The Phantom Tollbooth

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF NORTON JUSTER

Juster was born in Brooklyn, New York, to Jewish immigrant parents. Like his father, he pursued a career in architecture. He joined the Navy in the mid-1950s as a young man. While in the Navy, Juster began doing small watercolors of fantastical creatures and writing in his downtime—though he was asked to stop. During these years, he wrote a children's book that was never published. *The Phantom Tollbooth* came about when Juster received a grant to write a children's book on urban planning. Instead, inspired by his own experiences as a kid and a conversation with a child at a restaurant about what the biggest number is, Juster wrote *The Phantom Tollbooth*. The book's illustrator, Jules Feiffer, lived in the apartment below Juster's. Feiffer's girlfriend was the one to take *Tollbooth* to a publisher. Despite the fact that *The Phantom Tollbooth* has been considered a classic for decades (and the fact that Juster also wrote the wildly popular picture book *The Dot and the Line*, which was adapted into a 10-minute short by Chuck Jones of Looney Tunes fame), Juster mostly focused on his architecture career. He taught architecture at Hampshire College and also cofounded an architecture firm. Juster died in March of 2021 of complications related to a stroke.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While Milo is both too young and self-involved to give any information about the real world he inhabits, the rapidly changing American midcentury landscape looms over the novel—and not in a favorable way. The decades after World War II saw the development of the suburbs and a thriving middle class, as well as a general speeding-up of daily life. Juster alludes to a lot of this in *The Phantom Tollbooth*: Dr. Dischord mentions people wanting only to hear the horrible city noises and not appreciating beautiful sounds, reflecting the modern move away from nature. Alec Bings shows Milo the city Reality, where people move too fast to appreciate the world around them—a reference to the rise of the car and, more generally, the speed of modern life. And Milo at the beginning of the novel reads as the not-unexpected product of a world that prioritizes speed, conformity, and consumerism above all else. He has more than he could ever need in the way of books and toys—and yet, Milo has no idea how to amuse himself or appreciate what he has, he doesn't truly see his apartment or his city, and he definitely doesn't appreciate them.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Though reviewers reference many books of all sorts when writing about *The Phantom Tollbooth*, one of the most commonly listed ones is Lewis Carroll's Alice books (*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*). Published about a century before *Tollbooth*, they also feature a young child winding up in an imaginary world where they learn lessons applicable to the real world. Juster, however, hadn't read the Alice books when he wrote *Tollbooth*. Rather, he was inspired by many of his own experiences, and in terms of books, he took inspiration from *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame (Juster insisted that illustrator Jules Feiffer include maps on the endpapers, like in *The Wind in the Willows*). *Tollbooth* has also often been compared to John Bunyan's 17th century novel *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which describes a man's spiritual awakening and discovery of Christianity in much the same way Milo learns how to tap into knowledge and learning. In its use of puns and allegory, Tollbooth also shares similarities with Salman Rushdie's *Haroun and the Sea of Stories*. *Tollbooth* was published the same year as Roald Dahl's classic *James and the Giant Peach*. Dahl, like Juster, took issue with the rapidly changing modern world, though this shows up more in his later novel *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (which, among other things, proposes that television robs children of the ability to think and amuse themselves). In how *Tollbooth* negatively portrays the modern world, it also shares similarities with Italo Calvino's experimental 1970s novel *Invisible Cities*, which criticizes consumerism, the frantic pace of modern life, and the absence of rhyme or reason in modern life. Many modern children's and young adult novels, particularly dystopian ones, also portray young people learning about their worlds and how to make them better specifically by reconnecting with nature, in much the same way that Milo must travel all through the Lands Beyond to learn how to be happy with his real life in the city. Books that follow this pattern include *Uglies* by Scott Westerfeld and *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Phantom Tollbooth
- **When Written:** 1960
- **Where Written:** New York
- **When Published:** 1961
- **Literary Period:** 20th century children's literature boom
- **Genre:** Children's Novel, Nonsense Literature
- **Setting:** Milo's bedroom and the Lands Beyond
- **Climax:** Milo, Tock, and the Humbug rescue the princesses Rhyme and Reason
- **Antagonist:** The demons, who represent qualities like

ignorance, sloth, greed, selfishness, and closed-mindedness

- **Point of View:** Third Person

EXTRA CREDIT

That's Not For Kids! It was a challenge for Juster to get *The Phantom Tollbooth* published (and once it was, it was hard to get libraries and bookstores to stock it) because many believed its puns, wordplay, and complex concepts would go right over children's heads. The novel's enduring popularity among children and adults, of course, continues to prove early naysayers wrong—*The Phantom Tollbooth* has been considered a modern children's classic for decades.

Thwarted. In the decades after *The Phantom Tollbooth* came out, a number of young readers set about trying to crack what they assumed was the code in the Mathemagician's letter to Azaz the Unabridged (which consists entirely of numbers). When they couldn't, some wrote to Juster asking for help—and he had to break it to them that the numbers were truly just random numbers and weren't a code at all.

PLOT SUMMARY

Milo is a chronically bored little boy. He can't amuse himself or be happy anywhere. One day, after racing home from school and preparing for another boring afternoon, Milo notices a big mysterious package in his room. It's a kit to put together a small purple **tollbooth** that leads to "lands beyond." Since he has nothing better to do, Milo puts it together. He gets in his toy electric car and puts his coin in the tollbooth.

Suddenly, Milo is driving along a beautiful country road. First, he comes to a sign that instructs him to honk for advice. When he honks, a man introduces himself as the Whether Man and welcomes Milo to Expectations. Confused by the Whether Man's odd behavior, Milo drives on. But soon after, Milo starts to daydream. As he stops paying attention, he takes a wrong turn and the car stops. A small creature on Milo's shoulder says this is the Doldrums, where nothing changes and nothing happens. He and his fellows are Lethargians. Milo got here because he wasn't thinking; thinking is against the law in the Doldrums. Just as Milo is about to accompany the Lethargians on holiday, a watchdog named Tock, whose body is an **alarm clock**, chases the Lethargians away. He tells Milo how to get out of the Doldrums (Milo must think) and asks to accompany Milo to Dictionopolis.

Finally, Milo and Tock reach the gates of Dictionopolis. Immediately upon entering, the king's five advisors welcome Milo to town and confuse him, as they all say the same thing using different words. Milo has never paid much attention to words before this, but now they seem interesting, so he browses the words in the market. At a stall that sells individual letters, Milo meets the Spelling Bee, who encourages him to learn to spell. But then the Humbug appears. The Humbug believes spelling is overrated, so he and the Spelling Bee fight—and knock the entire market over in the process. When Dictionopolis's one-man police force, Officer Shrift, arrives, he blames Milo for the damage. After giving Milo a short sentence of "I am," Officer Shrift puts Milo and Tock in prison for six million years.

In the dark dungeons, Milo and Tock meet what they think is a witch. But the kind old woman, Faintly Macabre, says she's actually a Which—she used to choose which words people could use, but when she started to hoard words and brought about silence and economic depression, the king put her in prison. She can't get out until the princesses Rhyme and Reason return to the kingdom.

Faintly Macabre tells Milo the story of the Lands Beyond. There used to be nothing but monsters and demons in the land until a prince arrived from across the Sea of Knowledge and, over the years, established the Kingdom of Wisdom. He had two sons who founded Dictionopolis and Digitopolis, and when the king was old, he discovered two baby girls under his grape arbor. He named the girls Rhyme and Reason, and as they grew, they ruled on matters of state with fairness and compassion. Things were fine until the king died. His sons, King Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician, constantly fought over whether numbers or letters were more important, and their fight reached a climax. When Rhyme and Reason ruled that letters and numbers were equally important, the new kings imprisoned them in the **Castle in the Air**, which is perched high above the Mountains of Ignorance. The demons still live in the castle. Milo suggests he rescue the princesses, but Faintly Macabre says it's too difficult. But she does note that there's a door out of the dungeon.

Immediately upon stepping into the sunshine, Milo and Tock are swept up by the king's advisors to attend a royal banquet. There, Milo meets Azaz the Unabridged and is tasked with deciding the menu. Milo's suggestions of "a light meal" or "a square meal" end up being terrible, as waiters bring platters of dancing light and steaming squares. Milo is upset; he didn't realize he'd have to eat his words. Once all the guests, save the Humbug, have left the hall, Milo suggests that things might make more sense if Rhyme and Reason returned. Azaz agrees that this is a great idea. He gives Milo a **gift** of all the words he knows and insists the Humbug will accompany Milo and Tock on the journey.

After driving a while out of Dictionopolis, Milo and his friends come across the Point of View. There, they meet Alec Bings, a little boy who floats in the air—in his family, Alec explains, children grow down to the ground. That way, they never have to change their point of view. He leads Milo through the forest and shows him the towns of Illusion (a beautiful city that doesn't exist) and Reality (a city that doesn't exist anymore

because people stopped noticing it, but where people still live). Then, they attend the evening concert. But rather than play music, the huge orchestra plays all the colors in the world, conducted by a man named Chroma. Once Chroma has conducted the sunset, he leaves to sleep and asks Milo to wake him so he can play the sunrise in the morning. In the morning, Milo decides conducting the sunrise himself shouldn't be too hard—but the musicians won't stop playing and end up playing through an entire week of color. But once the unsuspecting Chroma plays the sunrise, Alec takes his friends back to their car and gives Milo a parting gift: a telescope, so he can see how things really are.

Next, Milo, Tock, and the Humbug come across Dr. Dischord and his assistant, a cloud of blue smog called the DYNNE. Dr. Dischord creates all unpleasant noises and is thankful for the rise of big cities; now, people want noises like screeches and honks. He warns Milo that to get to Digitopolis, Milo will have to go through the terrible Valley of Sound. The valley seems normal to Milo—until suddenly, he realizes he can't hear any noises or make noise of his own. The silent residents of the valley explain, by writing on a chalkboard, that this is because of a woman called the Soundkeeper. The people need Milo's help: if he can bring a tiny sound out of the Soundkeeper's fortress, they can knock it down and release sound back into the world.

The Soundkeeper, to Milo's surprise, can speak—as can Milo while he's in the fortress. She agrees to show Milo how she catalogues sounds and the facilities where she used to make sounds. She explains that the Valley of Sound is silent because, when Dr. Dischord "cured" everyone by causing them to only be able to hear terrible sounds, the Soundkeeper decided people couldn't have *any* sound if they only wanted awful ones. Milo can't figure out how to sneak a sound out—until he starts to object to something she says and is able to keep the "but" he was going to say on the tip of his tongue. Once he rejoins the valley's residents, he drops the "but" into a cannon, which shoots the word into the fortress. The fortress crumbles. The Soundkeeper sobs that she regrets what she did and gives Milo a gift. It's a package of sounds, and it includes a number of laughs.

After this, as Milo, Tock, and the Humbug drive along, they remark that things couldn't be going better. This causes them to fly suddenly to the Island of Conclusions, where a man named Canby shares that they must swim back to shore through the Sea of Knowledge. Once back on shore, they continue to Digitopolis.

The first being to meet them is the Dodecahedron, who shows the travelers to the numbers mine where Digitopolis mines all the numbers in the world. In the mine, they also meet the Mathemagician. Then, in the Mathemagician's workshop, the Mathemagician shows Milo the biggest and longest numbers (a giant three and a giant eight, respectively). Realizing Milo actually wants to know how big infinity is, he sends Milo up a staircase with infinite steps. On the steps Milo meets the left half of a child who loves averages—he's part of an average family, which includes 2.58 children. He's the .58 of a child. Disillusioned, Milo returns to the Mathemagician's workshop and, using logic, convinces the Mathemagician to let him rescue Rhyme and Reason (the Mathemagician and Azaz have sworn to disagree on everything, so because Azaz agreed to let Milo rescue the princesses, the Mathemagician initially refuses). He then gives Milo his own magic staff (a pencil) to help him on his journey.

The Dodecahedron walks Milo, Tock, and the Humbug to the foothills of the Mountains of Ignorance, where the travelers find they have to walk. They keep a close eye out for the demons. Soon, they meet their first demon: the Terrible Trivium, who tries to stop the travelers forever with mundane tasks. Milo escapes once he uses the magic staff to figure out how long it would take to perform the tasks. He, Tock, and the Humbug hurry on—but the demons start to chase them.

Milo and his friends use the gifts he picked up earlier in his journey to outsmart the Demon of Insincerity, the Gelatinous Giant, and the Official Senses Taker. The demons are right behind them as they run up the giant spiral staircase and enter the Castle in the Air, where they meet the princesses Rhyme and Reason. The princesses assure Milo that it's okay he took so long; he was learning, and that's important. As the demons try to cut away the staircase and send the castle flying away into the sky, the princesses say to let the castle go—it's just a prison, anyway.

Everyone grabs onto Tock, who can fly since "time flies." They reach the ground and race on. Just when it seems like the demons are going to catch them, the armies of Dictionopolis and Digitopolis arrive to beat them back. With Rhyme and Reason returned, everyone celebrates. Then, it's time for Milo to go home. Milo bids his friends goodbye, gets in his car, and drives back through the tollbooth. When he gets back to his room, he realizes he's only been gone an hour.

The next day after school, Milo is excited to go back through the tollbooth—but when he gets home, the tollbooth is gone. Milo is sad for a few minutes, but then he realizes that he has more than enough to keep him occupied here, in his room.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Milo – The protagonist of the novel, Milo is a little boy who, when readers first meet him, is chronically bored. He doesn't see the point in doing anything, whether that's learning in school or playing with his many toys at home. His only goal is to get wherever he's going as fast as possible, without noticing anything of the world around him. Things start to change for Milo when he gets home one day and finds a mysterious

package in his room. It's a kit to erect a purple **tollbooth** that will lead him to the Lands Beyond. In his toy electric car, Milo passes through the tollbooth into the Lands Beyond. During his journey through these lands, Milo transforms. At first, Milo finds the Lands Beyond nonsensical and confusing, as he's never had to think much before. As he meets the watchdog Tock, Milo starts to see that his time is valuable—it's horrible to waste it. He becomes interested in words, spelling, and math for the first time as King Azaz in Dictionopolis and the Mathemagician in Digitopolis show him how fun and useful it can be to use language, numbers, and logic to express himself and communicate with others. In the Forest of Sight, Milo learns how useful it can be to see things from different perspectives and not take everything at face value. As he internalizes these lessons, Milo gains the tools he needs to best the demons in the Mountains of Ignorance and rescue the princesses Rhyme and Reason, thereby restoring figurative rhyme and reason to the kingdom of Wisdom. When he accomplishes his task, Milo returns home to discover that he's only been gone an hour, even though it feels like he's been gone for weeks. He's excited to go back through the tollbooth the next day to spend more time with his friends. But when he gets home from school and discovers that the tollbooth is gone, Milo realizes that his experiences in the Lands Beyond have taught him how to amuse himself and find joy in his real world—he no longer needs the Lands Beyond to entertain himself.

Tock – Tock is the first real friend that Milo meets in the Lands Beyond. Tock is a watchdog, which means he's a massive dog whose body is a ticking **alarm clock**. Despite displaying a gruff demeanor at first, Tock is actually a normal dog in a lot of ways—he loves car rides and interesting smells, and he's very loyal and dedicated to Milo once they get to know each other. Throughout Milo's journey, Tock is his constant companion and voice of reason. When Milo gets confused by, for instance, King Azaz's advisors' flowery language, Tock observes that using lots of big, fancy words doesn't make someone wise—using the appropriate words does. But even more importantly, Tock impresses upon Milo the importance of using his time wisely and not wasting it. Watchdogs, Tock explains, exist to make sure that nobody wastes time, which people believe isn't valuable since there's so much of it. But actually, Tock suggests, time is a person's most valuable possession. Because Milo internalizes this lesson, when he returns home to his bedroom he realizes how important it is to tap into his imagination and amuse himself, rather than waste his time being bored and miserable. But Tock also provides more lighthearted comic relief, as when he flies Rhyme, Reason, Milo, and the Humbug down from the **Castle in the Air** because "time flies."

The Humbug – The Humbug is Milo's second companion along his journey to rescue the princesses Rhyme and Reason. He's a giant beetle-like bug dressed smartly in a coat, hat, pants, and spats. He also carries a cane. Despite his distinguished appearance and occasionally flowery language, though, the Humbug is self-involved, and his only goal in life is to be right—he's at home on either side of an argument until, of course, an obvious correct position appears. When he makes observations or offers opinions, he's often wrong. Because of this, the Humbug provides most of the comic relief as he, Milo, and Tock travel along. Most of the lessons that Milo and Tock learn don't necessarily register with the Humbug; at the end of the novel, he remains unchanged from his initial state.

King Azaz the Unabridged – Azaz is the king of Dictionopolis and the Mathemagician's brother. He's a huge man with a long beard, and he wears robes embroidered with the alphabet. As the king of the kingdom of words, King Azaz fully believes that words and language are far more important than numbers. This forms the basis of his ongoing feud with his brother, the Mathemagician (who believes numbers are superior). Years before the novel begins, this feud led King Azaz to agree to imprison the princesses Rhyme and Reason in the **Castle in the Air**—though in the present, Azaz laments that he ever agreed to this and suggests it'd be better if the princesses return. He's more than happy to let Milo lead the rescue mission, though he does send Milo with a **gift**: all the words Azaz knows, which Milo can use to ask and answer any question he needs to. King Azaz and the armies of Dictionopolis arrive to lead the final fight against the demons who live in the Mountains of Ignorance. He mostly makes up with the Mathemagician, though their argument appears likely to continue long after the novel's close.

The Mathemagician – The Mathemagician is the king of Digitopolis and King Azaz's brother. Like his brother, he's a towering man with a huge beard. His robes are embroidered with complex mathematical equations, and he carries a "magic staff," which is a giant pencil. Since his kingdom is the kingdom of numbers, the Mathemagician is convinced that numbers are far superior to words—and he's locked in a years-old feud with Azaz because of this. The feud is what caused the Mathemagician to agree to imprison Rhyme and Reason in the **Castle in the Air** years before the novel begins. Though the Mathemagician is initially open to the idea of rescuing the princesses, he rejects the idea outright when he learns that Azaz thought it was a good idea. But Milo is able to convince the Mathemagician to agree using logic, and to reward Milo for this (and to help Milo through the Mountains of Ignorance), the Mathemagician gives Milo a **gift**: a miniature magic staff (a pencil). Milo uses the magic staff to escape the Terrible Trivium's clutches. The Mathemagician rides to fight in the final clash with the demons and mostly makes up with Azaz—though it seems likely that they'll continue their argument long after Milo leaves the Lands Beyond.

Princess of Sweet Rhyme – Rhyme is a princess who, along with her sister Reason, has been imprisoned in the **Castle in the Air** for many years. Because of this, there's no rhyme or

reason in the Lands Beyond, and absurdity reigns instead. Rhyme looks exactly like her sister—they're both blond and beautiful—but she's more lighthearted and fun-loving. The old king found Rhyme and Reason abandoned at his grape arbor when the girls were infants and raised them as princesses. Together, the girls kept things balanced in the Lands Beyond and made up a sort of high court; they often weighed in on important decisions and offered fair and balanced rulings. Their older brothers, Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician, imprisoned the girls when the girls ruled that words and numbers are equally important. When Milo arrives in the Castle in the Air to rescue the princesses, they impress upon him the importance of education and being sensible. People are always learning, and this is always a good thing, they suggest; it's important to look at the world with a level head. With the princesses rescued, figurative rhyme and reason return to the Lands Beyond.

