

The foolishness of
love: instruction in
"the nightingale and
the rose"



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ The Nightingale and the Rose” by Oscar Wilde is a children’s story within his collection, “ The Happy Prince and Other Tales.” In this story, a student pines over a romantic interest who ultimately rejects him, despite the help he receives from the Nightingale and despite his efforts to win her over. In the process of attempting to win her over and being rejected, the student learns a valuable lesson about his own values. Like other stories in the collection, this tale is intended to impart a lesson on the child reader. “ The Nightingale and the Rose” teaches the reader that education and logic are more important than romantic love.

In this narrative, the student is in great emotional pain because of his feelings for his unrequited love interest, which is intended to teach the reader that they should not invest so much energy into romance. The student weeps at the beginning of the story, and says, “ It’s amazing how happiness depends on such little things. I’ve read all that the wise men have written, and all the secrets of philosophy, but my life is wretched because of a red rose.” Despite having knowledge of the secrets of life, the student experiences severe emotional pain because of a love interest. This suggests that the student believes that romantic love is more important than his studies, because he places his feelings over logic and knowledge. However, this turns out to be a folly. At the end of the story, the student’s love interest rejects his advances, which worsens the student’s pain and makes him very angry. This suggests that the student should not have invested so much energy into the love interest. and he should have placed logical thinking over emotional thinking.

The Nightingale's sacrifice and work are ultimately useless, suggesting the uselessness of love. The Nightingale understands the student's romantic feelings. According to the narrator, the nightingale, "understood the secret of the student's sorrow." The Nightingale says to himself, "Surely love is a wonderful thing. It's more precious than emeralds and diamonds and gold." The Nightingale holds romantic love in high esteem and sacrifices himself for the love that the student feels. He goes through great lengths to ensure that the student receives his red rose, and ultimately dies because of this sacrifice. The student doesn't understand the sacrifice, thinking that he has found the red rose by himself. This suggests the uselessness of the sacrifice. The red rose, in turn, is useless to the student, because his love interest rejects him. This further suggests that it was foolish for the bird to sacrifice himself for the sake of romantic love. Because the Nightingale's actions in the name of love are useless and foolish, we can extrapolate that in this story romantic love is useless and foolish.

At the end of the story the protagonist chooses to read a book instead of continuing to pursue romantic love, which suggests the moral lesson of the story: logic and education are more important than love. In the final paragraph of the story the student says, "What a silly thing love is.... It's not half as useful as logic, and in fact is quite unpractical. I shall go back to philosophy." He then goes back to his room and begins to read. This is a remarkable change from how we are introduced to the student's character—he is pining over a woman and hopes that he can find a red rose to give to her in order to win her over. In the end, he throws the red rose in the gutter. Throwing the red rose in the gutter signifies that he is abandoning the

pursuit of romantic love. After he throws away the rose, he goes to read his book, which represents logic and knowledge. The obvious symbolism and the actions of the narrator at the end of the story suggests the moral lesson.

“ The Nightingale and the Rose,” a didactic children’s story, suggests that pursuing romantic love is not a useful endeavor compared to pursuing education. In stories where there is a moral lesson, we often see that the protagonist has undergone a change because of what he has learned throughout the story. At the beginning of the story, the student understands his feelings of romantic love to be more important than anything else, including his studies. The Nightingale attempts to help him pursue his romantic interest and dies in the attempt. The student’s romantic interest rejects him. The student symbolically casts aside the red rose that the Nightingale died to bring him, which demonstrates the lesson of the story: romantic love is useless, and a person should focus on logic while investing their energy into obtaining knowledge.