bring the two most precious things from this house, what would they be — and would anybody outside this family understand the choice?

Do it *together*

Illuminate your initial. Every tale in this edition opens with its first letter drawn huge — wrapped in roses, cherubs, and swallows by Charles Robinson. Everyone takes a page and does theirs: your first initial, drawn as big as your hand, decorated with the things you'd give away if you were the Happy Prince. Trade pages when you're done and guess what each treasure is. Tape them inside the front door where the Swallow would see them.