Princess of Pure Reason – Reason is a princess who, along with her sister Rhyme, has been imprisoned in the **Castle in the Air** for many years. Because of this, there's no rhyme or reason in the Lands Beyond, and absurdity reigns instead. Reason looks exactly like her sister—they're both blond and beautiful—but where her sister is often laughing, Reason is more reserved and chooses her words extremely carefully. The old king found Rhyme and Reason abandoned at his grape arbor when the girls were infants and raised them as princesses. Together, the girls kept things balanced in the Lands Beyond and made up a sort of high court; they often weighed in on important decisions and offered fair and balanced rulings. Their older brothers, Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician, imprisoned the girls when the girls ruled that words and numbers are equally important. When Milo arrives in the Castle in the Air to rescue the princesses, they impress upon him the importance of education and being sensible. People are always learning, and this is always a good thing, they suggest; it's important to look at the world with a level head. With the princesses rescued, figurative rhyme and reason return to the Lands Beyond.

The Soundkeeper – The Soundkeeper lives in a fortress in the Valley of Sound and used to manufacture all sounds people needed. She'd then catalogue all sounds in her vast sound library. But, after people in the Valley of Sound moved to cities and stopped appreciating her beautiful sounds as much, Dr. Dischord "cured" them and made it so they couldn't hear beautiful sounds anymore. In retaliation, the Soundkeeper decided to keep all sounds for herself. When Milo meets her, he discovers that while there's no sound elsewhere in the Valley of Sound, the Soundkeeper herself can speak and even wears clothes with small bells and chimes sewn on. She initially tells Milo that she believes she did the right thing to take sound away from people if they weren't going to appreciate the beautiful ones. But when Milo helps the valley's residents knock down the fortress and release sounds, the Soundkeeper admits that she was wrong to do this. She sends Milo with a **gift**: a package of sounds that includes many laughs. Later, the laughs make it so that, in the Mountains of Ignorance, the Official Senses Taker can't steal Milo's sense of humor.

Officer Shrift – Officer Shrift is the only police officer (and the entire police force) in Dictionopolis. And in addition to being the police force, he's also the judge and the jailer in town. He's about two feet tall and four feet wide, and as he walks through Dictionopolis he continuously mutters that the people around him are guilty. Officer Shrift imprisons Milo and Tock for destroying the Word Market, and in addition to giving them a "short sentence" ("I am," the shortest sentence he knows), he also imprisons them in the dungeons for six million years. But Faintly Macabre, the witch, assures Milo that while Officer Shrift loves locking people up, he doesn't care at all about keeping them in prison—there's a door out of the cell. Officer Shrift rides a dachshund in the final fight against the demons of Ignorance.

Faintly Macabre – Faintly Macabre—or Aunt Faintly to Milo—is imprisoned in the dungeons of Dictionopolis. Though Milo first believes she's a witch, Faintly Macabre corrects him that she's actually a Which. She was once the Official Which, which means that she was responsible for choosing which words should be said or written and which shouldn't. But as she tells her story, she explains that she grew miserly and began to hoard words until nobody in Dictionopolis could say anything and business had totally stagnated. At this point, she was put in prison—and she plans to stay there until the princesses Rhyme and Reason are freed. Faintly Macabre also tells Milo the princesses' story and inspires him to go rescue them.

Alec Bings – Alec Bings is a little boy Milo, Tock, and the Humbug meet in the Forest of Sight. He sees through things and sees things how they truly are, which provides some humor as Alec can't see what's right in front of him (like trees as he's running through the forest). In his family, babies are born in the air and then grow down until their feet touch the ground—so Alec hovers about three feet above the ground. This, he explains, is a good thing because people in his family never have to change their perspective as they grow; his perspective as an adult will be the exact same as it was when he was a child. Alec encourages Milo to think about perspective in a variety of ways, from encouraging him to try out seeing the world from an adult's perspective to showing him around the cities of Illusion and Reality. Alec also introduces Milo to Chroma. When they part, Alec gives Milo a **gift** of a telescope, which will allow Milo to see things as they truly are. Milo later uses this gift to deduce that one of the frightening demons that threatens him in the Mountains of Ignorance is actually small, cute, and nonthreatening.

The Whether Man – The Whether Man is the first person Milo meets in the Lands Beyond. He lives in Expectations and, when people honk, he runs to the road to dispense advice. But the

Whether Man hates making decisions, so his speech only confuses Milo because he won't speak clearly or without using wordplay that goes right over Milo's head.

The Lethargians – The Lethargians are small creatures who live in the Doldrums. There are many of them, and aside from the fact that they blend in with whatever they're sitting on, they all look exactly the same. They explain to Milo that in the Doldrums, their entire purpose is to do nothing—they don't want to do anything but waste time. Milo is, at first, totally at home with the Lethargians, but the watchdog Tock rescues him and impresses upon Milo the importance of thinking and using his time wisely.

The Spelling Bee – The spelling bee is a giant bee, about twice the size of Milo, who lives in Dictionopolis. He can spell any word correctly—and he often spells things he says as he's speaking. The spelling bee and the Humbug are rivals, as the spelling bee doesn't appreciate the Humbug's disinterest in spelling.

The Giant, Midget, Thin Man, and Fat Man – The giant, midget, thin man, and fat man are actually all the same person, a man who is average in terms of every physical attribute. He lives in a house with four doors, each labeled with one of his personas—this allows him to hold four jobs at once. He shows Milo how a person's perspective changes how they see the world when he explains that, for instance, to short people, he's a giant; while to very tall people, he's extremely short.

Dr. Kakofonous A. Dischord – Dr. Dischord (the A. in his name stands for "As Loud As Possible") creates all terrible sounds in the world and sells them as medicine to cure people of a lack of sound, which is a fake illness. He lives and works in a caravan trailer parked outside of the Valley of Sound. He has huge ears and dresses in a lab coat and a stethoscope. He loves the rise of city living and the increase of noise in the cities, as it means that business has been great—according to him, people love city noises like screeches, honks, and gurgling drains. He's partially responsible for the silence in the Valley of Sound, as he "cured" everyone in the valley as people turned more and more to loud city living and stopped appreciating beautiful sounds. He has an assistant, the DYNNE, whom he found as an orphan and brought up himself.

The DYNNE – The DYNNE is Dr. Dischord's assistant. He's a cloud of blue smog with yellow eyes who lives much of the time in bottles, but can emerge from the bottle and exist as a cloud of smog as well. The DYNNE is very sensitive and emotional; horrible sounds make him weep with happiness and he screams and runs at even the mention of beautiful sounds. His job is to go out each day and collect terrible sounds for Dr. Dischord to use in his medicines.

Canby – Canby is a man who greets people when they arrive on Conclusions, an island in the Sea of Knowledge. His personality is always changing, as he's as courageous as can be, as cowardly as can be, as smart as can be, as happy as can be, as sad as can be, and so on.

The Dodecahedron – The Dodecahedron is the first being to greet Milo, Tock, and the Humbug when they enter Digitopolis. He's a figure with 12 faces, and each of his faces wears a different expression. So he shows people his happy face if he's happy, or his confused face if he's confused. The Dodecahedron acts as Milo's guide through Digitopolis, showing him first to the number mines and introducing him to the Mathemagician and then escorting the travelers to the foothills of the Mountains of Ignorance.

The Child – Milo meets the child on the staircase leading to infinity. The child isn't a whole child; rather, he's .58 of a child and so is just over half of a child's left side. He loves averages—this is why he's only .58 of a child, as average families have 2.58 children.

Terrible Trivium – The Terrible Trivium is the first demon Milo and his friends encounter in the Mountains of Ignorance, though he doesn't initially look like a demon. Rather, he looks like a well-dressed man—but one without a face or any features. He holds up Milo, Tock, and the Humbug by assigning them tasks that will take years to complete, such as digging a hole with a needle. His entire purpose in life is to distract people with pointless tasks like this and keep them from getting anything meaningful done. Milo discovers that the way to beat the Trivium is to use math and his magic staff to calculate how long these pointless tasks will take—that, the novel suggests, will impress upon people how much time they could be spending on tasks that *aren't* pointless.

The Demon of Insincerity – The Demon of Insincerity at first seems helpful; he guides Milo and his friends through deep sludge. But once Milo, Tock, and the Humbug fall into a pit, the demon says he loves to give bad advice and has no intention of helping anyone. He introduces himself as a huge, frightening monster capable of keeping his prisoners in the pit—but with his telescope, Milo is able to see that the demon is actually small, cute, and nonthreatening.

The Gelatinous Giant – The Gelatinous Giant is a huge giant whom Milo, Tock, and the Humbug encounter in the Mountains of Ignorance. They wander into his hand, where he picks them up and threatens to eat them. Milo gets the giant to put them down by offering ideas and showing him the words from King Azaz—change, and ideas, are too frightening for the giant.

The Official Senses Taker – The Official Senses Taker sits at the bottom of the spiral staircase leading to the **Castle in the Air**. His purpose is to hold people up by gathering all information he can about them—and then stealing their senses. Though he's able to distract Milo for a while by showing him a carnival that doesn't exist, the spell is broken when Milo drops the package of sounds from the Wordsnatcher, releasing sounds of laughter into the air. The Senses Taker reveals that he can't steal a

person's sense of humor as long as they have laughter.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Everpresent Wordsnatcher – The Everpresent Wordsnatcher is a giant, dirty bird that Milo and his friends meet just after entering the Mountains of Ignorance. Though he's not technically a demon, the Wordsnatcher wishes he was. He twists Milo's words and is impossible to get information out of because of this.

Chroma – Chroma is the conductor of the orchestra that plays all the colors in the Lands Beyond. He's a tall man who conducts his orchestra with full body movements.

The Duke of Definition – The duke is one of King Azaz's advisors.

The Minister of Meaning – The minister is one of King Azaz's cabinet members.

The Earl of Essence – The earl is one of King Azaz's advisors; he's often choosing the wrong words, getting into trouble, and angering his fellow cabinet members.

The Count of Connotation – The count is an advisor to King Azaz.

The Undersecretary of Understanding – The undersecretary is a cabinet member in King Azaz's court.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING, AND THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

In *The Phantom Tollbooth*, a chronically bored little boy named Milo comes home from school one afternoon to discover a mysterious package in his bedroom. The package contains a kit and instructions to construct a purple **tollbooth**, and when Milo drives through it in his toy electric car, it takes him to the Lands Beyond. This is a fantastical land where kings fight over whether words or numbers are more important, and the princesses Rhyme and Reason have been imprisoned for years. As Milo travels through the Lands Beyond on a quest to rescue the princesses, he learns important lessons along his journey—such as why it's important to know how to spell and use words, how to use logic to make a point, and where things like words and numbers come from. In this way, *The Phantom Tollbooth* becomes a meditation on the purpose of learning. While the novel illustrates that learning to effectively use language and do basic math will inevitably come in handy in life, it also suggests that people are learning things all the time, no matter what they're doing—and that even if a certain lesson doesn't seem immediately useful, that lesson will still help the learner become a more well-rounded, interesting person.

When readers first meet Milo, he doesn't see the purpose at all in learning anything—and this leaves him unable to effectively engage with the world around him. To disaffected Milo, school feels like pointless torture. He doesn't understand why he has to know where Ethiopia is, and it's beyond him why he'd ever need to know how to spell or do math. And the novel suggests that this isn't Milo's fault—rather, it's other people's fault (presumably, his teachers and other caregivers) for failing to explain to him why these things matter. And this, in turn, leads to Milo disengaging and becoming disillusioned with the whole idea of learning and becoming educated. Then, because Milo hasn't bothered to learn about words or numbers, he's totally lost when he first arrives in the Lands Beyond. Even the simple act of using his brain to think about anything, even if it's just birds in the sky, is taxing. And when faced with wordplay, puns, and difficult synonyms and homonyms, Milo is helplessly confused. Because he doesn't value learning, he lacks the tools he needs to navigate the Lands Beyond—and this severely slows him down on his quest to rescue Rhyme and Reason.

The Phantom Tollbooth shows how, when people realize that what they're learning is useful and that learning new things can be interesting, education begins to seem far more fun and engaging. Though Milo enters the Lands Beyond content to be bored and not learn anything, he quickly discovers that life is going to be way more fun if he knows what's going on. As he and Tock peruse the Word Market, Milo becomes increasingly excited and interested in words, attempting to buy three that he thinks sound interesting, with the hope that he'll be able to learn what they mean and then use them. With this, the novel suggests that learning is more fun when students see how lessons apply to life and believe that what they're learning is interesting—in Dictionopolis, for instance, Milo needs to know how to use bigger words and decipher others' flowery language in order to effectively communicate and know what's going on. It's also important to note that, while Milo is learning at every point along the way as he journeys to the **Castle in the Air**, he doesn't always realize this. When, for example, Milo tries hard to see the world as an adult might so that he can join Alec Bings high up in the air, Milo is learning what it's like to have an adult perspective—and when he falls back to the ground, unable to sustain the effort, he learns that he prefers to see the world from a child's point of view. Learning, the novel shows, doesn't have to take place in a classroom. It happens everywhere, as people try new things and draw conclusions about what they've seen, heard, and experienced.

Finally, the novel shows that learning is never useless, whether

a person needs to use what they've learned to pass a test, accomplish a task, or develop a new point of view. Milo feels lost for much of the novel—but this doesn't mean he isn't learning. When he's able to use what he's picked up about logic to convince the Mathemagician to let Milo rescue the princesses, the novel makes it clear that Milo *has* been learning. But he just needed to encounter the right circumstances in order to use what he's learned. Then, Milo has to use everything he's learned to evade the demons in the Mountains of Ignorance. What he's learned about math allows him to calculate how much time it'd take to complete pointless tasks, thereby beating the Terrible Trivium, and Milo's new appreciation for words and ideas helps him scare away the Gelatinous Giant. His journey through the mountains is, in many ways, a practical test of everything he's learned in the Lands Beyond—and when he's able to rescue the princesses, he effectively passes with flying colors. However, *The Phantom Tollbooth* still suggests that the most important thing Milo learned wasn't necessarily math, spelling, or critical thinking. The novel shows this most clearly when Milo returns to his bedroom and suddenly knows that he has all he needs to entertain himself without returning to the Lands Beyond. In essence, Milo realizes that he can learn anywhere—and that his life is richer and more interesting when he makes a point to do so.

LANGUAGE, WORDPLAY, FUN, AND LOGIC

The Phantom Tollbooth is a fundamentally silly book filled with puns, witty wordplay, and logic puzzles. At first, the wordplay puzzles young Milo, who isn't good at spelling and, for that matter, has never cared to learn the meanings of most words. He also doesn't entirely see the humor in many of the novel's puns or logic puzzles. So part of Milo's journey is developing the language skills to find the humor in these things, a quest on which the reader accompanies him. Through the novel's humor and Milo's developing understanding of its puns and wordplay, *The Phantom Tollbooth* makes the point that learning to use words and logic doesn't have to be stuffy—rather, just like the act of reading, it can be fun.

While *The Phantom Tollbooth* insists throughout that learning about words and language is important to a person's ability to function in life, it also shows that without a baseline grasp of language, a person's sense of humor suffers. This idea plays out most clearly in Dictionopolis, the city of words, which is the first place that Milo visits of his own volition. There, the king's five advisors all speak together and in turn, with each of them saying exactly the same thing but using different words to do so. Because of this, to readers whose vocabulary lets them understand what's going on, the advisors are hilarious—especially when Tock mutters that what the advisors are doing is ridiculous and doesn't actually make them sound intelligent. But to Milo, who doesn't know what any of the advisors are actually saying, the humor is lost on him. It's essential, he realizes, to have a baseline level of education in order to understand when things are funny. Indeed, much of the novel's humor goes right over Milo's head because he doesn't have the language, logic, or math skills to realize what's funny. This, in a way, makes Milo the butt of a joke that readers are in on. While the novel encourages readers to be like Milo (in that they should endeavor to learn whenever possible and see how important it is to do so, as Milo eventually does), the novel also suggests that life is way funnier if one has already gone through this process and is more like Milo at the end of the novel. The novel is, in this sense, a roadmap that shows people how to develop a sense of humor.

The novel also suggests that stuffiness, pretentiousness, and extreme specialization of knowledge is funny and should be laughed at, not aspired to. King Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician's argument about whether words or numbers are superior is serious—it's what's ripping the Kingdom of Wisdom apart and making it so ridiculous, after all—but each ruler, because of their intense specialization in one subject area, becomes a laughable figure. When the Mathemagician offers Milo a friendly letter he wrote to his brother, which was returned, he's enraged because nobody could read it—but the letter is just a random assortment of numbers and is totally unreadable. The Mathemagician is so intent on only using numbers that he humorously makes it impossible to communicate with other people. Similarly, King Azaz's insistence that in Dictionopolis, they only use numbers when absolutely necessary, reads as ridiculous and humorous. Math is a part of everyday life, whether one likes it or not—and the fact that a king concerned about his kingdom's wealth and fortune almost refuses to use numbers reads as misguided and closed-minded. This kind of extreme specialization, to the point that a person won't acknowledge the existence or use of subjects outside their area of expertise, is something the novel frames as ridiculous and even harmful.

Finally, *The Phantom Tollbooth* shows that learning (and specifically, learning to read) should be fun by presenting a story that's in turn exciting, funny, and ridiculous. Reading, it suggests, doesn't have to be stuffy. Whether Tock is asking to go for a ride in the car or Milo is struggling to conduct an orchestra playing the sunrise and turning snow green in the process, *The Phantom Tollbooth* invites readers along on a fantastical, ridiculous ride. Learning, it suggests, is important for a variety of reasons—but a person's reason for learning can be simply to be able to find humor in the world around them, and to be able to enjoy reading books like this one for entertainment. *The Phantom Tollbooth* may have darker, thornier undertones (such as its issues with the modern world, or with censorship), but it's more than okay, it suggests, to

enjoy the ride along with Milo and come away having been entertained.

BOREDOM, BEAUTY, AND MODERN LIFE

Published in 1961, *The Phantom Tollbooth* is a reflection of the quickly changing midcentury world. In the novel, characters reflect on the rise of big cities, consumerism, and the increasing pace of modern life—but the novel suggests that all of these things detract from the joy of living. Young Milo is portrayed as a product of this setting: he hurries through his days, doesn't see the point in doing anything, and can't entertain himself despite having a bedroom overflowing with toys and books. By the end of his trip to the Lands Beyond, though, Milo has learned to appreciate life and seize every opportunity to enjoy his midcentury world. Through Milo's journey, *The Phantom Tollbooth* shows that in order to remedy the ills that come along with the modern world, it's necessary to slow down, appreciate what one has, and admire beauty in the world wherever one finds it.

The Phantom Tollbooth portrays the modern world that Milo inhabits as one that is senseless, dull, and unable to intellectually or visually stimulate its residents. The novel mostly makes this point by portraying places in the Lands Beyond that closely mirror the real-life modern world that Milo inhabits. For instance, Alec Bings introduces Milo to two twin cities called Illusion and Reality. Reality was once a vibrant, beautiful city where people loved nothing more than to admire their beautiful surroundings. But when people began to prioritize speed over visually enjoying their city, the city itself began to disappear—and now, the residents don't even notice their city is gone. And many, Alec explains, actually live in Illusions, which is bright, shining, and perfect—but doesn't actually exist except in people's minds. Through the story of Reality, the novel proposes that modern life has caused people's priorities to shift from enjoyment to expediency. The speed required of modern city life discourages people from even noticing how beautiful and interesting their home is. A similar tale played out in the Valley of Sound, which, when Milo arrives, is entirely *devoid* of sound. This is because as residents moved into cities where more loud, obnoxious sounds were the norm, people stopped appreciating life's more beautiful sounds. And when a man known as Dr. Dischord made it so the valley's residents could only hear terrible sounds, the valley's ruler, the Soundkeeper, decided to take all sound away. Both of these stories are fantastical and exaggerated, but they both suggest the same thing—that modern life is fast, loud, and ugly. This creates a vicious cycle: as the world gets louder and uglier, people think this is normal, and so nothing changes.

