

## The Little Prince 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Revised by Victoria Sara Dazin



Since its 1943 publication, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's classic novella has moved and changed children and adults alike. On this, the Little Prince's 80th birthday, we honor the worldwide impact of a small space traveler who inspires us to live well and to take care of that which we hold dear.

With children and parents, with French teachers and students, with readers and writers and artists, we honor this very special birthday. Additionally, during the whole of 2023, alongside the Fondation Antoine de Saint Exupéry pour la Jeunesse, we will continue to celebrate Saint-Ex's masterpiece and the author's legacy. Stay tuned for more on the Year of the Little Prince!

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, born June 29, 1900, was a French writer and aviator. He is best remembered for his novella *The Little Prince* (in French, *Le Petit Prince*). He also wrote books about aviation adventures, including *Night Flight* and *Wind, Sand, and Stars*.

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, having fled the turmoil of World War II in France. Like the narrator, Saint-Exupéry was a pilot who experienced a plane crash in a desert (Libya). His wife, Consuelo, is also said to have had erratic behavior 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 in 2000). Thus, the narrator and little prince have been viewed as expressions of different aspects of Saint-Exupéry himself. This theory is explored in the 2018 documentary *Invisible Essence: The Little Prince*, which also discusses the work's themes and legacy.

During World War II, he joined the Free French Forces and disappeared on a reconnaissance flight over the Mediterranean in July 1944.

*In The Little Prince*, there are so many great passages one comes about when the little prince explains to his new acquaintance the fox why he is despondent. He had fallen in love with a rose, believing she was the only one in the world.

<https://rhapsodyinbooks.wordpress.com/2010/06/29/june-29-1900-birthday-of-antoine-de-saint-exupery>



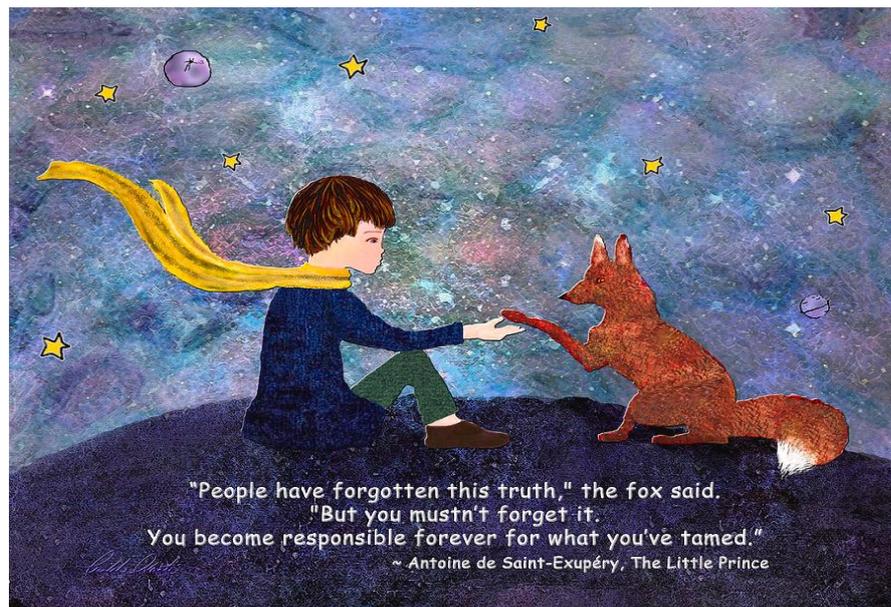
Then he discovered to his dismay that there are many roses, and the object of his love was not unique. The fox explains that it doesn't matter; establishing ties with one particular being changes everything:

*“To me, you are still nothing more than a little boy who is just like a hundred thousand other little boys. And I do not need of you. And you, on your part, do not need me. To you, I am nothing more than a fox like a hundred thousand other foxes. But if you tame me, then we shall need each other. To me, you will be unique in the world. To you, I shall be unique in all the world . . .*

*‘I am beginning to understand,’ said the little prince. ‘There is a flower . . . I think that she has tamed me. . .’*

Before the fox goes, he imparts yet more wisdom to the boy:

*“‘Goodbye,’ said the fox. ‘And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.’ ... ‘It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.’”*



## **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 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 seedlings, lest they grow big enough to engulf the tiny planet. One day an 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 knows 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 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. The geographer recommends that the little prince visit 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 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 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 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 April 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 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.” However, the novella ultimately became a beloved classic, its story resonating with readers of all ages. Saint-Exupéry had little time to enjoy its success. The same month that the book was published, he joined the Free French Air Force, and in July 1944 he disappeared while flying a reconnaissance mission, reportedly shot down.

**The Little Prince**, French **Le Petit Prince**, was published with his illustrations in French as *Le Petit Prince* in 1943. The simple tale tells the story of a child, the little prince, who travels the universe gaining wisdom. The novella has been translated into hundreds of languages and has sold some 200 million copies worldwide, making it one of the best-selling books in publishing history.

## **Adaptations**

The enduring appeal of *The Little Prince* resulted in numerous adaptations around the world, from radio plays and films to operas, ballets, and theatre productions. Movies included Stanley Donen’s 1974 musical, featuring Bob Fosse and Gene Wilder, and a 2015 animated film with voice work by Jeff Bridges and Rachel McAdams.

A French TV series inspired by the novella aired from 2010 to 2017. In 2016 the National Ballet of Canada performed its adaptation.

In addition, cocreator Nicholas Lloyd Webber, son of famed British composer and theatrical producer Andrew Lloyd Webber, debuted the stage musical *The Little Prince* in 2011.

<https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Little-Prince>

“Le Petit Prince”

Written by Kate Lohnes,  
The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica

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