The Snow Goose and Other Stories

Paul Gallico

Summary

The Snow Goose

Part 1: This story is set in England in 1930. Philip Rhayader is a hunchback whose physical deformity has isolated him from other people. He now lives alone in an abandoned lighthouse on the southeast coast of England. He is an artist who paints the birds that inhabit the desolate marshland by the sea. He also provides the birds with food and shelter. One day a girl named Fritha, who lives in the local village, comes to see him, carrying an injured bird. She is afraid of Philip, but she has heard that he knows how to take care of wild creatures. He examines the bird and tells Fritha that it is a Canadian snow goose that must have flown off course. After their first meeting, Fritha often visits the lighthouse to see the bird. When the bird flies north in the spring, Fritha’s visits stop. Every October when the snow goose returns Fritha comes to the lighthouse, and when the snow goose leaves, Fritha’s visits stop.

Part 2: Fritha and Philip’s relationship develops, although they never speak of the love they feel for each other. Each year the snow goose spends longer and longer periods at the lighthouse until it never leaves. In 1940 Britain is at war. Germany has invaded Belgium and France and now thousands of Allied troops are trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk in France. Philip sails across the Channel and rescues many soldiers, taking them to the bigger boats in deeper water that will bring them back to England. All the time he is accompanied by the snow goose. In the lighthouse Fritha finds a painting that Philip has done of her and the snow goose and she realises the love that exists between them. One evening the snow goose returns to the lighthouse. Fritha knows in her heart that Philip will not return. Then one night an enemy plane targets the lighthouse and destroys it.

The Doll

Part 1: In London, Dr Amony buys a beautiful doll for his niece’s birthday. He wants to meet the person who makes the dolls. He discovers that it is a young woman, Mary, who is in her aunt’s care. Mary has a twisted leg and is very ill. Dr Amony suspects that Mary’s aunt may have something to do with her illness.

Part 2: Dr Amony discover that Mary is dominated by her aunt, Rose Callamit, who forces her to make the dolls, then sells them and keeps the money. Mary is dying because no-one loves her; her dolls are her only children. The doctor falls in love with her, rescues her from Rose Callamit and finally marries her.

The Silver Swans

Part 1: Doctor Fundoby, who has an important job at the British Museum, meets a young woman who lives on a houseboat on the River Thames in London. She calls herself Thetis (a character from an old Greek story who lived under the sea). She is really called Alice and she is a professional actress. She asks Dr Fundoby: ‘How will I know when I’m really in love?’ He suggests a test.

Part 2: Alice puts the test into practice with a handsome ocean scientist, Richard Hadley, whose boat is on the river. The test is successful and Alice marries Richard.

About the author

Paul William Gallico was born in New York City in 1897. In 1921 he graduated from Columbia University with a Bachelor of Science degree. He took a job in the sports department of a newspaper. He wrote an article about the famous boxer, Jack Dempsey. He wanted to know what it was like to be hit by the world heavyweight champion, so he asked if he could spend a few minutes in the ring with Dempsey. He was knocked out in under two minutes but he had a great story! He became Sports Editor and was one of the best known sports writers in the United States. But he had always wanted to be a fiction writer, and he wrote short stories and sports articles for magazines. In 1936 he went to live in Europe and concentrated on his writing. In 1941, The Snow Goose was published and Gallico became as well known in Europe as he was in the U.S. He wrote more than forty books, on a wide range of subjects. Gallico’s book, The Poseidon Adventure (1969), is a serious thriller describing the adventures of a group of people
trapped inside an upturned ocean liner. The book was made into a film and was the first of the 'disaster movies' of the 1970s. He also wrote children's books and several books about cats! He died in Monaco on 15 July 1976.

The original text

The plots of The Snow Goose, The Doll and The Silver Swans are fictional. However, due to Gallico's use of different narrators and fragments, his stories look like legends. It is said that during his lifetime Gallico was often asked if his stories were retellings of actual legends.

Background and themes

Love through epiphany: Do we realise that we are in love as time passes or do we have a sudden revelation?

Love vs. hatred and separation: Can hatred and separation destroy love or is love more powerful?

Discussion activities

The following teacher-led activities aim at discussion and extension.

The Snow Goose

Part 1

Before reading

1 Guess: In pairs, have students look at the cover and:
   a Describe the picture: What type of bird is the girl holding? Why isn't the goose afraid of the girl?
   b Read the title: What is a snow goose? Where does it live?

2 Guess: Read the phrase in italics that appears beneath the title on page 1.
   Why did women turn their eyes away from 'him'? What do you think 'he' looked like? What didn't the women see?

While reading

3 Check: Ask students to look at the illustration on page 1 and spot the marsh and lighthouse in it.

4 Read carefully: Ask students to re-read page 2 and underline with different colours the good and bad things about living in the Great Marsh.

5 Discuss: Have students talk about feeling different.
   What is a hunchback? Do you know any famous hunchback in classic literature? What was Quasimodo's life like? Where did he live? Was Philip's life similar to Quasimodo's? Why? Why not? What kinds of friends did Philip have instead of people?