To fix these issues with the modern world, the novel suggests slowing down, appreciating beauty, and seeking out joy to counteract the modern world's speed and ugliness. Again and again, the characters Milo meets suggest that the only way to fix things in the Lands Beyond is for people to slow down and start appreciating beautiful things again. It's ridiculous, people imply, to live life at such a breakneck pace that one can't appreciate anything. It's absurd to move so fast that people don't even notice when their city disappears into thin air. This lifestyle makes people oblivious to the sights and sounds around them, and the solution is to restore life's meaning. Milo doesn't remain in the Lands Beyond long enough to see how they change once Rhyme and Reason return, but he does see the positive effects of balancing beauty with ugliness in the Valley of Sound. Milo helps the residents there steal a sound from the Soundkeeper's fortress, which enables them to knock the fortress down and release sound back into the valley—good sounds as well as bad. Interestingly, this simply returns life in the valley to normal; the return of sound doesn't make life particularly good or particularly bad. With this, the novel proposes that normalcy, and balance between the terrible and good parts of the modern world, is worth striving for, even if "normal" might not be as flashy as what came before.

Milo himself provides the novel's clearest example of the ill effects of the modern world, the remedy for those ill effects, and the final result. Milo begins the novel living a life much like those who live in Reality: he hurries through his day without seeing anything. He doesn't even notice a singing sparrow, and he doesn't see the point in doing or thinking anything. But as he journeys through the Lands Beyond, Milo learns to slow down, be curious, and take pleasure in all life has to offer—whether it's the Word Market in a bustling city, or the rolling countryside. Finally, when Milo returns home, he finds that with these skills, he has no problem entertaining himself in his own bedroom and his own city. Through Milo, *The Phantom Tollbooth* shows that one of the best ways to thrive in the modern world is to slow down and see it as something inherently exciting, rather than seeing it as a means of getting ahead as quickly as possible.

ABSURDITY VS. REASON

When young Milo unexpectedly finds himself traveling through the Lands Beyond, he's in for a shock. In the Lands Beyond, life is extremely absurd: Milo attends a banquet where he has to literally eat his words (which end up being very unappetizing) and Dr. Dischord creates all the loud, obnoxious sounds in existence. But not all of the absurdity in the Lands Beyond is fun or humorous: two warring kings argue about whether words or numbers are more important, entire valleys are sworn to complete silence, and some cities have disappeared after their residents stopped noticing the world around them. As Milo travels through the Lands Beyond, he hears the same thing over and over again from the various characters he meets: that things have only gotten so horribly absurd because the princesses, Rhyme and Reason, have been imprisoned, and so what they stand

for—rhyme and reason—no longer exists in the Lands Beyond. While Milo embarks on his quest to rescue Rhyme and Reason and return them to the Lands Beyond, he discovers, essentially, the importance of balance. Absurdity isn't a bad thing, the novel suggests—indeed, it can be fun when it exists alongside reason. But without reason to temper it, the novel shows how absurdity can morph from entertaining into something far more sinister: senselessness and, in some cases, censorship.

Through characters' stories of how things were before Rhyme and Reason were imprisoned, the novel shows how a combination of rhyme, reason, and absurdity makes life functional and also fun. Faintly Macabre, for instance, explains how the former king of Wisdom found the baby princesses and how, with the princesses' help, the kingdom of Wisdom functioned effectively and was a fun, beautiful place to live. With Rhyme and Reason making up a high court of sorts, King Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician were still fighting over whether words or numbers were superior, but their fight seemed more good-natured and less of a fight to the death. Residents throughout the kingdom, as in the city Reality, were able to appreciate their beautiful cities and landscapes, and it was easier for people from different places, with different priorities, to communicate effectively with each other. These stories of times past show the importance of balance. Life can be silly, and life can be ridiculous—but this isn't a bad thing if life is still governed by reason and sensibility. According to the novel, the problem comes when rhyme and reason disappear entirely.

Without Rhyme and Reason, however, the novel shows how quickly life can digress into senselessness. King Azaz the Unabridged and his advisors, for instance, suggest that Milo has such a hard time navigating the ridiculousness in Dictionopolis because the princesses' moderating effect no longer exists in the kingdom. This is why Milo doesn't realize he'll have to literally eat his words, which results in him having to try to figure out how to eat beautiful rays of sunlight (when he suggests a "light meal") as well as platters of steaming squares (when Milo suggests they eat a "square meal"). Milo's plight is funny, but it also shows that it's nearly impossible to function in a world where there is no sense. More sinister is Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician's argument over whether words or numbers are more important. Both are, of course, necessary to modern life—people speak and communicate in words, not exclusively in numbers; and as the Mathemagician points out, numbers are necessary for people to be able to say things like "tea for two." But because the kings no longer have Rhyme and Reason to advocate for this kind of balance, their argument tips over into ridiculousness.

Finally, the novel illustrates the worst-case scenario, in which a lack of rhyme and reason leads to censorship. This idea shows up in various places throughout the novel, as when the Lethargians first inform Milo that thinking is illegal in the Doldrums. As Milo points out to the Lethargians, this is ridiculous—*everyone* thinks. But outlawing thinking, even if it's just in name and not actually enforceable, shows how censorship and control can make it impossible to be rational, reasonable, or even make decisions about one's own life. If one is to follow the rules of the Doldrums and remain there, the novel suggests, a person will waste their life away—without thinking, there's no fun and no reason. Milo encounters a different kind of censorship in the Valley of Sound. There, not long after the princesses were imprisoned, residents began moving to the cities and stopped appreciating the beautiful sounds of everyday life. When a man named Dr. Dischord made it so the residents couldn't hear anything but terrible sounds, the Soundkeeper took all sound away—so when Milo enters the valley, it's entirely silent. And Faintly Macabre says that much the same thing happened in Dictionopolis when she, as the Official Which, began to hoard words, leading to forced silence and economic depression (because people could no longer buy or sell words in the market). Through these examples, the novel proposes that censorship itself is ridiculous and senseless—and it's selfish of the person enforcing censorship to do so. Censorship, Milo finds, robs people of their relationships, their livelihoods, and their ability to dictate the course of their life. And this is why balance between absurdity and reason is so important. When both qualities exist in healthy amounts, life has parameters, but life can also be fun and exciting. But when life leans too much in one direction or the other, it's all too easy for people to become isolated, unthinking, and unable to communicate.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE CASTLE IN THE AIR

The Castle in the Air represents what happens when ideas aren't grounded in rhyme and reason—and what happens when people get too caught up in their ideas to properly evaluate them.

To say something is a "castle in the sky" (or in the air) is an idiom that means an idea is impossible or not well thought out. So, for instance, starting a business without a plan or enough funding could be a castle in the sky—without those things, the business is never going to get off the ground. The novel suggests that King Azaz and the Mathemagician's idea to imprison the princesses Rhyme and Reason in a literal Castle in the Air was also a "castle in the sky" idea—before banishing the princesses, they didn't think through the implications of what would happen without Rhyme and Reason to temper the absurdity in the Kingdom of Wisdom. Many characters note that it was this

lack of critical thinking and planning that made the Lands Beyond into the nonsensical, ridiculous, and absurd place it is when Milo arrives.

When Milo finally reaches the princesses, they impress upon him that it's important to not get so invested in an idea that it's impossible to look at it from all angles, with rhyme and reason. As the Castle in the Air floats away when the demons cut the staircase, the princesses encourage Milo and the Humbug to let it go, since it was nothing more than a "beautiful prison." With this, they warn both the characters and readers against getting too caught up in ideas without thinking them through. The consequences, as the novel shows, can be severe.

THE TOLLBOOTH

The tollbooth represents imagination. Though it requires a coin to get through, Milo must also use his imagination to pass through the tollbooth to the Lands Beyond—once he arrives, he observes that what started as pretend has now become real. By passing through the tollbooth, Milo discovers how to use his imagination to amuse himself and to learn things. All he has to do is open himself up to some pretend play, and he can find himself somewhere fun and fantastical.

The tollbooth, though, isn't intended to facilitate Milo's imagination forever—rather, it's a tool to teach him how to use his imagination and set himself up to be imaginative without a crutch. This is why the tollbooth disappears once Milo returns to his bedroom. Having learned how to use his imagination by passing through the tollbooth the first time, Milo can create fun for himself wherever he is, with whatever he has—not just because he has a shiny new toy to play with.

GIFTS

The gifts Milo receives from the various people he meets, and how he ultimately uses those gifts, represent the learning process. As Milo travels through the Lands Beyond, meeting people and soaking up knowledge, people often give him a parting gift. From King Azaz he receives a box of all the words the king knows. From Alec Bings, Milo gets a telescope that lets him see things how they are. The Soundkeeper gives him a package of sounds, while the Mathemagician gives Milo a miniature magic staff (a pencil). When Milo receives these gifts, it represents his newfound understanding of an idea. He gets the words from King Azaz, for instance, after finally understanding how important language and spelling are; and he gets the telescope after realizing how important it is to look at things from various perspectives. After receiving each gift, Milo understands the idea associated with it—but, in order to achieve mastery of a given concept, he must take a test. Milo's tests come as he outsmarts the demons in the Mountains of Ignorance. He's able to outsmart the Terrible Trivium by using his magic staff (and math) to figure out how long it would take to perform some tedious tasks; and with the telescope, Milo discovers that a demon who insists he's huge and frightening is actually small, cute, and nonthreatening. This represents Milo learning how to apply what he's learned in the classroom in the real world. With his gifts—words, numbers, perspective, and sounds—and his mastery of various concepts, Milo is prepared to take on the world and think for himself in both the Lands Beyond and in the real world.

TIME/TOCK'S ALARM CLOCK

The way that the novel frames the concept of time and the character Tock (whose body is an alarm clock) shows that time is extremely valuable, but is often taken for granted anyway. When readers first meet Milo, he constantly wastes time rushing through his day without paying attention or finding joy in anything. Indeed, when he receives the mysterious package that contains the **tollbooth**, the accompanying letter is addressed to Milo, "who has plenty of time." This establishes from the beginning that time is something valuable, even if Milo hasn't quite put it together yet. As Milo meets and gets to know Tock, Tock then makes it very clear just how important time is. Tock insists outright that time is the most valuable thing that people have—and yet, so many people waste it.

The novel shows how consistently people take time for granted in one of its central conflicts. King Azaz and the Mathemagician spend all their time arguing about whether words or numbers are more important. But as they argue, Tock and his clock tick away, and occasionally his alarm goes off—time, the novel proposes, is actually far more important than either numbers or words, but it's not something that people think to even argue about. So while Tock himself and the novel on the whole propose that time is arguably a person's most valuable possession, the way the novel's conflicts are framed shows just how easy it is to overlook the importance of time in favor of other things.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Bullseye Books edition of *The Phantom Tollbooth* published in 1988.

Chapter 1. Milo Quotes

❝ He looked glumly at all the things he owned. The books that were too much trouble to read, the tools he'd never learn to use, the small electric automobile he hadn't driven in months—or was it years?—and the hundreds of other games and toys, and bats and balls, and bits and pieces scattered around him.

Related Characters: Milo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 11

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just hurried home from school to sit in his room for another long afternoon of being bored—nothing in his room is engaging for him. In this passage, the novel's mid-20th-century setting shines through. The U.S. and other nations experienced an economic boom after World War II, which led to an increase in consumerism among the middle class. Along with this, though, came other changes that the novel also takes issue with, such as the increasing speed of modern life.

Here, Milo is portrayed as an expected product of those midcentury changes—and his bored reaction to all his belongings shows how unfulfilling his world really is. Life may have gotten faster and easier, and he may have more toys to play with than kids in generations past had, but that doesn't make him any happier. Indeed, it makes him miserable, because Milo has never had to figure out how to entertain himself. This passage, then, shows Milo's starting point before he embarks on his journey to the Lands Beyond and returns able to enjoy everything he has in his room.

Chapter 2. Beyond Expectations Quotes

❝ "That's a ridiculous law," said Milo, quite indignantly. "Everybody thinks."

"We don't," shouted the Lethargians at once.

"And most of the time *you* don't," said a yellow one sitting in a daffodil. "That's why you're here. You weren't thinking, and you weren't paying attention either. People who don't pay attention often get stuck in the Doldrums." And with that he toppled out of the flower and fell snoring into the grass.

Milo couldn't help laughing at the little creature's strange behavior, even though he knew it might be rude.

"Stop that at once," ordered the plaid one clinging to his stocking. "Laughing is against the law."

Related Characters: Milo, The Lethargians (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has found himself in the Doldrums, a gray, boring place in the Lands Beyond where people called Lethargians purposefully do nothing (and, as they do here, insist that nobody else can do anything either). The Lethargians' very name is a play on the word "lethargic," which means lazy or low-energy.

A Lethargian has just told Milo not to think. Milo is, of course right—everybody thinks, even if they're not doing so consciously. Outlawing thinking full stop, as the Lethargians propose, is ridiculous and impossible. This starts to introduce the idea of censorship to the novel, and to make the point that censorship is ridiculous. Outlawing thinking altogether isn't just impossible; if someone can actually get people to think as little as possible, this has serious implications—without thinking, people won't be able to change anything about their situation. (The Lethargians don't want Milo to leave the Doldrums, and they even invite him to stay with them—they're not necessarily being malicious. But they also don't want Milo to leave or think, as this will cause things to change.) And if thinking is illegal, it would make sense that laughing is also against the law. Finding something funny requires a person to see or hear something happening and think about it enough to see the humor. In this passage, Milo might not be thinking a lot—but he's thinking too much for the Lethargians.

On a more lighthearted note, Lethargian on the daffodil nevertheless suggests that not thinking is common. Though it's physically impossible for people to stop thinking entirely, this doesn't mean that people don't experience periods where they're not actively thinking and paying attention to what's going on in their heads. And this, the Lethargians suggest, is a fast track to boredom and the fictional Doldrums. So on the flip side, the novel proposes that to counteract boredom and lethargy, it's important to actively think more often than one passively thinks—that way, a person can always entertain themselves by choosing to think about something that's interesting to them.

Chapter 3. Welcome to Dictionopolis Quotes

"When they began to count all the time that was available, (…) it seemed as if there was much more than could ever be used. 'If there's so much of it, it couldn't be very valuable,' was the general opinion, and it soon fell into disrepute. People wasted it and even gave it away. Then we were given the job of seeing that no one wasted time again," he said, sitting up proudly. "It's hard work but a noble calling. For you see"—and now he was standing on the seat, one foot on the windshield, shouting with his arms outstretched—"it is our most valuable possession, more precious than diamonds. It marches on, and tide wait for no man, and—"

Related Characters: Tock (speaker), Milo, King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 34

Explanation and Analysis

Milo and Tock are in Milo's car, heading for Dictionopolis, and Tock is explaining what watchdogs like himself do. He isn't a watchdog in the usual sense—meaning a guard dog—instead, he's literally a mixture of a clock and a dog. As Tock explains how time came to be and how the watchdog profession emerged, he suggests that people don't value time because it's not something they feel they have to think about much. Because there's so much of it, as he says, it doesn't seem valuable. Looking back at how Milo conducted his life before coming to the Lands Beyond, it's easy to see that Tock is correct. Milo had no sense that even though he's young and likely has many years left to live, his time is still limited—people don't live forever. So Tock is essentially just observing that people don't always have the best grasp of their own mortality, which would encourage them to use their time better.

And time, according to Tock, is the most important thing a person has. This is interesting not just in how it supports the novel's overarching message (that life is more fun and meaningful when people use their time to do things that interest them and learn new things). It also suggests that Azaz and the Mathemagician's argument over whether words or numbers are the most important is wildly misguided—time, according to Tock, is the most important. But because people don't consider time to be precious, this argument is never brought to the warring kings—it never occurs to anyone in the novel to suggest that the entire premise of their argument is incorrect.

"Our job," said the count, "is to see that all the words sold are proper ones, for it wouldn't do to sell someone a word that had no meaning or didn't exist at all. For instance, if you bought a word like *ghlbtsk*, where would you use it?"

"It would be difficult," thought Milo—but there were so many words that were difficult, and he knew hardly any of them.

"But we never choose which ones to use," explained the earl as they walked toward the market stalls, "for as long as they mean what they mean to mean we don't care if they make sense or nonsense."

"Innocence or magnificence," added the count.

Related Characters: The Count of Connotation, Milo, The Earl of Essence (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 42-43

Explanation and Analysis

King Azaz the Unabridged's advisors are explaining to Milo what their job is: to oversee words sold in Dictionopolis and make sure they're real words, but not to choose which ones are the best to use. On the surface, the count and the earl are doing necessary work—it's important, both in the novel and in real life, to spell words correctly and to make sure one is using them properly. Milo knows this, so he can't disagree with the advisors.

But the issue comes when the earl notes that it's none of their business to choose which words are the best to use—even if the words a person uses are total nonsense when taken as a whole. The count proves the earl's point when he says, "innocence or magnificence." The two words have nothing to do with each other in terms of their definitions; they just happen to rhyme. Putting them next to each other is silly if one cares about sense and meaning. The point, the count and the earl seem to suggest, is to say things that sound nice and are fun to say. And while this isn't necessarily a bad thing—poems, particularly those for children, rely on rhythm, rhyme, and meter to create a pleasing reading or reciting experience—it does, as Milo goes on to find, make things hard to understand.

Of course, a lot of Milo's problem understanding what's going on in Dictionopolis comes from the fact that, as the narrator notes here, Milo isn't familiar with most words. So, this passage is one of several that shows Milo in the

beginning stages of his journey to discover that words and language can be fun and are worth learning about. It also shows how his lack of knowledge leads him to simply agree with what others are saying (no matter how nonsensical it might be) in the interest of looking like he knows what's going on, and not admitting his gaps in understanding. So, in a way, Milo is also learning why he should learn about words: so he can engage intelligently with people like the count and the earl, rather than agree unthinkingly.

Chapter 4. Confusion in the Market Place Quotes

❝ Milo had never thought much about words before, but these looked so good that he longed to have some.

"Look, Tock," he cried, "aren't they wonderful?"

"They're fine, if you have something to say," replied Tock in a tired voice, for he was much more interested in finding a bone than in shopping for new words.

Related Characters: Milo, Tock (speaker), Faintly Macabre

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

As Tock and Milo wander the stalls of the Word Market, Milo becomes interested in words for the first time. This is a major turning point for Milo, as this is the first time he expresses genuine interest in anything in his life. Suddenly, he sees that learning about words can be fun and interesting. The words themselves are attractive, and it's also no doubt an attractive prospect to be able to converse more knowledgeably with others in Dictionopolis.

Making the words into beautiful, interesting physical items sold in an open-air market also has another purpose. It suggests to readers—particularly to those who, like Milo, might not see the point in learning about words—that opening up the dictionary and learning a new word can be like going shopping for something new. Learning new words shouldn't be torturous, the novel suggests. It can be—and ideally, is—as fun as shopping for anything else a person is excited to buy.

Finally, Tock tempers Milo's excitement with some sage advice: that the purpose of words is to be able to express oneself. Learning the longest, fanciest words in the dictionary may be fun, but those words aren't as useful if one can't use them in a sentence to convey their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. As Tock and the Which Faintly Macabre say at several points in the novel, whipping out complex words doesn't make a person sound more intelligent if they can't also communicate clearly and effectively.

Chapter 5. Short Shrift Quotes

❝ "That was all many years ago," she continued; "but they never appointed a new Which, and that explains why today people use as many words as they can and think themselves very wise for doing so. For always remember that while it is wrong to use too few, it is often far worse to use too many."

Related Characters: Faintly Macabre (speaker), Milo, Tock, King Azaz the Unabridged

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

In the dungeons of Dictionopolis, the imprisoned Which, Faintly Macabre, tells Milo and Tock about why she was imprisoned: she hoarded words, bringing about economic depression and making it so people couldn't communicate.

