

Reading Guide

The Princess Bride

S. Morgenstern's Classic Tale of True Love and High Adventure

by William Goldman

Introduction

William Goldman's swashbuckling romp, *The Princess Bride*, has sold more than one million copies since it was first published by Harcourt in 1973. Goldman also wrote the screenplay for the film version, released in 1987, which introduced another generation of fans to this rollicking, wildly imaginative novel. Featuring strapping farmers and eccentric royals, wrestling and swordfights, heartrending romance and eye-popping danger, this is a fairy tale also laced with sparkling satirical quips and intriguing "true revelations" about the author at every turn. From the Cliffs of Insanity to the Zoo of Death, this classic tale of good and evil (and every quirky variation in between) is sure to enchant and entertain.

The following questions and topics are intended to enhance your reading of William Goldman's *The Princess Bride*. We hope they will enrich your experience of this fantastic voyage.

Questions and Topics for Discussion

1. In the introduction to the thirtieth-anniversary edition, Goldman claims that he adapted *The Princess Bride* from a book originally written by the great Florinese writer S. Morgenstern. Throughout the rest of the novel, Goldman sustains two narratives: the tale of *The Princess Bride* and the story of his own involvement with it. How do Goldman's comments about Morgenstern, the publishing process, and the entertainment industry in general affect your reading of his novel?
2. Just before she reaches sixteen, Buttercup is the envy of all the village girls. Word of her beauty reaches Count Rugen, who pays a visit to her family. What makes Buttercup discover she is in love with the farm boy she has taunted? What tone does Goldman use to describe her confession of love and Westley's response? How does this compare with traditional episodes of fairy-tale love?
3. Why does Prince Humperdinck build his Zoo of Death? What is significant about the fifth level? How would you characterize the Prince's brand of sadism—and the sadism of Count Rugen and his life-sucking Machine? How are these elements of sadism and evil necessary to the universe of a fairy tale?
4. In the early part of the story Buttercup's kidnappers are known only as the Spaniard, the Turk, and the Sicilian. But as each of these men prepares to battle the Man in Black, the reader learns the kidnapper's name, his history, and how he became part of "the most effective criminal organization in the civilized world." How does this affect our reading of the subsequent battle scenes? With whom do your sympathies lie?

5. Discuss the story Westley tells about the Dread Pirate Roberts. How does this tale within the tale influence your interest in Westley? Is he still the same farm boy from the beginning of the book?
6. During the scenes in which Westley is tortured and then killed by Count Rugen and his Machine does Goldman maintain a consistent tone, or does it shift depending on whether he is describing macabre events?
7. In the first chapter of *Buttercup's Baby*, why does Piccoli want Inigo to train his mind instead of his body in preparation for meeting the six-fingered man? What did you learn about Inigo in these passages that you didn't know before?
8. Also in *Buttercup's Baby*, how does Fezzik attempt to save Waverly's life as they fall through the air? What does this action, along with the name Waverly calls him, reveal about Fezzik's character?
9. Consider the romantic relationships that Goldman describes throughout the novel (Goldman and Helen, Westley and Buttercup, Miracle Max and Valerie). How does Goldman portray the women in his novel? Does this say something about his views of romance and marriage—or is it all part of a joke?
10. What surprised you most about the end of the book? Do you agree with what Goldman says about endings and about the fairness of life? Why or why not?
11. In addition to writing the novel *The Princess Bride*, Goldman also wrote the screenplay for the 1987 film adaptation directed by Rob Reiner. How does Goldman describe his experiences in both publishing and Hollywood? How does the book compare to the film? What plot changes do you notice, and why do you think they were made?
12. *The Princess Bride* was originally published in the 1970s. Does it reflect the trends of this time period, or does the original publication date seem surprising? What is its place in American literary history? How is the book also timeless?
13. How should *The Princess Bride* ultimately be categorized: Satire? Adventure? Romance? Fantasy? Is the title ironic? Does it imply a tame love story or a traditional piece of children's literature?

About the Author

WILLIAM GOLDMAN has been writing books and movies for more than forty years. His screenplays for *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and *All the President's Men* won Academy Awards, and he has received three Lifetime Achievement Awards in screenwriting.