6 Discuss: Have students talk about fear.
   Fritha went to Philip's house though she was very much afraid of the stories she heard about him. Have you ever been afraid of talking to someone? Did you talk to the person? Why? Why not? Why did Fritha forget about her fear?

Research: Ask students to bring a map of the world and draw a line showing the snow goose's journey from Canada to England.

After reading

8 Write: Divide students into two groups.
   a Have one group write different stories that the people of the village may tell about Philip.
   b Have another group write down Philip's diary entry the day before he meets Fritha.

9 Role play: Discuss with students what Fritha says to her mother so that she lets her go to Philip's house every day. Then get them to dramatise the dialogue.

Part 2

Before reading

10 Research: Ask students to do some research about World War 2.
   When did it take place? What two groups of countries participated in the war?

While reading

11 Guess: Re-read pages 15–16 and imagine that Philip wrote a letter to Fritha before leaving.
   What would the letter say? How would Fritha answer his letter?

12 Guess: Have students think about what might happen next.
   Will Philip be able to save the British soldiers at Dunkirk? Will he return to the lighthouse?

13 Read carefully: Ask students to re-read pages 20–24 and make a list of Philip's heroic actions.

After reading

14 Write: Have students prepare a news report. The students are reporters listening to Private Potton's story. Have them write a news report with the headline: Philip Rhayader: The Mysterious Hero. They can include drawings.

15 Write: Divide students into three groups and have them write from the snow goose's point of view:
   a when Fritha asked her to take care of Philip.
   b when Philip died.
   c when Fritha learnt about Philip's death.

16 Role play: A reporter finds out about Fritha and Philip's relationship. Have students imagine the reporter's interview with Fritha and then get them to dramatise the dialogue.

17 Write: Have students write an obituary. Students imagine they are Fritha. Have them write Philip's obituary for the village's newspaper.
The Snow Goose and Other Stories

The Doll

Part 1

Before reading
18 Guess: Have students look at the illustration on pages 30–31.
Where is the man? What is he going to do? What things do you see in the shop window? What is the doll’s face like? Why is the doll’s face sad?

While reading
19 Discuss: Have students talk about dolls and toys. Did you have a favourite doll or toy when you were a child? Who gave it to you? What made your doll or toy special?
20 Read carefully: Have students re-read pages 37–38, look for hints about Mary’s illness and underline those sentences.
21 Pair work: In this part, there are many mysteries. Have students write down five questions they would like to ask Rose and Mary Callamit.

After reading
22 Write: Have students write the doll’s thoughts as she is waiting at the shop window for somebody to buy her.
23 Write: Have students write Dr Amony’s diary entry. Have them write down Dr Amony’s thoughts after meeting Rose and Mary Callamit.

Part 2

Before reading
24 Guess: Students will read the questions they would like to ask Rose and Mary Callamit (see Activity 21) out loud and the whole class will find an answer.

While reading
25 Discuss: Have students talk about life without love. Dr Amony says that Mary is dying because nobody loves her. How important is love to all living creatures?
26 Read carefully: What do the dolls she makes represent in Rose’s life?
   a) a way of expressing herself, b) a game, c) a job and d) what is missing in her life

After reading
27 Role play: Doctor Amony asks Jim Carter to have a long conversation with Rose Callamit when she enters his shop. What does he talk about? Get students to dramatise the dialogue.
28 Write: Have students write a letter from Mary Nolan. You are Mary Nolan and you are now married to Stephen. Write a letter to your aunt, Rose Callamit and tell her why you were so unhappy and so ill.

The Silver Swans

Part 1

Before reading
29 Discuss: Have students talk about living on the water.
What is a house boat? Would you like to live in one? Why (not)?

While reading
30 Discuss: Have students talk about tests of love. Dr Fundoby says you can be sure you are in love when you can still love him/her when he/she is ill or ugly. Do you agree with Dr Fundoby? Do you have a test to know if you really are in love?
31 Guess: What does Thetis want? Thetis sings the song ‘The Silver Swans’ (page 57). Why is the song called that? Do you think Thetis wants to find her true love? Why (not)? Do you think that the four dirty white swans show that Thetis is going to meet her true love?

After reading
32 Write: Have students write Thetis’s diary entry. Thetis says she is in love with Richard Hadley (page 60). Write Thetis’s thoughts after she met Richard.

Part 2

While reading
33 Discuss: Have students talk about double lives. Why do Thetis and Richard Hadley hide what they do? What sort of life would you like to have apart from the one you already have?

After reading
34 Role play: Have students imagine there is a talk show called ‘Is Richard a good partner for Thetis?’ Have them play the talk show host, Thetis, Richard Hadley and Dr Fundoby. Remember that if they are part of the audience they can ask questions and make comments as does the studio audience of any talk show.

Vocabulary activities
For the Word list and vocabulary activities, go to www.penguinreaders.com.