In her capacity as the former Official Which, Faintly Macabre's job was to choose *which* words people could and should use to express themselves. Without a Which, people now don't have any guidelines as to what words are the best to use—which, Faintly Macabre suggests, has resulted in the nonsensical, flowery manner of speaking that's so far confused Milo at every turn. With this, Faintly Macabre makes the point that having a large vocabulary and using lots of big, complex words to say something doesn't make someone sound more intelligent. What matters more than anything else is whether a person can communicate effectively—and this, she implies, means choosing the right number of words, and the appropriate words, to do so.

In saying that it's actually worse to use too many words, Faintly Macabre seems to be referring to the fact that if a person doesn't give a robust enough explanation of something, it's always possible to ask for more information. That is, it's always possible to add more words, which can then increase a listener's understanding. However, using a bunch of unnecessary words is just confusing, making it even more difficult for a person to understand what's being said.

Chapter 6. Faintly Macabre's Story Quotes

"'Words and numbers are of equal value for, in the cloak of knowledge, one is warp and the other woof. It is no more important to count the sands than it is to name the stars. Therefore, let both kingdoms live in peace.'"

"Everyone was pleased with the verdict. Everyone, that is, but the brothers, who were beside themselves with anger.

"'What good are these girls if they cannot settle an argument in someone's favor?' they growled, since both were more interested in their own advantage than in the truth."

Related Characters: Faintly Macabre, Princess of Pure Reason, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician (speaker), Milo, Tock

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

Faintly Macabre is telling Milo and Tock about the incident that resulted in the princesses Rhyme and Reason being imprisoned in the Castle in the Air. When asked to decide whether words or numbers were more important, the princesses ruled that both were equally important. This angered their brothers, King Azaz and the Mathemagician.

In their decision, the princesses make the case for balance. It's ridiculous, they insist, to think of one discipline as being more important than the other, as both language and math are essential subjects. As various characters note throughout the novel, math and numbers are necessary to say things like "tea for two," as well as necessary to keep track of a kingdom's riches. Language, on the other hand, is essential if someone wants to communicate—people generally don't communicate exclusively in numbers. The novel itself, which is written in words, is proof of how important language is. It wouldn't exist if numbers were the only thing people could use.

Because of this (and because the princesses' reasoning is framed here as the inarguable truth), Azaz and the Mathemagician become jokes and caricatures. They each represent not just intense specialization in a particular subject area, but also those who believe that their subject of choice is the only subject worth studying. This outlook is one that the novel suggests is silly. It causes people to become selfish and makes it so they can't fully enjoy the richness of life—which is something people can only truly appreciate, per the novel, when they understand that all subject areas matter and are worth learning about.

Chapter 8. The Humbug Volunteers Quotes

"In this box are all the words I know," he said. "Most of them you will never need, some you will use constantly, but with them you may ask all the questions which have never been answered and answer all the questions which have never been asked. All the great books of the past and all the ones yet to come are made with these words. With them there is no obstacle you cannot overcome. All you must learn to do is use them well and in the right places."

Related Characters: King Azaz the Unabridged (speaker), Milo, Tock, The Humbug

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 98-99

Explanation and Analysis

As Milo, Tock, and the Humbug prepare to leave Dictionopolis, Azaz gives Milo all the words he knows as a parting gift. This passage is interesting because in it, King Azaz sounds far more balanced and sensible than he does at any other point in the novel. While in previous chapters Azaz has seemed content with living in a kingdom that's ridiculous, nonsensical, and barely intelligible, his tone is entirely different. Saying that Milo probably won't need a majority of the words in the box stands out, since up until this point, it's seemed like everyone's goal in Dictionopolis is to use the most complex, flowery language possible. Lots of those words are words that, to take King Azaz at his word here, aren't necessary. And then, his final line—that Milo's quest will be to learn how to use them well and in the right places—directly contradicts everything about words that King Azaz's advisors have said previously. They made it very clear that they don't bother choosing their words carefully, since they believe that all words are created equal and that it's fine to use as many words as possible.

It's possible to read Azaz's middle sentences as holding up the superiority of words over numbers. However, it seems more likely that his advice here is simply that if Milo can learn to harness language, he'll be able to learn all sorts of things. He can ask and answer questions, read books, and even write them. So, taken in this light, the middle sentences of this passage read more as advice that language will open all sorts of doors for learners.

Chapter 9. It's All in How You Look at Things Quotes

"Oh no," said Milo seriously. "In my family we all start on the ground and grow up, and we never know how far until we actually get there."

"What a silly system." The boy laughed. "Then your head keeps changing its height and you always see things in a different way? Why, when you're fifteen things won't look at all the way they did when you were ten, and at twenty everything will change again."

"I suppose so," said Milo, for he had never really thought about the matter.

Related Characters: Milo, Alec Bings (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just met Alec Bings, a little boy who floats three feet off the ground—in his family, babies are born in the sky and grow down to the ground, which means they never have to change their perspective. (Alec sees everything from an adult's perspective.)

Alec and Milo's exchange serves as an example of how learning takes place outside of the classroom and in the real world. Milo isn't focused on learning right now—rather, he's just asking and answering questions with a potential friend. And because he's open to learning new things, Milo finds that he does indeed learn something new: that it's interesting to look at life from another person's perspective.

Alec also introduces Milo to the idea that as a child, Milo is constantly changing. As he learns new things, grows another inch, and moves around, he's constantly taking in new information that changes how he sees the world. And as Alec says, Milo won't be the same person when he's 15 as he is now, when he's a little boy. But again, while Alec attributes this mostly to the fact that Milo is going to grow physically (meaning he'll get taller and look at the world from higher up), this also alludes to the fact that as Milo talks with people, asks questions of them, and answers their questions, he's going to discover new ways of looking at the world.

Chapter 10. A Colorful Symphony Quotes

"No one paid any attention to how things looked, and as they moved faster and faster everything grew uglier and dirtier, and as everything grew uglier and dirtier they moved faster and faster, and at last a very strange thing began to happen. Because nobody cared, the city slowly began to disappear. Day by day the buildings grew fainter and fainter, and the streets faded away, until at last it was entirely invisible. There was nothing to see at all."

Related Characters: Alec Bings (speaker), Milo, Tock, The Humbug

Related Themes:

Page Number: 118

Explanation and Analysis

Alec is telling Milo, Tock, and the Humbug the story of the city Reality, which disappeared when its residents stopped paying attention to it. Through this story, the novel indirectly references the increasing speed (and ugliness) of modern life. With the rise of cars in particular, but also planes and trains, people in the first half of the 20th century were suddenly able to move around faster—and, as Alec suggests in this story, people became far more interested in getting from point A to point B. In constructing roads and highways, cities prioritized expediency over making those roads beautiful. So in this passage, the novel engages in a thought exercise: because the cities are no longer beautiful to look at, and because people move so fast, what would happen if the cities themselves disappeared? Would anyone notice?

In Reality, the answer is no—as Alec goes on to explain, Reality's residents have no idea that their city no longer exists. They go about their business as though the city still exists, unable to see either the griminess or the absence of any city at all. Broadly speaking, this suggests that one of the issues with modern life is that people have neglected to (or forgotten how to) appreciate the world around them. The world exists to move through, not enjoy, if one is to believe Reality's residents. The remedy to this, of course, is for people to start paying attention and appreciating the beauty all around them—to notice reality, which is what Milo learns to do during his journey through the Lands Beyond.

"You see what a dull place the world would be without color?" he said, bowing until his chin almost touched the ground. "But what a pleasure to lead my violins in a serenade of spring green or hear my trumpets blare out the blue sea and then watch the oboes tint it all in warm yellow sunshine. And rainbows are best of all—and blazing neon signs, and taxicabs with stripes, and the soft, muted tones of a foggy day. We play them all."

Related Characters: Chroma (speaker), Milo, Tock, The Humbug, Alec Bings

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug have just watched Chroma conduct the sunset, and he's explaining how important color is—in his mind, it's what makes life beautiful and worth living. Through this, Chroma expands on what Alec Bings had to say earlier about the city Reality, which disappeared when its residents stop noticing it. While Reality's story showed Milo what could happen (in the fantastic world of the novel) if people stopped noticing things, Chroma instead tells Milo how amazing and fulfilling it is to notice the world around him. He makes the case that all the different colors in the world are unique and beautiful, whether it's green spring grass or sunshine on the sea. All of these different colors are worth paying attention to, and paying attention to them makes life more interesting and enjoyable.

Then, it's interesting that Chroma notes specifically how much he likes conducting his orchestra in playing neon signs and taxicabs. These are items associated with city living rather than undeveloped nature, like a "spring green" landscape or the ocean. With this, Chroma insists that life in the city can be beautiful too. It might be noisy and it certainly has its faults, but he insists that this doesn't mean it's not worth admiring. It's just different.

Chapter 11. Dischord and Dynne Quotes

"Carry this with you on your journey," he said softly, "for there is much worth noticing that often escapes the eye. Through it you can see everything from the tender moss in a sidewalk crack to the glow of the farthest star—and, most important of all, you can see things as they really are, not just as they seem to be. It's my gift to you."

Related Characters: Alec Bings (speaker), Milo

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 132

Explanation and Analysis

Alec Bings has just given Milo a telescope as a parting gift. Receiving the telescope shows that Milo has learned how important it is to look at things from various perspectives, and to interrogate everything he sees and hears. This is a major step for Milo, as prior to coming to the Lands Beyond, he didn't think critically about anything. And he definitely didn't notice things—indeed, when he walked home from school to find the tollbooth, the narration made it clear that he didn't notice most of the things he passed on his way home. So, receiving the telescope shows how far Milo has come: now he understands the importance of studying the world around him and thinking critically about it.

Furthermore, the things Alec mentions suggest that the city doesn't have to be as terrible as the novel makes it out to be. There are many beautiful things to notice in an urban setting, such as the moss between sidewalk cracks, as Alec notes here. With this, the novel suggests that cities aren't necessarily bad in and of themselves. Rather, the problem is the way people tend to move through cities as fast as possible, rather than taking the time to admire their surroundings.

Chapter 12. The Silent Valley Quotes

"Slowly at first, and then in a rush, more people came to settle here and brought with them new ways and new sounds, some very beautiful and some less so. But everyone was so busy with the things that had to be done that they scarcely had time to listen at all. And, as you know, a sound which is not heard disappears forever and is not to be found again.

"People laughed less and grumbled more, sang less and shouted more, and the sounds they made grew louder and uglier. It became difficult to hear even the birds or the breeze, and soon everyone stopped listening for them."

Related Characters: Milo, Tock, The Humbug, The Soundkeeper

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

A resident of the Valley is Sound is telling Milo, Tock, and the Humbug the story of how the Soundkeeper took sound away from the valley's residents. Because everything is silent, the "speaker" is writing this on a chalkboard.

As in cities like Reason, this passage alludes to the rise of big cities in the mid-20th century. When lots of people live in close quarters, as in a city, things naturally get noisier. But the speaker here suggests that the issue wasn't the noise—it was the speed of life. People were too busy, and too focused on getting on with their lives, to actually appreciate any of the sounds they heard, enjoyable or not. And just as in Reason, the sounds eventually just stopped to exist for any of the listeners—they weren't listening for, say, the birds singing, so the singing birds ceased to exist for people. This aside in particular mirrors how Milo, in the novel's first chapter, didn't even notice the singing sparrow as he walked home from school.

In general, the speaker gives the impression that life in the city was too busy to enjoy anything, whether it was sound, color, words, or even another person's company. And the speaker also implies that this speeding up of life made it difficult, if not impossible, for people to connect with one another. This becomes especially apparent when they mention that rather than laughing and singing, people started grumbling and shouting—the kinds of sounds one makes when they're upset, stressed, or angry. With this, the novel implies not just that modern life is too fast and too loud, and that it prioritizes the wrong things. It can also keep people from forming meaningful relationships with one another.

❝ "It doesn't make me happy to hold back the sounds," she began softly, "for if we listen to them carefully they can sometimes tell us things far better than words."

"But if that is so," asked Milo—and he had no doubt that it was—"shouldn't you release them?"

"NEVER!" she cried. "They just use them to make horrible noises which are ugly to see and worse to hear. I leave all that to Dr. Dischord and that awful, awful DYNNE."

"But some noises are good sounds, aren't they?" he insisted.

"That may be true," she replied stubbornly, "but if they won't make the sounds that I like, they won't make any."

Related Characters: The Soundkeeper, Milo (speaker), Dr. Kakofonous A. Dischord, The DYNNE, King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Princess of Pure Reason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 158

Explanation and Analysis

Milo is touring the fortress with the Soundkeeper and asking he why she doesn't let sound back out into the valley. Initially, the Soundkeeper suggests that sounds are, in some situations, more important than words. This again suggests that the argument between Azaz and the Mathemagician is misguided, since there are times when neither words nor numbers are the most important thing—something like nonverbal sounds may take precedent in certain contexts. This implies that what's most important changes constantly, depending on context.

The fact that Milo believes the Soundkeeper is correct in this regard shows how much he's come around to the idea of balance. He's seen how nonsensical the Lands Beyond are, and he knows that the only way to improve them is to return the princesses Rhyme and Reason (and figurative "rhyme or reason," meaning logic) to the land. To him, this means it's obvious that the Soundkeeper can and should fix things by letting sounds out. Only by having sound to pair with silence will balance be restored to the Lands Beyond.

In her response, though, the Soundkeeper articulates how censorship works—and she shows that absurdity can easily tip over into this sinister realm. Rather than acknowledge that there are just more ugly sounds in the world these days, thanks to the rise of the cities and Dr. Dischord's success, the Soundkeeper reasons that the only way to deal with things is to stop everyone from being able to use any sounds at all. And the novel shows that this is, first and foremost, a selfish endeavor: the Soundkeeper notes that she's hoarding sounds because people won't make sounds that *she* likes. She's not thinking about those who live in the Valley of Sound and what they need and obviously want. (The valley's residents are currently protesting silently outside the fortress for the return of sound.) Rather, she's prioritizing her own wishes, and her own comfort, over anyone else's ability to communicate.

Chapter 13. Unfortunate Conclusions Quotes

❝ "But it's all my fault. For you can't improve sound by having only silence. The problem is to use each at the proper time."

Related Characters: The Soundkeeper (speaker), Milo, Tock, The Humbug, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Princess of

Pure Reason, King Azaz the Unabridged, Chroma

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 163

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just helped the people who live in the Valley of Sound release sound from the Soundkeeper's fortress by supplying them with a sound to launch out of their cannon. The fortress is now a wreck, and sound has returned to the valley.

Finally, the Soundkeeper sees the error of her ways. She's been hoarding all sounds from the Valley of Sound and not allowing anyone in the valley to use or listen to them. She found the silence more beautiful than the ugly noises that people were using more frequently (and those ugly noises were overwhelmingly tied to the rise of big cities in the valley). But now, the Soundkeeper realizes how important it is to have balance. Normal life—which the novel implies has been restored in the valley now that it has sound again—entails finding balance between opposing forces, such as silence and sound, speed and enjoyment. And as the Soundkeeper notes here, it's essential to know when to use each thing for the best results.

This idea has been echoed multiple times throughout the novel, as when King Azaz noted that Milo needed to learn when to use his words to get the answers he needed, or when Chroma discussed playing the appropriate colors to color the different parts of nature. All of this requires balance, something that the Lands Beyond haven't had since the princesses Rhyme and Reason were imprisoned in the Castle in the Air. So, this passage shows Milo yet again what his quest is: to restore figurative "rhyme or reason"—that is, logic—and through doing so, restore balance to the Lands Beyond.

Chapter 14. The Dodecahedron Leads the Way Quotes

"What a shame," sighed the Dodecahedron. "[Problems are] so very useful. Why, did you know that if a beaver two feet long with a tail a foot and a half long can build a dam twelve feet high and six feet wide in two days, all you would need to build Boulder Dam is a beaver sixty-eight feet long with a fifty-one-foot tail?"

"Where would you find a beaver that big?" grumbled the Humbug as his pencil point snapped.

"I'm sure I don't know," he replied, "but if you did, you'd certainly know what to do with him."

"That's absurd," objected Milo (…)

"That may be true," he acknowledged, "but it's completely accurate, and as long as the answer is right, who cares if the question is wrong? If you want sense, you'll have to make it yourself."

Related Characters: The Dodecahedron, The Humbug, Milo (speaker), Tock

Related Themes:

Page Number: 175

Explanation and Analysis

While introducing Milo, Tock, and the Humbug to Digitopolis, the Dodecahedron shows them how useful problems can be with this ridiculous anecdote about a massive beaver. What the Dodecahedron says is, of course, absurd—as the Humbug points out, beavers are never 68 feet long. And in this case, the absurdity is what makes this so funny. This shows that math doesn't have to be stuffy—it can turn up all manner of ridiculous answers to silly problems. The answers don't have to be real or useful to also be entertaining, if being entertained is one's goal.

However, this beaver exercise also shows that what makes Digitopolis so absurd is, in part, the fact that it specializes in numbers and doesn't take words seriously. A beaver dam is not the same as a manmade dam like the Boulder Dam; the words' definitions are related in that both things do slow water's flow down a stream or river, but they're otherwise entirely different things. So, this is one of many instances where the novel shows how necessary it is to have a balance of words and numbers—both are required to make a fantastical problem like this make sense.

Chapter 15. This Way to Infinity Quotes

"How did you do that?" gasped Milo.

"There's nothing to it," they all said in chorus, "if you have a magic staff." Then six of them canceled themselves out and simply disappeared.

"But it's only a big pencil," the Humbug objected, tapping at it with his cane.

"True enough," agreed the Mathemagician; "but once you learn to use it, there's no end to what you can do."

Related Characters: Milo, The Mathemagician, The Humbug (speaker), Tock, King Azaz the Unabridged

Related Themes:

Page Number: 188

Explanation and Analysis

The Mathemagician has just shown Milo how he uses his magic staff to multiply himself so he can be in multiple places at once. Milo is in awe, but the Humbug is less impressed.

While people in the real world can't just use a pencil to create multiple versions of themselves and be in many places at once, the Mathemagician's ability to do this in the context of the Lands Beyond makes sense. There, anything is possible, whether one has a magic staff or not. It adds to the magic and absurdity of the book—and it also introduces young readers to what multiplication (and division) actually is. Math, the novel shows, doesn't have to be formal and stuffy. It can also be fun and engaging to learn these basic concepts.

The Mathemagician also makes the case that as long as a person has a pencil and a grasp of mathematical concepts, it's not hard to work all sorts of what seems like magic. With a pencil and some know-how, people can add things, subtract, multiply, and divide—just as the Mathemagician demonstrates here. This can be useful, and this can be funny (Indeed, author Norton Juster's other well-known book, *The Dot and the Line*, is basically just a drawn-out joke about math). It doesn't take much, in other words, to turn a pencil from something ordinary into a useful tool that can help someone do exceptional things.

The Mathemagician is speaking mostly about math here, which makes sense given that that's his area of expertise. But it's also worth noting that with a pencil, a person can also write all sorts of things—pencils aren't just used to solve math problems. This is another place where the novel implies that the Mathemagician and Azaz's argument over whether math or words are more important is ridiculous.

Chapter 16. A Very Dirty Bird Quotes

"But that can never be," said Milo, jumping to his feet.

"Don't be too sure," said the child patiently, "for one of the nicest things about mathematics, or anything else you might care to learn, is that many of the things which can never be, often are. You see," he went on, "it's very much like your trying to reach Infinity. You know that it's there, but you just don't know where—but just because you can never reach it doesn't mean that it's not worth looking for."

Related Characters: Milo, The Child (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 197

Explanation and Analysis

The child—who is actually only the left .58 of a child—is explaining averages to Milo, and how they can help people in certain situations. Milo thinks that this is ridiculous—prior to this, he insists that averages aren't actually real. But the boy encourages Milo to look at things a little differently. Instead of being such a realist, the boy suggests that Milo would have more fun if he looked at math as a way to make impossible things possible. On paper, for instance, there are imaginary numbers, infinity, and all manner of things that don't actually exist in the real world. And this doesn't have to be frustrating or a negative, per the boy. Rather, the fact that these things can exist is proof that the world is exciting and that all sorts of things are possible—if only a person knows how to work out the math on paper.

The child also notes that this applies to "anything else you might care to learn," which encourages Milo (and the reader) to apply this idea elsewhere. Indeed, this idea explains how and why the novel itself exists. Everything Juster (the author) describes in the novel is fantastical—it's impossible for people to multiply themselves, dogs don't have bodies that are watches, and humbugs aren't real bugs. But by writing it down and publishing it for others to read, Juster can make those things real for readers, if only for a short time. So in many ways, this passage isn't just holding up math as something exciting that allows people to discover fun things—it also speaks to the value of imagination more broadly.

"I hope you found what you were looking for."

"I'm afraid not," admitted Milo. And then he added in a very discouraged tone, "Everything in Digitopolis is much too difficult for me."

The Mathemagician nodded knowingly and stroked his chin several times. "You'll find," he remarked gently, "that the only thing you can do easily is be wrong, and that's hardly worth the effort."

Related Characters: Milo, The Mathemagician (speaker), Tock, The Humbug, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Princess of Pure Reason

Related Themes:

Page Number: 198

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just gone up the staircase to Infinity and returned, feeling defeated, after realizing that it's impossible to reach Infinity. At this point, Milo believes he can't reach Infinity not because such a thing is impossible, but because things are "too hard" for him here. Milo recognizes, essentially, that he doesn't have a firm grasp of mathematical concepts, and he's feeling like this is holding him back and making it so he doesn't know what's happening. And this causes Milo to go into an emotional slump, where it seems like he's not going to be able to accomplish his ultimate task of rescuing the princesses.

However, the Mathemagician takes a different view of what's going on here. He encourages Milo to focus on the fact that he's learning, even if the process is hard. So what, the Mathemagician seems to suggest, if Milo didn't reach infinity? He learned more about infinity by trying, and the Mathemagician suggests that this matters. More broadly, the Mathemagician suggests that it's all too easy to give up and just decide to be wrong. But if a person does that, they'll never learn. So it's better, he implies, to continue to make the effort, no matter how futile it might seem—eventually, Milo will know how to find the right answer.

Chapter 17. Unwelcoming Committee Quotes

"But why do only unimportant things?" asked Milo, who suddenly remembered how much time he spent each day doing them.

"Think of all the trouble it saves," the man explained, and his face looked as if he'd be grinning an evil grin—if he could grin at all. "If you only do the easy and useless jobs, you'll never have to worry about the important ones which are so difficult. You just won't have the time. For there's always something to do to keep you from what you should really be doing, and if it weren't for that dreadful magic staff, you'd never know how much time you were wasting."

Related Characters: Milo, Terrible Trivium (speaker), Tock, The Humbug, The Mathemagician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 213

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just used his magic staff to calculate how long it would take him, Tock, and the Humbug to complete the Terrible Trivium's pointless tasks. This has caused Milo to reflect on how he often spends his time at home doing pointless tasks.

The Terrible Trivium clearly states his position here: that important things that are worth doing (which the novel suggests throughout are things like learning, appreciating the world, and forming connections with others) are too difficult to actually do. He's essentially the demon of procrastination—he reasons that if something is difficult, why not put it off forever? It's easier and more comfortable to stick with pointless tasks, like digging a hole with a needle (as the Humbug was doing) or moving all the water in a well to a new receptacle (which Tock was doing).

But there is a way to counter the Terrible Trivium and procrastination: using a magic staff, and doing math, to figure out how much time one is wasting on pointless tasks. Indeed, the Trivium notes that if only people knew how much time they wasted doing silly tasks, they would make more of an effort not to waste that time. This also reinforces the novel's insistence that time is a person's most valuable possession, which Tock has been saying the entire novel. But while Tock and his alarm clock exist to remind Milo to keep moving, keep trying, and keep learning, not having a clock—or a magic staff—can keep people from using their time wisely. This echoes what Tock said in the beginning,

when he first met Milo: that people don't think time is valuable because there seems to be so much of it.

❝ "I'm the demon of insincerity," he sobbed. I don't mean what I say, I don't mean what I do, and I don't mean what I am. Most people who believe what I tell them go the wrong way, and stay there, but you and your awful telescope have spoiled everything. I'm going home." And, crying hysterically, he stamped off in a huff.

"It certainly pays to have a good look at things," observed Milo as he wrapped up the telescope with great care.

Related Characters: The Demon of Insincerity, Milo (speaker), Tock, The Humbug, Alec Bings, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Princess of Pure Reason

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 217

Explanation and Analysis

When a demon lures Milo, Tock, and the Humbug into a deep pit and then announces that it's a frightening monster, Milo doesn't take it at its word. Instead, he pulls out the telescope from Alec Bings and discovers that the demon is actually fuzzy and nonthreatening—it's the Demon of Insincerity.

This demon suggests first that many people are easily drawn in by insincerity. The demon was convincing as it guided Milo and his friends through a deep puddle of ooze—Milo didn't think he had any reason to distrust the voice, since it sounded so trustworthy. And believing insincere people and groups, the demon suggests, can lead people astray—it can lead them "the wrong way" and cause them to stay in the wrong place for a long time.

By using his telescope to see this demon for what it is, Milo metaphorically demonstrates how to use critical thinking to avoid falling prey to others' insincerity. He uses the telescope to unmask this creature and expose it for what it is—a frightened, manipulative creature that isn't dangerous if Milo doesn't take it seriously. The telescope symbolically allows Milo to go through all the things that make this demon untrustworthy and judge for himself what this demon is all about. And this pays off—because Milo knew to look closely at this demon, he's able to frighten it away and proceed with his quest to rescue the princesses.

Chapter 18. Castle in the Air Quotes

❝ "but we would have been here much sooner if I hadn't made so many mistakes. I'm afraid it's all my fault."

"You must never feel badly about making mistakes," explained Reason quietly, "as long as you take the trouble to learn from them. For you often learn more by being wrong for the right reasons than you do by being right for the wrong reasons."

Related Characters: Princess of Pure Reason, Milo (speaker), Princess of Sweet Rhyme

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 233

Explanation and Analysis

Milo and his friends have finally reached the Castle in the Air, and Milo is apologizing to the princesses for taking so long. The fact that Milo feels the need to apologize speaks to the fact that while he has transformed thanks to his journey through the Lands Beyond, he's not done learning. In his mind, making mistakes and being late are terrible things—it would've been much better, he reasons, had he been able to rescue the princesses a long time ago (Milo notes later that he's supposedly been in the Lands Beyond for weeks). And at this point, he doesn't believe that mistakes can ever be good.

But Reason suggests that Milo isn't going about things in the way that he should. Rather than dwell on what he believes he did wrong, Milo should instead, she suggests, look at where he made mistakes and try to learn from them. And though Milo isn't able to make the connections here, this is exactly what he's done throughout the novel. When he accidentally jumped to the Island of Conclusions, for instance, he learned from that experience that instead of making snap judgments, he should carefully evaluate information before deciding anything. Then, when Milo attempted and failed to reach Infinity, he framed it as a failure—but the Mathemagician counseled Milo at the time to keep trying to learn new things. And each time that Milo trusted a demon in Ignorance, he learned an important lesson about thinking for himself, how to use math, how to see through lies, and so on, even if mistakenly trusting the demons at first slowed him down some.

So, Milo has been chewing on this idea that mistakes aren't bad for a while now. But it takes the princesses telling Milo that everything is okay, and that mistakes aren't a stain on his character, for Milo to really start believing it.

"And it's much the same thing with knowledge, for whenever you learn something new, the whole world becomes that much richer."

"And remember also," added the Princess of Sweet Rhyme, "that many places you would like to see and many things you want to know are just out of sight or a little beyond your reach. But someday you'll reach them all, for what you learn today, for no reason at all, will help you discover all the wonderful secrets of tomorrow."

"I think I understand," Milo said, still full of questions and thoughts; "but which is the most important—"

Related Characters: Princess of Pure Reason, Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Milo (speaker), King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 234

Explanation and Analysis

During Milo's brief rest with the princesses in the Castle in the Air, the princesses assure Milo that the journey he took to get to them was just fine—all the things he learned are important, even if it took him longer than he thinks it should to learn them.

In this passage's first line, the princess Reason suggests that learning doesn't just benefit the person learning something. Rather, one person learning something adds something positive to the whole world. With new knowledge, a person can teach others or use their ideas to make the world a better place. So with this, Reason essentially proposes that learning isn't necessarily an individual pursuit. A person learns in part so that they can contribute to a bigger pool of knowledge.

Then, Rhyme encourages Milo to understand that he's never going to be done learning. Just because he can't do something now—such as grasp the concept of infinity, which Milo has struggle with recently—doesn't mean he won't be able to understand it tomorrow, or in a few years. And then, she makes the case that nothing Milo learns is ever going to be useless. It's impossible to know when a lesson he learned is going to prove useful, or when some tidbit he picked up in the course of his day is suddenly going to seem interesting and meaningful. This rounds out the idea that Milo will never be done learning, as it suggests that he's learning all the time, whether he knows it or not.

Finally, Milo's final question—which he never gets to answer, as the demons sever the staircase, and Milo and his friends have to deal with this pressing issue—is presumably whether numbers or words are more important. Milo has been so caught up in King Azaz and the Mathemagician's argument that now this is a burning question for him. Their argument is, after all, why Milo is here in the first place. But when Milo never gets an answer, the novel suggests that the question is flawed from the start. The novel has shown that life requires words and numbers to function smoothly, and it's made the case multiple times that time is actually the most important, valuable thing people have. But leaving the question of what the most important thing is unanswered indicates that this argument will never have a truly satisfying answer—indeed, it's one that persists to this day.

"But what about the Castle in the Air?" the bug objected, not very pleased with the arrangement.

"Let it drift away," said Rhyme.

"And good riddance," added Reason, for no matter how beautiful it seems, it's still nothing but a prison."

Related Characters: The Humbug, Princess of Pure Reason, Milo (speaker), Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Tock, King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 236

Explanation and Analysis

Milo, Tock, the Humbug, and the princesses are preparing to leap out of the castle to escape the demons, which have cut the Castle in the Air away from the steps tethering it to the ground.

Saying something is like a castle in the sky (or the air) is a way of saying that an idea isn't well thought out. When King Azaz and the Mathemagician imprisoned the princesses in the Castle in the Air, they didn't think this decision through very well—they both cared more about being right than about doing the best thing for their kingdom. So by imprisoning the princesses in an actual Castle in the Air, the novel shows how their idea trapped and ultimately harmed everyone in the Lands Beyond by depriving them of figurative rhyme and reason.

The Humbug, though, struggles to grasp concepts like this—his goal is, like the kings, to be right and be liked, though he's willing to say whatever it takes to achieve those

goals. Essentially, his critical thinking skills are lacking, and he's easily drawn in by fantastical ideas, which is why he objects to letting the Castle in the air go. To him, the castle is still valuable, even if it served a terrible purpose and deprived the Lands Beyond of "rhyme or reason"—that is, logic.

But Reason cautions the Humbug to realize that ideas like the physical Castle in the Air can be dangerous. They can trap people, just as they trapped the princesses, no matter how beautiful, valuable, or good the idea might seem on the surface. With this, they encourage Milo to continue to look critically at things so that he can identify other ideas that are like the Castle in the Air—so that going forward, Milo (and the reader) can avoid getting trapped by them, as the princesses were.

Chapter 19. The Return of Rhyme and Reason Quotes

"That's why, said Azaz, "there was one very important thing about your quest that we couldn't discuss until you returned."

"I remember," said Milo eagerly. "Tell me now."

"It was impossible," said the king, looking at the Mathemagician.

"Completely impossible," said the Mathemagician, looking at the king.

"Do you mean—" stammered the bug, who suddenly felt a bit faint.

"Yes, indeed," they repeated together; "but if we'd told you then, you might not have gone—and, as you've discovered, so many things are possible just as long as you don't know they're impossible."

Related Characters: King Azaz the Unabridged, The Mathemagician, The Humbug, Milo (speaker), Princess of Sweet Rhyme, Princess of Pure Reason

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 247

Explanation and Analysis

Once Milo has returned from his quest to rescue Rhyme and Reason from the Castle in the Air (after successfully completing that quest), King Azaz and the Mathemagician share that Milo's quest was impossible.

Azaz and the Mathemagician make the point here that when it comes to learning and discovery, it's important not to tell a learner that something is impossible. That, they suggest, will stop the learner before they even start. This would result in no new knowledge, no discoveries, and no fun, either. If one wants others to learn new things or do something that might be impossible, it's essential not to tell someone they can't do it.

As Milo proved by completing his journey, when someone isn't told something is impossible (and is instead encouraged to try), amazing things can happen. Milo learned all sorts of things along his journey. He learned how to use words and developed an interest in both language and math, how to think critically about what people say and how they present themselves, and that it's okay to ask questions and even fail. Milo still would have been able to learn these lessons, even if he hadn't been successful in rescuing the princesses. As Rhyme and Reason told him while they sat in the Castle in the Air, failure and mistakes aren't entirely bad, as long as a person still manages to learn from them. Their advice holds true here as well: it's very possible to learn from trying something impossible.

Chapter 20. Good-by and Hello Quotes

And, in the very room in which he sat, there were books that could take you anywhere, and things to invent, and make, and build, and break, and all the puzzle and excitement of everything he didn't know—music to play, songs to sing, and worlds to imagine and then someday make real. His thoughts darted eagerly about as everything looked new—and worth trying.

"Well, I *would* like to make another trip," he said, jumping to his feet; "but I really don't know when I'll have the time. There's just so much to do right here."

Related Characters: Milo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 256

Explanation and Analysis

Milo has just discovered that the tollbooth has disappeared from his bedroom. Though he's sad for a moment, he then realizes that he doesn't need it to amuse himself and use his imagination. Milo's entire journey through the Lands Beyond has been, at its core, a lesson for him in how to use his imagination. At first, he needed the tollbooth to help

facilitate his imagination and get him into the Lands Beyond. But after all the lessons he learned in the Lands Beyond about perspective, learning, and celebrating all aspects of the world around him, Milo finds that he doesn't need the tollbooth to help him use his imagination. This turns Milo into a very different little boy than he was at the beginning of the novel. While the Milo readers first met couldn't see the point in doing anything and didn't appreciate any of the toys or books in his room, this transformed Milo now realizes how exciting and engaging all these things can be. Now, he's able to see the educational and entertainment value of his belongings, which means that Milo doesn't need the assistance of the tollbooth to amuse himself.

Especially as Milo looks around his room at all the things he owns and feels excited about all of it, the novel suggests that Milo has also learned how to be happy in his fast-paced modern world. At the beginning of the novel, Milo read as an unhappy consumer, acquiring objects but not taking interest in any of thems. But now, Milo appreciates the world around him and all the things in it. He's adapted to the modern world and now knows how to actually enjoy all the delights it offers, rather than take those things for granted.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1. MILO

Milo is a little boy who never knows what to do with himself. If he's in school, he wants to be at home; when he's home, he wants to be out. Nothing interests him, and he believes almost everything is a waste of time. One day, walking home from school, he laments that there's no point to learning. Problems are "useless," and he'll never need to know where Ethiopia is. No one sets him straight, so he believes learning is a huge waste of time. As he hurries along, he thinks that there's nothing to do—he doesn't want to do or see anything. He sighs so loudly that he startles a sparrow nearby, and the bird flies home to its family.

Young Milo is totally lost. He can't find anything to amuse himself, he doesn't understand why he even has to go to school, and life in general seems like a waste. Interestingly, though, the narrator doesn't blame Milo for this. Instead, the narrator underhandedly blames Milo's teachers and caregivers for not setting him straight and teaching him that life and learning are interesting.

Milo hurries through town, not even noticing the buildings and shops around him. Once at his apartment building, the elevator takes him to the eighth floor, where he hurries into his apartment and then his room. Milo flops on his bed and looks at all his things. His room is full of toys and books that he doesn't care to look at or play with—he can't remember the last time he used his little electric car.

Because readers are told what Milo is passing and where he's going, this passage creates the impression that even with this distant narration style, readers *know more about Milo's world than Milo does because he's so disinterested in his surroundings. His room is piled high with toys and books that he doesn't care about, which is a nod to the rise of consumerism in the mid-20th century (when the book is set).*

But, as Milo looks around, he notices something he's never seen before. It's a huge package and a strange shape. There's a note attached that reads: "FOR MILO, WHO HAS PLENTY OF TIME." Milo is confused and excited, since he can't figure out why he got it. (Christmas is months away, and he hasn't even been all that good this year.) He decides it'd be rude to send it back, so he begins to unpack the box. There's an envelope and inside, and the note in it reads that Milo has received "ONE GENUINE TURNPIKE **TOLLBOOTH**." It's supposedly easy to put together at home, and it's for people who have "never traveled in lands beyond."

The tollbooth package is far too interesting for Milo to pass up opening, which shows that Milo can *be engaged when something unusual disrupts the monotony of his days (though his excitement is still lukewarm). Milo also shows here that he's a people pleaser, since it'd be rude to send back the box—put another way, he's not terribly interested in the tollbooth, but he is interested in being polite to the sender.*

Milo continues to read. The package supposedly contains a **tollbooth**, directions to put it together, three signs, coins, a map, and a rulebook. Milo follows the instructions and quickly puts the tollbooth together. It's smaller than a real one and purple, and Milo mutters that it's impractical—there's no highway to go with it. But since Milo is bored, he sets up the signs, unfolds the map, and studies it. He hasn't heard of any of the places on it, so he closes his eyes and stabs at the map. Since he has nothing else to do, he decides to visit the place he's stabbed, Dictionopolis. Milo gets in his electric car, pays the toll, and hopes that this game will be interesting.

Milo might not be very engaged or curious, but he does show here that he's humorously practical. And his practicality here, ironically, makes him somewhat impolite, as grousing that the tollbooth didn't come with a highway reads as entitled and assuming. But as Milo moves forward, it's important to establish him as sensible and practical, as he's going someplace where practicality isn't the norm.

CHAPTER 2. BEYOND EXPECTATIONS

All of a sudden, Milo is driving along a strange country highway. He can't see his room or the **tollbooth**—this is real. Milo is confused. The only thing he knows for sure is that it's a nice day for a trip. It's sunny and the colors seem rich and bright. As Milo drives, he comes to a sign that welcomes him to Expectations and instructs him to park and blow his horn if he'd like "information, predictions, and advice." Milo follows the directions.

Prior to going through the tollbooth, Milo's imagination was more or less nonexistent. But now that he's agreed to play along and go through the tollbooth, his imagination has symbolically cracked wide open. This is confusing for Milo, and he assumes that what he's experiencing must be real, since this is perhaps his first time engaging in this kind of imaginative play.

A small man hurries out of a house. He speaks quickly and repeats everything he says multiple times. In this manner, the man welcomes Milo to Expectations and introduces himself as the Whether Man. Shocked by the greeting, Milo asks if he's on the right road for Dictionopolis. Confusingly, the Whether Man says that there are no wrong roads to Dictionopolis; it's the right road if it heads to Dictionopolis. Otherwise, it's the right road to somewhere else. The Whether Man asks if Milo thinks it'll rain.

Milo is so uptight and sensible that the Whether Man's strange manner of speaking is just beyond understanding. The Whether Man is somewhat confusing, but he also encourages Milo to be open to possibilities. Milo might not get where he initially wanted to go on this road, but he might still end up somewhere just as interesting.

Extremely confused, Milo says he thought the man was the Weather Man—but the man says he's the Whether Man because "it's more important to know whether there will be weather than what the weather will be." At this, he releases balloons into the air to see which way the wind is blowing. Milo asks what Expectations is like, and the Whether Man explains that everyone has to go to Expectations before they get where they're going. His job is to hurry people along, and he asks how he can help Milo. But before Milo can ask another question, the Whether Man runs away to fetch an umbrella.

This passage is humorous because "weather" and "whether" are homophones, words that sound the same but are spelled differently and have different meanings. It's unclear if Milo understands what exactly the Whether Man is even saying, since unlike readers, Milo can't see the words written differently on the page. This lets readers in on a joke while making Milo the butt of the joke. Milo's confusion can also be read as a consequence of his unwillingness to learn anything in school.

Though Milo doesn't know where he's going, he tells the Whether Man he can find his own way. The Whether Man asks Milo to return his way if he finds it; he lost it years ago. He opens the umbrella and says he hates making decisions, so he's glad Milo decided to leave on his own. He believes in expecting everything, so nothing unexpected ever happens. Suddenly, it starts to rain over the Whether Man.

Again, the Whether Man's joke about getting his way back is funny for readers, as he's using wordplay to make the idea of "finding his way" literal rather than figurative. But because Milo doesn't know how to use language well enough, it's lost on him. It's also hard for Milo to take the Whether Man's advice to expect everything, because Milo doesn't have much of an imagination. If he can't imagine multiple scenarios, it's impossible to foresee lots of things.

Milo drives away into a green valley. As he drives, Milo tells himself that the Whether Man is the strangest person he's ever met. (Milo doesn't know he's going to meet many more strange people shortly.) As he drives, he daydreams and stops paying attention to where he's going. This causes him to take a wrong turn. Things immediately begin to look gray, and the road becomes boring. The car gradually slows down until it comes to a stop. Worried, Milo asks where he is. A voice answers that he's in the Doldrums—but Milo can't find the voice's source. Milo fearfully asks what the Doldrums are, and another voice says it's "where nothing ever happens and nothing ever changes."

Because Milo doesn't have much practice using his imagination or noticing things around him, the Whether Man is "strange" (rather than funny, as he is for readers). This is, per the novel, also why Milo starts to daydream and stop paying attention here. He's not practiced in staying engaged with anything for any length of time. And this, the novel warns, can lead to winding up in places one might not want to be, such as the Doldrums with these frightening, mysterious voices.

Milo realizes the voice came from a tiny creature sitting on his shoulder. It blends in with his shirt. The creature introduces all of his kind as the Lethargians. Milo notices lots of creatures like the one on his shoulder. They all blend in with whatever they're sitting on, but otherwise look exactly the same. Milo asks if they could help him, since he thinks he's lost. But another Lethargian tells Milo not to say "think"—it's against the local rules. When prompted, Milo looks this up in his rule book: thinking isn't allowed in the Doldrums. Milo says that's ridiculous since everyone thinks, but the Lethargians say that Milo *wasn't* thinking—that's why he's here.

To readers (and to Milo), it probably seems ridiculous to outlaw thinking altogether—after all, everyone is thinking all the time. But the Lethargians are actually talking about active *thinking here—they don't consider daydreaming to be real thinking. The Lethargians are another example of humor in the novel, as their name derives from "lethargic," or lazy. When Milo chooses to push back on the Lethargians, it again shows that he's practical. But the Lethargians are also highlighting for Milo some of Milo's faults, such as that he can't pay attention for long periods of time.*

When the Lethargian falls asleep and falls off the flower he's sitting on, Milo laughs. Another Lethargian tells him laughing is also against the rules in the Doldrums. Then, another Lethargian shares the daily schedule in the Doldrums. It's packed with napping, daydreaming, dawdling, putting things off, and "loafing." All of this means that they "never get nothing done." Milo objects that they never get *anything* done, but a Lethargian snaps that they don't *want* to get anything done. Another invites Milo to join them on holiday (where they do nothing). Milo agrees.

Laughing and finding something funny requires thinking; things read as funny when they're somehow incongruous or there's a punchline to decipher. So, banning laughter is another way to ban thinking. Interestingly, the Lethargians' daily schedule reads a lot like what Milo's schedule at home seemed to be. Milo didn't do anything and seemed pretty content to keep doing nothing. He daydreamed, was bored, and put off doing anything important (like learning).

Yawning, Milo asks if everyone really does nothing. A Lethargian says that everyone except the watchdog does nothing. Another Lethargian shrieks that the watchdog is coming, and all the Lethargians scatter. Milo's eyes go wide as a big dog skids to a stop in front of him. The dog looks normal—except his body is a ticking **alarm clock**. The dog asks Milo what he's doing here and howls with rage when Milo says he was "killing time." Milo explains he was on his way to Dictionopolis and got lost. He asks for help.

From the beginning, the watchdog establishes himself as in conflict with the Lethargians. While they endeavor to do nothing, the watchdog's whole purpose is to prevent people from wasting and even "killing" time. His ticking alarm clock body symbolizes the idea that time is always ticking, even if people aren't aware of it. In addition, the watchdog is another character whose name involves wordplay—he is literally a clock combined with a dog, rather than a guard dog.

The dog says Milo has to help himself; Milo *must* know why he got stuck here. Milo says he wasn't thinking, and the dog says that obviously, Milo has to start thinking again to get out of the Doldrums. With that, the dog hops into the car and asks to join—he loves car rides. Milo has to try hard to think, since he doesn't do it often. But as he thinks, the car picks up speed. Milo finally reaches the main highway, marveling that he can do so much just by thinking a bit.

Here, the novel confirms outright that Milo doesn't think much. So, having to think to get out of the Doldrums is entirely new territory for Milo. Milo shows that he's more than capable of changing his ways when he sees how effective putting his mind to something can be. And the novel injects some humor when the watchdog asks to accompany Milo for a car ride, as this is an activity that most pet dogs enjoy.

CHAPTER 3. WELCOME TO DICTIONOPOLIS

The dog apologizes for his "gruff conduct" and introduces himself as Tock. Milo assures Tock it's fine and asks why he's called Tock, since he goes "tickticktick." Tock starts to cry and tells his sad story. His parents named his older brother Tick, expecting him to go "tickticktick." Instead, Tick went "tocktocktock." It was too late to change Tick's name. Figuring their second child would make the same noise, they gave Tock his name—but Tock goes "tickticktick." His parents gave up on having children after that and turned to philanthropy.

Tock's family story is funny, and it also shows readers how humor works. The fact that Tock's parents were wrong about their children twice is unexpected—but then the end of the story, where they turn to philanthropy and give up on trying to properly name their children, comes totally out of left field. So, the story is funny because the reader goes into it expecting the story to end one way, and it ends in a totally different way.

To stop Tock from sobbing, Milo asks how he became a watchdog. Tock says it's tradition in his family. There used to be no **time** at all, which made things very inconvenient—nobody could catch their trains or know if they were eating dinner at dinnertime. When they finally divided time into seconds, minutes, hours, days, and years, time started to seem less valuable since there was so much of it. Watchdogs came into being to make sure nobody wastes time again. Tock stands in his seat and says proudly that time is "our most valuable possession." Milo hits a bump in the road, and Tock falls. His alarm goes off.

Tock makes the case here that lots of people are like Milo. Lots of people aren't able to fill their days with fulfilling, entertaining activities, and so they end up in the figurative Doldrums wasting time. It's possible to see watches and alarm clocks as real-life watchdogs, as they remind those who use them that time is always moving forward. It's important that Tock insists that time is, essentially, the most important thing in the world; the novel will revisit this soon.

After a while, Milo and Tock catch sight of Dictionopolis's flags. At the gate, the gateman asks Milo if he's come to buy or sell, since it's market day. Milo stutters, confused, and says he doesn't have a reason—or even an excuse—to enter the city. The gateman fishes out an old reason for Milo to use, which turns out to be a medallion on a chain that reads "WHY NOT?" The gateman places the medallion around Milo's neck and ushers the car through the gate.

Recall that Milo's only reason for coming to Dictionopolis is that he poked it on the map; he has no idea what he's going to find and no agenda once he's here. So, the excuse medallion for Milo is fitting. "Why not?" implies that there doesn't always have to be a reason to do something, aside from there being nothing better to do. That's the point where Milo is in his development right now: he's willing to go along with what's happening to him because he has no good reason to do anything else.

Immediately upon entering, Milo wonders what the market will be like. He doesn't have to wonder long, though, because he drives right into a huge square with decorated stalls all around. A sign announces that this is the Word Market. Five tall, regally dressed gentlemen rush to Milo and, speaking in turn, greet him and offer him the hospitality of Dictionopolis and Azaz the Unabridged. They each say the same thing, but use different words to say it. Milo asks why they speak like that—wouldn't it be easier to use one word? The gentlemen say that'd be ridiculous. One says that "one word is as good as another—so why not use them all?" They're all the right words, after all.

These men's manner of speaking is absurd—it's overly flowery, and using so many words doesn't necessarily get their point across any better than saying things in a straightforward way. Even the names "Dictionopolis" and "Azaz the Unabridged" (presumably the leader of Dictionopolis) are associated with speech and long, uncondensed writing, respectively. To Milo, this is shocking in part because it seems like he's never encountered anyone who takes so much pleasure in vocabulary. After all, Milo historically hasn't seen the value in going to school and learning, so it makes sense that he's coming at this from a very different perspective than the people of Dictionopolis.

The men introduce themselves. They are the Duke of Definition, the Minister of Meaning, the Earl of Essence, the Count of Connotation, and the Undersecretary of Understanding. The minister explains that they're the king's cabinet, and that Dictionopolis is the source for all the world's words. The words grow in their orchards. Milo admits he didn't know words grew on trees. The undersecretary and count say that since money doesn't grow on trees, something has to—like words. The crowd cheers at this display of logic. The minister says this market takes place weekly, and their job is to make sure the words sold are real (nobody could use a word like *ghlbtsk*, for instance). But they don't care if words make sense or not, as long as they mean what they're supposed to.

The cabinet men are all officials in what words mean, both in their dictionary definitions and in specific contexts. In this sense, they're almost walking dictionaries. However, this doesn't mean that their logic is sound—saying that something had to grow on trees, and that it may as well be words, is questionable at best. The fact that the crowd cheers at the "display of logic" then suggests that in Dictionopolis, as the minister says, nothing has to make sense. Individual words may have to mean the right thing in context, but the overall message of what someone is saying doesn't have to be reasonable at all.

Milo says little, as lots of words are difficult for him and he doesn't know many of them. As the cabinet continue to tell Milo about their work, the earl says it's "easy as falling off a log," which causes him to fall off a log. The duke and the minister scold the earl for choosing such a dangerous expression. The count tells Milo to choose his words carefully so he says what he means to. Then he invites Milo to the royal banquet later. The cabinet runs away. Milo tells Tock he had no idea words could be this confusing—but Tock says they're only confusing "when you use a lot to say a little."

Milo finds that in Dictionopolis, he's at a disadvantage. It's never been important to him before this to know what words mean. But now he sees that he's going to have to learn and catch up if he wants to be able to function effectively in Dictionopolis—there's now a purpose to learning, in other words. Tock's advice, though, rings true: the cabinet is being more confusing than they need to be because they use such flowery, extravagant language to express simple ideas.

CHAPTER 4. CONFUSION IN THE MARKET PLACE

Milo looks around at the confusing marketplace. Vendors shout for people to get their "fresh-picked ifs, ands, and buts" and advertise "Juicy, tempting words for sale." Milo and Tock wander the aisles studying the words. Some are short, and some of the longer ones are packaged in gift boxes for special occasions. One vendor offers Milo a bag of pronouns. Milo thinks they look wonderful and muses that if he buys some words, he might learn how to use them. He chooses three: quagmire, flabbergast, and upholstery. He doesn't know what they mean, but they look elegant. When the vendor shares how much they are, Milo puts them back. All the money he has is the coin to get back through the **tollbooth**.

Now that Milo has seen how interesting words and language can be, it suddenly seems like a good idea to figure out how he can better use language to express himself. The three words Milo chooses are funny because in terms of their definitions, none of them are particularly elegant. In a way, Milo has found himself in a "quagmire," which is a way to say that he's in an awkward and uncomfortable situation—and the Lands Beyond have also "flabbergasted" (shocked and confused) him on several occasions. But because Milo doesn't know what these words mean, he isn't in on the joke.

Milo and Tock continue to study the words. At the end of the last aisle, they notice a wagon with a sign that says, "DO IT YOURSELF." There are 26 bins filled with letters. The merchant offers Milo an A to taste; it's delicious. The man says not all letters are so good; Z and X are dry and stale. But he lets Milo sample an I (which is refreshing) and a C (which is crisp). When the merchant encourages Milo to try making his own words, Milo admits he's not good at that.

Discovering how these different letters taste is a transformative experience for Milo. While letters were once confusing, now they're at least interesting because he's experiencing each one on a sensory level. So, he's started to move forward in his learning journey. He might not be good at putting the letters together into words yet, but he has to start somewhere.

Just then, an unfamiliar voice offers to help. Milo turns and sees that the voice is coming from an enormous bee. The bee introduces himself as the Spelling Bee. As he speaks, he spells his words. The Spelling Bee insists he can spell anything and asks Milo for a word. Milo asks him to spell "good-by," and the bee assures Milo he's not dangerous and then asks for a more difficult word. The most difficult word Milo can come up with is "vegetable." Tock counts down while the bee pretends to sweat—and then spells the word correctly.

It's meant to be funny that the most difficult Milo can think of is "vegetable," since this is a relatively common word. Before coming to the Lands Beyond, Milo was something of a vegetable, in that he didn't take interest in the world around him and just existed in it. But again, this is a joke for the reader, not for Milo. The Spelling Bee is somewhat pretentious and frightening, though Milo is willing to play along.

This earns Milo's admiration. The Spelling Bee explains that he used to be an ordinary bee, but then he realized he'd never be anyone of note if he kept sniffing flowers and taking "part-time work in people's bonnets." He decided to get an education. But, just then, a booming voice interrupts the bee's story with a loud "BALDERDASH." This speaker is a finely dressed, beetle-like insect. The Spelling Bee introduces the newcomer as the Humbug, "a very dislikable fellow."

Again, the Spelling Bee is pretentious, but he makes one of the novel's main points: that without education, one will live their life like Milo before coming to the Lands Beyond, just existing and unable to be curious and excited about the world around them. "Humbug" refers to a person who lies as a joke—which suggests that readers should take the Spelling Bee's advice and treat the Humbug with skepticism.

The Humbug says everyone loves him, including the king. The Spelling Bee insists that the Humbug hasn't met the king and that the Humbug is a fraud. But the Humbug insists that his family is noble and even fought in the crusades—his family members have been prominent in government for centuries. The Spelling Bee tells the Humbug to go away so he can continue to teach Milo about spelling, but the Humbug cautions Milo to not worry about spelling: caring about spelling is a "sign of a bankrupt intellect." Milo has no idea what this means. The Spelling Bee starts to divebomb the Humbug and, as they threaten each other, the Humbug trips and crashes into a stall. Everything in the market falls down as Tock's **alarm** rings.

Here, the Spelling Bee references the dictionary definition of "humbug" when he calls the bug a fraud. Turning the Humbug into an actual bug is humorous; while people aren't entirely sure where the term came from, most agree that it has nothing to do with bugs. It's also ironic that the Humbug uses such flowery language to warn Milo away from learning, since the bug clearly values language and spelling. The Milo at the beginning of the novel didn't care about learning and would certainly agree with the Humbug, so it creates a disconnect when he can't understand what the Humbug is saying. Tock's alarm clock reminds Milo that time is ticking—there's more to see and do than get caught up in arguments between the Humbug and the Spelling Bee.

CHAPTER 5. SHORT SHRIFT

Since all the words in the market have been mixed up, a salesman shouts "Done what you've looked." Nobody can say anything understandable until the stalls are put back up. As the merchants set to sorting out all the spilled words, Officer Shrift, Dictionopolis's one-man police force, appears. He's only two feet tall, but twice as wide. He blows his whistle constantly—when he's not blowing, he's shouting at people that they're guilty. Officer Shrift scolds Tock to turn off his **alarm** and then asks who's responsible for the mayhem. He says the Humbug looks suspicious. As the Humbug defends himself, he points to Milo.

People's inability to speak coherently until the market is put back together again is humorous because it makes an abstract idea (not being able to spell words correctly) more literal. Officer Shrift is, in many ways, a caricature of a policeman—and he seems just as nonsensical as everyone else in Dictionopolis. The Humbug is, of course, partially responsible for the mayhem, so Officer Shrift's suspicion is warranted. But as the Humbug essentially blames Milo, things get even more ridiculous—Milo is, of course, an innocent child.

Officer Shrift says that, just as he expected, "boys are the cause of everything." Officer Shrift won't let the Humbug elaborate and turns to interrogate Milo. He wants to know where Milo was on July 27. It's Officer Shrift's birthday, and when Milo asks why this matters, Officer Shrift mutters that Milo forgot his birthday. He then reads Milo's crimes (which include upsetting the applecart and mincing words) and asks if Milo is ready to be sentenced. Milo points out that only judges can sentence people, so Officer Shrift changes into a black robe and says he's the judge too. Milo asks for a short sentence, so Officer Shrift gives him "I am," the shortest sentence he can come up with. He also gives Milo six million years in prison.

Everything that Officer Shrift charges Milo with is absurd, but it does introduce readers to some new idioms: "upset the applecart" means to ruin plans, while "mince words" means to speak vaguely. In this content, though, Officer Shrift means the phrases literally, as he's describing what happened in the mayhem at the market. Notably, Officer Shrift, not Milo, is the one who's figuratively "mincing words." Milo's impossibly long sentence is also ridiculous, which shows again that logic and reason barely exist in Dictionopolis.

When Milo points out that only jailers can put people in prison, Officer Shrift again changes his clothes—he's the jailer too. He leads Milo and Tock through a huge door and into a dark corridor. They climb down a circular staircase. The walls are slimy, and cobwebs brush Milo's face. Officer Shrift shows Milo through another big door and says it'll be lonely, though Milo can always talk to the witch. Milo is terrified as he follows the officer deeper into the prison. They reach a cell door, and Officer Shrift opens it for Milo and Tock. He promises to see them in six million years and then walks away.

The nonsense in Dictionopolis has severe consequences for Milo—he's being imprisoned for something he didn't do, for an absurd amount of time. Milo doesn't have any control of the situation and feels like all he can do is follow along. In this way, Milo is beginning to understand the consequences of illogic and of not understanding the world around him. Things become even scarier when Officer Shrift mentions the witch in the dungeon—Milo seems to assume that this witch is going to be the stereotypical Halloween variety.

Milo and Tock decide this is very serious. They also realize there's nothing to do, but Tock says they'll figure it out. He asks Milo to wind him and as Milo complies, Milo muses that you can get in trouble if you can't spell, or if you mix up your words. He vows to learn more about words if he gets out. A woman's voice across the cell deems this a "commendable ambition." Milo looks up at an old knitting lady. He warns her to be careful; supposedly, there's a witch down here. The lady says *she* is the witch. Milo leaps back in fear, but the lady laughs because she's a Which, not a witch. Her name is Faintly Macabre, and she's the not-so-wicked Which.

Milo is again confused here by the homophones "witch" and "which." To be fair, using "which" in this context is as ridiculous as everything else in Dictionopolis; there's no way he could've prepared to meet a Which in the real world. But as Faintly Macabre introduces herself, Milo starts to learn not to make assumptions. She looks like a perfectly nice old lady and, at the very least, doesn't look like the terrifying witch Milo seemed to expect—her name suggests that she is only "faintly macabre," or slightly scary. And she supports the novel's insistence that people should, whenever possible, try to learn something.

Confused, Milo asks what a Which is. Faintly Macabre explains that she's the king's great-aunt. She used to get to choose words for all sorts of occasions in her capacity as the "Official Which." At first, she encouraged people to use the right words. But then, "power corrupts," so she tried to keep as many words for herself as she could. Sales in the market fell, but the Which continued to hoard words. With fewer words out there, casual conversation became difficult—until finally, the Which insisted that "Silence Is Golden." People stopped talking, and the king ultimately put the Which in prison. They still haven't appointed a new Which, which is why people think it sounds intelligent to use as many words as possible. She warns Milo that it's inappropriate to use too few words—but it's worse to use too many.

As Faintly Macabre essentially tells a story about the ills of censorship. She frames herself as someone who was selfish and, to indulge her selfishness, tried to keep people from using words. And this had serious implications: not only could people not communicate, but it also plunged Dictionopolis into a depression. Now, Faintly Macabre advocates for balance, rather than using language excessively or carelessly. She insists that people should choose their words carefully and make sure they're saying things in the clearest way possible. Using too many, as the king's cabinet does, just obscures the words' meaning.

Faintly Macabre returns to her knitting and says she's been down here ever since. People have either forgotten her, or they think she's a witch—but they're just as frightened of witches as they are of Whiches. Milo insists she's not frightening. To this, the Which says that Milo can call her Aunt Faintly and offers him a sugar-coated punctuation mark. Milo vows to help her, but the Which says only one thing can help: the return of Rhyme and Reason. She says it's a long story, but Tock says they'd love to hear it.

Since people in Dictionopolis no longer bother to choose the correct word when they speak, it makes sense that they don't see the point in distinguishing between a witch and a Which (and that they'd be afraid of a person whose entire job it is to choose the right words). When Tock says they'd love to hear a long story, it's an endorsement: spending one's time listening to stories like this is, per Tock, a good use of one's precious time.

CHAPTER 6. FAINTLY MACABRE'S STORY

Faintly Macabre begins her story. Once upon a time, she says, this land was a frightening wilderness. If anything grew, it was bent and the fruit was inedible. There were evil creatures everywhere, and the land was known as the land of Null. One day, a ship came in from the Sea of Knowledge carrying a young prince. The prince claimed the country in the name of goodness and truth. This infuriated the demons and monsters, so they tried to drive the prince out. By the end of their battle, the prince only had a small bit of land at the edge of the sea. He decided to build a city there.

Since the Land of Null (the land of nothing, essentially) was initially inhabited by evil creatures, this starts to draw connections between evil, nothingness, and by the end, anti-intellectualism. The fruit that doesn't grow or is inedible speaks to how the novel frames a lack of education: it keeps people (or lands) from becoming useful and productive. When the prince comes from the Sea of Knowledge, it symbolically shows that he's bringing knowledge and education to an empty land.

Faintly Macabre says that soon, settlers came to the new land and the city grew progressively larger. The demons and monsters continued to attack, but the city continued to expand. Eventually, it became known as the kingdom of Wisdom. The prince, at this point, became the king, and he decided to conquer the rest of the lands. Each spring, he went out with an army to fight the demons. The kingdom grew, the king took a wife, and eventually, they had two sons.

The prince-turned-king's quest to conquer the land again symbolizes a quest to spread knowledge and make education possible for people. And when the kingdom becomes known as Wisdom, this suggests that through education, a person can become wise and knowledgeable. This is an important lesson for young Milo, who hasn't prized education in the past.

When the boys were young adults, the king told them he was getting old, and they must take over the fight to grow the kingdom of Wisdom. One boy went south to build the city of words, Dictionopolis. The other went north and built the city of numbers, Digitopolis. The cities flourished and the demons had to retreat—but the demons still haven't totally given up. Faintly Macabre explains that the brothers were glad to part ways, as they're suspicious and jealous. Each believed—and still believes—that their city, and by extension either words or numbers, are more important than wisdom.

By noting that the demons haven't given up, Faintly Macabre implies that there will always be those who oppose education—even in the real world. Though the brothers are fighting over whether words or numbers are more important, recall that Tock has made it clear what the actual most important thing is: a person's time. The brothers' argument is silly on its face, but per the logic of the novel, it also disregards that neither numbers nor words are as important as what a person chooses to do with their time.

The old king didn't know how much his sons hated each other, so he remained happy. He was even happier, though, when he discovered two tiny baby girls abandoned under his grape arbor. He'd always wanted a daughter. The king named one baby Rhyme and the other Reason. Soon after, the king died. His sons took over the kingdom and agreed to care for the princesses. One son became Azaz the Unabridged, the king of Dictionopolis. The other became the Mathemagician, king of Digitopolis—but they continued to care for the princesses, who lived in Wisdom and were universally loved.

The princesses Rhyme and Reason represent the abstract idea of "rhyme or reason"—that is, a logical explanation. At this point in the story, when they reside in Wisdom, their location shows that seeing the world with "rhyme or reason"—logic—is part of how a person becomes and stays wise. Note that at first, Azaz the Unabridged and the Mathemagician are loyal enough to their father and their sisters to care for their sisters, per the old king's wishes. Their love for their sister and father keeps their argument from getting too heated.

Azaz and the Mathemagician, Faintly Macabre says, would often call on Rhyme and Reason to settle their disputes. But as the years went on, the brothers' animosity grew. One day, as they fought over whether words or numbers were more significant, the princesses declared that words and numbers are equally important—and the kingdoms should live in peace. The kings, though, weren't pleased, so they banished the princesses to the **Castle in the Air**. This is why there's no rhyme nor reason in this land anymore. Milo asks what happened to the kings. Faintly Macabre says they've continued to fight, even as their kingdoms prosper. Wisdom, however, is struggling. Nothing will be right again until the princesses return.

If one looks at the kings' argument with figurative rhyme and reason, the princesses' ruling makes sense: people need both numbers and words to communicate. Both are, as the princesses say, extremely important, so the argument is pointless. But because the kings have way more political power than their sisters, they're able to imprison the princesses in the castle and get rid of figurative rhyme and reason in the Lands Beyond. This explains why Dictionopolis, at least, is so ridiculous: there's no reason or sensibility to temper the absurdity.

Milo suggests they rescue the princesses, but Faintly Macabre explains that the **Castle in the Air** is far away and guarded by evil demons. It's not a task for a boy and a dog—and anyway, it's not hard to get used to life in prison. She tells Milo to get on with it anyway and explains that he can't take Officer Shrift seriously. The man just likes putting people in prison, not keeping them imprisoned, so there's a door in the cell. Milo presses the button the Which points to, which opens a door into the sunshine. He waves at Faintly Macabre as he and Tock step outside. Just then, the king's advisors rush Milo and Tock: it's time for the banquet. They all get in the advisors' vehicle, which "goes without saying" (so they all stop talking, and it moves toward the palace).

Though Faintly Macabre can say intellectually that the princesses should return, she also shows here how complacent she's become after so long without Rhyme and Reason. This suggests that life without logic is dangerous, because people who don't think logically are more likely to remain stuck in their ways and accept circumstances that aren't ideal. Faintly Macabre also shows Milo again that he shouldn't necessarily take people at their word. Officer Shrift might be imposing despite his small stature, but she makes it clear that he doesn't have much actual power in Dictionopolis—another symptom of the princesses' absence. The vehicle that "goes without saying," meanwhile, is another play on words. If something "goes without saying," that means it's obvious—whereas this vehicle literally goes if people stop saying things.

CHAPTER 7. THE ROYAL BANQUET

At the palace, the king's advisors lead Milo and Tock up a marble stairway to a palace that looks suspiciously like a giant book standing upright. They wander down mirrored halls and the earl gasps that they must be late as they enter a banquet room. Everyone inside is talking and arguing; Milo recognizes many faces from the market place. The Humbug and the Spelling Bee are arguing in a corner, while Officer Shrift mutters "Guilty" as he wanders around. When he notices Milo, he brightly asks if it's already been six million years.

Dictionopolis is the city of words, so it makes sense that the palace is book-shaped. That Milo notices this at all shows that he's starting to pay more attention to the world around him (at the beginning of the book, he didn't notice any of the buildings around him as he walked home). Officer Shrift's greeting to Milo shows again how ridiculous and nonsensical things are in the Lands Beyond—it clearly hasn't been six million years since Milo was imprisoned, so this just highlights how ineffective Officer Shrift is at his job.

With Milo, Tock, and the advisors in attendance, it's time for the banquet. The Humbug says Milo, as the guest of honor, must choose the menu. As Milo is thinking, trumpets blast and a page announces King Azaz the Unabridged's arrival. The giant man settles in his throne. Milo studies the man's long beard and his robes, which have the alphabet embroidered all over them. King Azaz greets Milo and asks what Milo can do to entertain them. He deems Milo "ordinary" when Milo says he can't sing, dance, tumble, or juggle. King Azaz lists all the things his cabinet members can do, like make mountains out of molehills, split hairs, and leave no stone unturned. Ominously, he says the undersecretary hangs by a thread.

Azaz's robes illustrate how much he loves words and language, while his great size shows how powerful he is—he's much bigger, and more knowledgeable about language, than tiny Milo is. And Milo feels even more insignificant when King Azaz insults Milo's inability to entertain the court. It's unclear whether Milo has the language skills or vocabulary to understand how funny Azaz's advisors "abilities" are—essentially, they blow things out of proportion, are pedantic, and are at risk of losing their jobs.

Milo offers that he can count to a thousand, but at this, King Azaz tells him to never mention numbers here. Then, King Azaz and the Humbug ask Milo what they should eat. Remembering that his mother says to eat lightly when you're a guest, Milo suggests a "light meal." Waiters instantly rush in with serving platters. They lift the covers to reveal beautiful shafts of light. The Humbug suggests Milo come up with a more filling meal. Milo suggests "a square meal of—" but before he can finish, waiters bring platters piled with edible squares. The Spelling Bee says the squares taste terrible.

Milo might not have been particularly engaged in his life before coming to the Lands Beyond, but he did operate on the assumption that things made sense, and that he didn't have to speak literally. Here in Dictionopolis, though, Milo has no idea how things work because there is no "rhyme or reason" to make things work normally. Now, when he asks for "light" and "square" meals (meaning a small meal, and a meal that's nutritionally balanced, respectively), the waiters serve him literal lights and squares. On another note, when Milo is scolded for even mentioning numbers, it shows how specialized Azaz is in his subject area of choice—he isn't well-rounded, as he's only knowledgeable in one realm.

Nobody likes the squares, so King Azaz says it's time for speeches. He tells Milo to go first. Timidly, Milo starts a speech, but the king cuts him off. The Humbug goes next. His speech is simply, "roast turkey, mashed potatoes, vanilla ice cream." Other speakers list food—and when the king claps once everyone has spoken, the waiters bring trays of the food listed in the speeches. The king tells Milo to dig in, but Milo says he had no idea he'd have to eat his words. The king suggests he should've made "a tastier speech."

Milo is, again, operating under totally different expectations for how a banquet like this is supposed to go. Speeches aren't normally a person's dinner order, and Milo had no way of knowing that, since nobody told him. So, Milo is certainly at a disadvantage here, but it's also important to note that nobody thought to let Milo in on some of the local customs. Milo is learning a lot, but mostly just that everything he says is going to be taken literally here.

The duke offers Milo somersault (which improves the flavor). Passing the breadbasket, the minister and duke suggest he have a ragamuffin or a synonym bun. As the advisors continue to make suggestions, the earl chokes—and when his fellows tease him, all five start a fistfight under the table. King Azaz threatens to banish all of them, so they stop and apologize. The rest of the meal is silent until the smell of dessert wafts in. The King says the pastry chefs have been working tirelessly in the half bakery. Milo asks what a half bakery is (it's where half-baked ideas come from). Milo doesn't know what a half-baked idea is either. By this point, carts have arrived with cakes and everyone jumps up to get one.

Despite their powerful positions, the advisors read as far less mature than Milo, an actual child. It's possible to see this as yet another symptom of the princesses' absence, as people are operating without "rhyme or reason." The advisors are using wordplay with the breadbasket: "ragamuffin" sounds like an edible "muffin" but actually means someone wearing ragged clothes. "Synonym bun" is a play on "cinnamon bun," with "synonym" humorously meaning a word with a similar definition to another word. These expressions also go right over Milo's head, because he seems not to know what these words actually mean, just as he struggles to understand what a half-baked idea is. In this case, he discovers that they're actual cakes that are half-baked, rather than incomplete ideas. When Azaz is so annoyed that Milo doesn't know any of these things, it shows that Azaz isn't adept at helping people with a more limited grasp of something figure things out.

The Humbug says the half-baked ideas are tasty, but not always agreeable. He hands a cake to Milo that's been iced with the words "THE EARTH IS FLAT." The Spelling Bee muses that people used to swallow that one, but it's not popular anymore. He nibbles one that reads, "THE MOON IS MADE OF GREEN CHEESE." Tock advises Milo not to eat too many so he won't get sick. Milo decides to wrap one up for later. He selects, "EVERYTHING HAPPENS FOR THE BEST."

What the Humbug and Tock say about half-baked ideas gets at an important point: half-baked ideas (meaning incomplete ideas) are often nice, but that doesn't make them true. And eating too many, or taking them too seriously, can lead to serious consequences. Fortunately for Milo, he's operating with more sense than his fellows, so he knows to treat these ideas with caution and take Tock's advice.

CHAPTER 8. THE HUMBUG VOLUNTEERS

Everyone is extremely full. As people lick their spoons, the Humbug remarks that the meal was elegant. Then, he suddenly asks Milo to find him water for his indigestion. Milo suggests he ate too much too fast. The Humbug mutters in agreement and suggests he should've eaten too little too slowly. He falls off his chair as King Azaz leaps up—and as everyone else aside from Milo, Tock, and the Humbug run out of the palace. King Azaz begins a speech, but Milo meekly points out that nobody is left. With a sigh, the king says this happens all the time. Everyone went to dinner; the king will follow soon.

The Humbug likes to say things intended to make him sound educated and intelligent—but really, they make him look pompous and out of touch. This proves Faintly Macabre's point that using too many words doesn't make a person better. The events after the banquet again illustrate how ridiculous and nonsensical Dictionopolis is. To Milo, all of this is very strange and impossible to follow. Why did everyone leave? Why did Azaz try to make a speech to an empty room? All of this is left ambiguous, so readers are just as confused as Milo is.

Milo wants to know how they can possibly eat dinner after a banquet. King Azaz shouts that indeed, that's scandalous—people must eat dinner *before* the banquet in the future. Milo insists that's just as bad, but the Humbug corrects Milo: it's just as good, if Milo looks on the bright side. Milo admits he's confused by everyone's words and doesn't know where to look. The king agrees with Milo, so the Humbug suggests he pass a law to clarify things.

Because Milo doesn't have a solid language foundation, he's struggling in Dictionopolis where everyone speaks in puns and nonsense. What King Azaz is saying is silly: a banquet, of course, is a meal, so it makes little to sense to have another meal before or after a banquet. So although Milo doesn't have all the tools he needs to navigate Dictionopolis, he does have the common sense to notice when things are illogical.

Milo, though, suggests that King Azaz let Rhyme and Reason return. King Azaz says that would be nice, but it's impossible because it'd be too difficult. The Humbug, who is "equally at home on either side of an argument," agrees with King Azaz—and then with Milo's suggestion that if they really wanted the princesses back, they could make it happen. Uncomfortably, the Humbug says the task is simple for a boy, a dog, and a car if that boy travels through miles of countryside to Digitopolis, gets the Mathemagician to agree to release the princesses, and then makes it through the demon-infested Mountains of Ignorance to the **Castle in the Air**. The boy would then have to do everything in reverse.

It's interesting that King Azaz seems fine with the princesses returning—perhaps he regrets banishing them in the first place. The Humbug just wants to be liked and look smart, so to him, it matters less what he says and more that someone powerful likes what he's saying. When the King says it'd be too hard to rescue the princesses, he echoes Faintly Macabre's complacency when she said that prison isn't so bad. The novel seems to be suggesting that without "rhyme or reason"—logic—it's easier to become complacent when things aren't going well.

King Azaz says he had no idea it'd be so easy, but Milo says it sounds dangerous. The king says there's one more problem—but he can only tell Milo about it when Milo returns. At this, the king claps and waiters remove everything in the hall—and then the hall itself, leaving everyone standing in the market place. Azaz says he can't go himself, but he offers Milo a **gift**: a box that will offer him protection. The box contains all the words King Azaz knows. Milo won't need all of them, but it'll allow him to ask and answer all questions. He just has to use the right words in the right places.

Despite how ridiculous King Azaz often seems, giving Milo the gift of so many words reads as extremely wise. This is especially true when he notes that Milo can use the words to both ask and answer questions, and when he says it's essential to use the words properly. In other words, King Azaz still knows what it's like to live in a land ruled by rhyme and reason. Most of the time, though, he just doesn't.

King Azaz walks Milo to his car and says that the Humbug will accompany Milo and Tock. The Humbug is shocked, but the king insists the Humbug is resourceful and loyal. This flatters the Humbug into agreeing. Tock isn't convinced this is a good idea, but the party climbs in the car and drives off as the people of Dictionopolis cheer.

Again, Tock is one of the novel's most sensible characters, so it's not surprising that he's not thrilled to have the Humbug along—the Humbug wants to flatter others and curry favor, not actually do anything difficult. So having him along will provide some comic relief, since he and Tock are on totally opposite sides of this divide.

CHAPTER 9. IT'S ALL IN HOW YOU LOOK AT THINGS

It's late afternoon in the unknown lands between Dictionopolis and Digitopolis. Before long, they reach a dense forest and find a sign announcing that this is the scenic route; the "point of view" is straight ahead. Milo can't see anything but trees, but eventually, the trees end, and he can see over a cliff into a green valley. He stops the car and remarks that it's beautiful, but another voice says that depends on how you look at things. Milo turns and sees a boy his age who's floating three feet off the ground. The boy says that if you like deserts, you might not like this view. He also notes that if Christmas trees were people and people were Christmas trees, people would be chopped down and decorated every year. The boy admits this has nothing to do with the subject at hand—but it's interesting, nonetheless.

This boy literally sees things from a very different perspective than Milo does, given his height. But on a more figurative level, he seems to also make an effort to see things from many other people's perspectives. This can be a useful exercise, as realizing that not everyone sees things the exact same way helps a person develop empathy. But particularly with his Christmas tree thought exercise, he also shows that experimenting with different perspectives can make life more fun and interesting. Indeed, Juster, the author, experimented with a new perspective by writing a story about a young boy when he himself was an adult.

Milo asks the boy how he's standing so high. In return, the boy asks how old Milo is, since he's standing on the ground. The boy explains that in his family, kids are born in the air, at the level they'll be when they're adults, and they grow to the ground. (Some people never reach the ground no matter their age.) Milo explains that his family is the opposite; nobody knows how tall they'll be until they're done growing. The boy laughs and deems this silly—if your head's height keeps changing, you'll always be seeing things differently as you grow. Milo has never considered this. Further, the boy continues, you can't get hurt falling or scuff your shoes if you're high above the ground.

To this boy, it's a good thing to never have to develop a new perspective. It means he never has to change—though he clearly doesn't have any problem engaging in thought experiments that may cause him to change his point of view. But for Milo, though he hasn't thought about it much before, it's just a given that he's going to change as he grows—not just because he's going to get taller, but because he's going to have experiences that influence how he sees the world. Most importantly, this passage encourages Milo to see that not everyone shares his perspective, and that this is something he should be aware of.

The boy says there are still lots of other ways to look at things. As an example, he tells Milo exactly what Milo had for breakfast. He tells Tock that Tock is worried about people wasting **time**, and he tells the Humbug that the Humbug is almost never right—if he's right, it's usually an accident. Tock and Milo are impressed. The boy introduces himself as Alec Bings. He sees through things, which means that he can see what's inside, around, or behind anything else—he just can't see what's right in front of him. Alec admits it's a bit inconvenient, but his family helps out. His father "sees to things," while his mother "looks after things." His little sister, Alice, "sees under things," and if she can't see under something, she overlooks it.

*Alec's ability to see through things might provide him with some interesting insights, but he acknowledges that it's not without its difficulties. Indeed, he needs his family to help make sure that he's seeing things from a variety of perspectives. Milo seemed pretty isolated in his everyday life, so this may be a lesson to him to reach out and form connections with others. Alec's note that Alice over*looks *things she can't see* under *is funny, because it means she just ignores those things—but this pun is lost on Milo, since he still doesn't have the language skills to see the humor.*


Milo asks if he could possibly see something from up high. Alec says he can—if Milo tries to look at the world as adults do. Milo tries and, sure enough, his feet lift up. He crashes down quickly and says he'll continue to look at things as a child, since it's not as far to fall. Alec deems this wise, since everyone needs their own point of view. Tock is confused; he thought this was *everyone's* Point of View. But Alec says each person has their own point of view, and it's impossible to always see someone else's point of view. He points out that to an ant, a bucket of water looks like an ocean, while a fish sees it as home. At this, Alec offers to show the newcomers the forest. He flies away, Milo in pursuit.

Alec doesn't just see things from a physically taller perspective—he also sees the world as an adult does, despite being a child. Milo, as a child, has to try very hard to see things from this point of view, though it is possible for him to maintain for short stints. This suggests that seeing things from other perspectives is something one has to practice—unless one is Alec Bings, it's not second nature to do so. When even Tock learns something here, it also shows that everyone—no matter how wise—is always learning.

Milo asks if everyone here grows down like Alec. Alec says that occasionally, someone's feet start to grow toward the sky. They try to discourage that. Oddly, those people usually grow 10 times as big as normal people, and supposedly they walk in the stars.

Alec is probably referring to people with big, fantastical dreams—perhaps even future celebrities—when he mentions the people growing toward the sky. Celebrities are often portrayed as larger-than-life.

CHAPTER 10. A COLORFUL SYMPHONY

As Milo, Tock, and the Humbug follow Alec through the forest, the light becomes increasingly beautiful. Alec struggles to run, as he can't see what's right in front of him, so he often crashes into trees. Finally, the Humbug pants that they're lost. Alec says they're not lost; they're "right here on this very spot." And being lost, he insists, is about knowing where you aren't. Milo is confused, so Alec points to a small house and tells Milo to go ask the giant.

Alec essentially proposes here that the journey, not the destination, is the point of going anywhere. So if a person can be happy where they are, they're not lost, per his logic. Milo, though, seems to have a destination in mind (though he hasn't mentioned one), so this idea is unsettling for him. It requires him to think about moving through the world in a new way.

Milo knocks on a door labeled "THE GIANT," but a normal-sized man opens the door and says he's the smallest giant in the world. Milo asks the man if he's lost, but the man sends Milo to ask the midget. The backside of the house has a door labeled "THE MIDGET." A man answers the door who looks exactly like the giant; he says he's the tallest midget in the world. When Milo again asks if he's lost, the midget sends Milo to ask the fat man. Milo knocks on the appropriate door—and the fat man looks just like the midget. He says he's the thinnest fat man in the world and sends Milo to speak to the thin man. The man who opens the final door looks just like the others; he's the fattest thin man in the world. Milo says he believes the men are all the same.

doesn't tell Milo why the giant is the person to ask a question like this. But as Milo goes around the house, asking each man the same question, it starts to look like the point here isn't to answer Milo's question of whether or not he's lost. Rather, the point is to show Milo how much things change depending on his perspective, as this man implies when he says that he's, for instance, "the thinnest fat man in the world." ("Midget" is now considered an offensive term, so its use here reflects the era in which the novel was written.)

The man draws Milo close and tells him not to ruin it. To tall men he's a midget, to short men he's a giant, to skinny people he's fat, and to fat people he's thin. He has four jobs for this reason, even though he's totally ordinary. Milo asks again if they're lost, but the man can't answer. He sends them back to ask the giant and closes the door.

Finally, the man confirms that this was just an exercise in seeing things from new perspectives. Acting as four very different men allows this man to take on four different identities—and four different jobs, which he frames as a positive thing. Milo, though, doesn't entirely see the point of this exercise, since he's still so concerned with possibly being lost.

Milo and Tock return to Alec, who leads them to a big clearing. He explains that people here live in a city called Reality. Milo looks to his left and sees a beautiful, shiny city. Alec says that city is Illusions; Reality is the other way. Milo doesn't know what illusions are, so Alec defines them as things that aren't actually there, but are visible. The Humbug is extremely confused, but Alec explains that sometimes it's simpler to see things that *aren't* there than to see things that *are* there. For instance, you can see all sorts of things with your eyes closed. This is why imaginary things can be easier to see than real ones.

As Alec explains illusions to Milo and the Humbug, he implies that a lot of times, people see what they want to see—their imaginations fill in any gaps and turn their worlds into what they want them to be. This, Alec suggests, is easier than seeing reality for what it is. It's possible to see this as commentary on the modern world, where life isn't always great, but where shiny new things can sometimes make life seem better if a person focuses on those new things.

Alec tells Milo that they're right in the middle of Reality's Main Street. Tock and the Humbug see nothing, but Alec leads them down the street and points out invisible sights and greets people. The people all walk with their heads down. When Milo says he doesn't see a city, Alec says the people don't either—but they don't miss it. He explains that years ago, there used to be a beautiful city here that people loved to admire. The point wasn't to get to one's destination in this city; the point was to admire things along the way. But people discovered you can go faster if you look down—and as everyone started doing that, things got dirtier and uglier. Nobody cared about the city, so the city disappeared. Milo remembers all the times he's walked home in this manner.

Reality reads as a representation of the modern world in which Juster was writing. The modern world arguably prioritizes expediency over interpersonal connection or genuine enjoyment, which is why the residents of Reality—and Milo, who lives in the real modern world—are more concerned with getting places fast than in enjoying the journey. The disappearing fictional city symbolizes people in the real world's inability to notice the world around them, and it's significant that Milo recognizes this. Presumably, because he recognizes that he does ignores his surroundings and sees the horrifying consequences of doing so, Milo will change his ways once he returns home.

Alec says that nobody cared enough to do anything about the missing city. Telling residents the city is gone doesn't do any good. He explains that many actually live in Illusions—but that, in a way, is just as bad. Milo suggests that someday, they'll have a city that's easy to see, like Illusions, and hard to forget, like Reality, and Alec says it's possible. Rhyme and Reason just have to come back.

The worst part of Reality isn't that it doesn't exist. Rather, Alec insists that what's even worse is that instead of noticing what's around them, people fill in their mental image of the city with pictures that aren't even real. This means that residents don't see their city as it is, and so they can't even try to change it for the better.

At this, Alec rushes ahead so they can catch the evening concert. He leads them through Reality to where a huge orchestra is playing in the forest. The conductor is on a high podium in front, conducting with full body movements. Milo notes that he doesn't hear anything, but Alec says that's the point—this is a concert you watch. Right now, the musicians are playing the sunset, like they do every evening. They play morning, noon, and night at the appropriate times of day. There's color in the world because the musicians play the color. The concert is almost over, Alec explains, and then Milo will be able to ask the conductor, Chroma, about this himself.

Showing Milo an orchestra that plays a concert you're supposed to watch encourages Milo to see things from yet another perspective. What if, the novel suggests, color actually did come from a bunch of people playing instruments? In addition to being fun and fantastical, this also encourages readers to look for the beauty in the modern world. There are many surprising things, the novel suggests, that are worthy of attention and appreciation—if a person is willing to look.

When the sun sets, leaving the bass fiddles playing the night and bells playing the constellations, Milo says the concert was beautiful. Chroma says he's been practicing a long time as he picks Milo up and sets him on the music stand. Chroma introduces himself as Chroma the Great, "conductor of color." Chroma explains that he plays all day. When Milo asks what happens if they stop, Chroma raises his hands. The instruments stop—and the world suddenly looks like an unused coloring book. The musicians play again when Chroma brings his arms down, and Chroma explains the world would be dull without color. Yawning, Chroma says he needs to sleep and asks Milo to wake him up at 5:23 for the sunrise. Tock and Alec both fall asleep, and Milo follows suit.

Seeing the world as an unused coloring book gives Milo yet another new perspective: things would be extremely boring if the world weren't as colorful as it is. Using the orchestra metaphor encourages Milo to think more critically about, and pay attention, to, every little bit of color in his life. It also suggests that every color has a reason to exist—whether it's because plants are green to best absorb sunlight, or as in the context of the novel, because a particular instrument plays that color of green.

CHAPTER 11. DISCHORD AND DYNNE

At 5:22, Milo opens his eyes. Everything is still dark, and Milo knows he must wake Chroma for the sunrise. But Milo also wonders what it'd be like to conduct the orchestra himself. He reasons that it can't be too hard; the musicians know what to do, and anyway, it's too early to wake someone up. So Milo steps onto the podium and, at 5:23, raises his index finger. A piccolo starts to play some yellow light. A few more join in as more light appears on the horizon. Cellos make the hills turn red. Milo is thrilled and decides to go get Chroma. He signals for the musicians to stop.

Prior to coming to the Lands Beyond, Milo wasn't at all curious about the world around him. But after only being here a little while, he's becoming more curious and interested in his surroundings. Deciding to try conducting the sunrise himself shows just how curious and engaged Milo now is. It's not enough to sit back and watch others try things—it's now more fun to try things himself.

But the musicians don't stop—instead, they play louder. The colors grow bright and brilliant. Then, odd things start to happen. The sky turns magenta, green snow falls, and the trees become orange. Milo tries to conduct the musicians to fix the odd colors, but everything keeps getting worse. Nothing works. The musicians play faster and faster. Within a minute, the sun sets and rises again—seven times. Finally, exhausted and upset, Milo drops his hands. The orchestra stops and night falls again. Milo announces that it's time for sunrise just as Chroma walks up, ready to conduct the sunrise. Milo says nothing. Only a few people know about the lost week.

The tone of the narration here, as Milo's sunrise goes awry, is essentially that there was no real harm done. This is somewhat interesting, given that the novel insists that time is a person's most important possession—and a week of it just passed by in a flash. More broadly, this suggests that it's okay to try things and fail. Going forward, Milo will no doubt take this experience with him and either be more cautious or ask for help the next time he decides to try something.

Tock's alarm goes off and he says they need to go. Alec accompanies the party back through the Forest of Sight, sad to see his new friends go. But he says there's a lot to see elsewhere if they keep their eyes open. Once they reach Milo's car, Alec hands Milo a **gift**: a telescope. It will allow Milo to "see things as they really are, not just as they seem to be." Milo puts it in the glove compartment, shakes Alec's hand, and gets in the car.

The telescope is a physical representation of the novel's insistence that it's essential to think critically about what one encounters, not just take things at face value. The telescope will encourage Milo to look long and hard at something and decide whether what he's hearing about it is true—or whether his ears or his eyes are playing tricks on him.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug drive through the countryside until they reach a deep valley. At the bottom, Tock and Milo notice a carnival wagon on the side of the road. It's red and "KAKOFONOUS A. DISCHORD, DOCTOR OF DISSONANCE" is written on the side. Milo parks so he can ask for directions. When he taps on the door, he leaps back immediately—a crash comes from inside, and a bright voice asks if Milo has ever heard a set of dishes dropping onto a stone floor. The voice is happy when Milo says he hadn't heard that until now, and then it invites Milo and his friends in.

The simple fact that Milo stops to ask for directions shows that he's learning the importance of forming a community and getting to know people. He can't go through life all on his own. The man in the wagon, though (presumably Dr. Dischord), seems far more interested in these loud noises than in helping Milo find his way. Milo is also learning more new things as he encounters this shockingly loud noise.

The voice says that Milo, Tock, and the Humbug all look unwell. Milo notices that the voice is coming from a man busy mixing ingredients from apothecary jars and boxes. He wears a lab coat, and his ears are as big as his head. When Milo asks if the man is a doctor, the man introduces himself as Kakofonous A. Dischord, Doctor of Dissonance. The A stands for "as loud as possible." As he speaks, screeches and bangs come seemingly from nowhere. The doctor asks to examine his new patients and deems that they're suffering from a lack of noise. Then, he mixes a medicine from bottles labeled as "Loud Cries," "Bangs," "Swishes," and "Miscellaneous Uproar."

Everything about Dr. Dischord is silly and ridiculous, from his loud ears to insisting that a lack of noise is an illness. Even his name is a play on the words "cacophony" and "discord," which refer to loud, chaotic noises. Dr. Dischord also demonstrates a skill that the novel suggests is important and useful: curiosity. Milo might not find Dr. Dischord's loud noises particularly pleasant, but the man still obviously takes pleasure in coming up with the noises. His reason for doing so is, however, still a mystery.

Milo isn't excited to try this medicine, so he asks what kind of a doctor Dr. Dischord is. Dr. Dischord says he's a noise specialist, and he creates the sound of "a square-wheeled steam roller rid[ing] over a street full of hard-boiled eggs" to demonstrate his craft. Milo doesn't understand why anyone wants to hear these terrible noises, but the doctor says the noises are very popular today. People seem to want nothing else. As he works, he explains that years ago, he didn't have much work except for when people went to war. But when people built big cities, suddenly they needed the sounds of honking horns, shrieks, and gurgling drains. People would be very unhappy if they didn't have his medicine—just a little bit every day and the user won't have to listen to beautiful sounds again.

Finally, the narration reveals that Dr. Dischord is responding to the rise of the big cities and the increasing speed and volume of modern life. This passage encourages readers to see that although big cities might seem exciting to live in, there are aspects of them—like disruptive noises—that are unappealing. The way that Dr. Dischord talks about the people who take his medicine mirrors what happened in Reality: they tuned out beautiful noises, just as the people in Reality ignored the city until it disappeared outright.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug all refuse the medicine, and Tock insists that a lack of noise isn't an illness. Dr. Dischord agrees, but he says that that's exactly why it's a hard illness to cure. He only treats illnesses that don't exist so he doesn't get in trouble if he can't cure someone.

This passage could be a reference to pseudoscientific fads that purport to heal illnesses that don't exist, or to heal in ways that are impossible. Milo, Tock, and the Humbug use critical thinking here to avoid getting drawn in—they don't take Dr. Dischord at face value.

Since nobody will take the medicine, Dr. Dischord says he'll give it to the DYNNE for lunch. He uncorks a bottle and a deafening rumble comes from it. Then, blue smog comes out and coalesces into a cloud of smog with hands, feet, and yellow eyes. He drinks the potion and bellows that it was great. Dr. Dischord introduces the smog as his assistant, the DYNNE. As Dr. Dischord explains that he found the DYNNE orphaned and trained him as an assistant, the DYNNE makes bad jokes and laughs thunderously.

Smog and air pollution is another symptom of the rise of big cities (especially at the time the novel was published in the early 1960s, before emissions standards had been put in place). So while the DYNNE himself is fantastical, his existence nevertheless encourages the reader to ask what would happen if the smog in their city was alive with a personality. The DYNNE is framed as an undesirable being, if not an outright antagonist, in much the same way that smog can harm people.

Milo, confused, asks what a DYNNE is. Dr. Dischord says everyone's heard of the DYNNE—whenever someone plays too loudly, others complain about "that awful din." Suddenly sobbing, the DYNNE chokes out that he doesn't understand why Milo hates noise—he heard an explosion last week, and it was so beautiful he cried. The DYNNE collapses in hysterics and Milo comments that he's quite sensitive. Dr. Dischord agrees, but he says the DYNNE is right—noise is the most valuable thing in the world.

Here, Dr. Dischord explains that the DYNNE isn't just physical air pollution; he's also a physical embodiment of the terrible noises in cities. Making the DYNNE so humorously emotional when it comes to city sounds begs the question of who actually likes noises like explosions. Are they an unfortunate reality of modern living, or are they, as the DYNNE and Dr. Dischord suggest, actually enjoyable to some?

When Milo points out that according to King Azaz, *words* are the most valuable, Dr. Dischord points out that when people (or things) want something, they make noise to ask for whatever it is. The doctor insists it's simple and then sends the DYNNE off on his noise-collecting rounds. When he hears that Milo is headed for Digitopolis, the DYNNE offers his condolences—Milo will have to go through the Valley of Sound.

Dr. Dischord may technically be right that people or things use sound to ask for what they need. But again, he misses the novel's main point: that time is more important than words, numbers, or sounds. So, Dr. Dischord becomes another figure who is so caught up in his area of expertise that he fails to see the bigger picture.

CHAPTER 12. THE SILENT VALLEY

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug think the valley is lovely and have no idea what Dr. Dischord was so upset about. But just then, something imperceptible changes. Milo opens his mouth to ask what happened—but no sound comes out. Now, Tock's **clock** isn't ticking and the Humbug isn't singing. There's no sound anywhere. The Humbug panics as Milo slows down. Suddenly, the three find themselves in the middle of a silent protest march. People are (silently) singing and shouting, and holding signs that say things like, "It's laudable to be audible." The protesters are pulling a cannon behind them. Aside from the protestors, and the silence, the valley looks very normal.

Where Dr. Dischord presented one end of a spectrum (where all noises are loud and obnoxious), the Valley of Sound presents the other end, where there's no sound at all. And given Milo and his friends' reactions, this is perhaps even more unsettling than Dr. Dischord's sounds. Given that they end up in the middle of this silent protest, it becomes clear that people in the valley aren't pleased with the state of affairs. Sound, the novel suggests, is necessary—but perhaps not in the way that Dr. Dischord would like it to be.

As the protestors reach the car, several people hold up placards welcoming Milo to the Valley of Sound and begging him to help them. Milo, of course, can't respond, but placards announce that someone is going to tell the terrible story of the valley. Someone writes on a blackboard to tell the story.

It's worth noting that without sound, people here struggle to communicate. Milo can't really consent to hear the story, or ask to hear it. But it does show how important words are when the valley's residents use the blackboard to tell the story using the written word.

The person writes that someone called the Soundkeeper lives in this valley. The king of Wisdom appointed her the guardian of all noises years ago. She ruled well for a long time and generously gave people the sounds they needed, such as creaking for hinges and bubbling for stew pots. After the sounds were used, the Soundkeeper would catalogue them in her fortress. But then, things began to change. People arrived with sounds that weren't so nice, and people got too busy to listen. People stopped laughing and singing, which worried the Soundkeeper. This started happening when Rhyme and Reason were banished.

This person's story begins in much the same way that Faintly Macabre's did when she told Milo about her downfall. However, while Faintly Macabre was the one to blame for taking away people's words, here, the storyteller suggests that the problem arose with people being unable to appreciate nice sounds, like laughing and singing. This aligns those in this valley more with the people in Reality, whose city disappeared when they stopped noticing it. But again, Rhyme and Reason's absence is the culprit here.

The person continues and writes that then, Dr. Dischord and the DYNNE came to the valley, promising to cure everyone. He gave everyone medicine—and all the good noise disappeared. The Soundkeeper angrily chased Dr. Dischord from the valley, and then she banished all sounds. It's been this way ever since. The people need Milo's help to attack the fortress and free sound. Milo's task is to visit the Soundkeeper and bring back a sound to go in the cannon. Milo agrees to go.

By "curing" everyone and getting rid of good sounds, Dr. Dischord upset the balance in the valley. But the Soundkeeper took things a step further when she took all sound away—this is something the novel implies upsets the balance in the valley even more than Dr. Dischord's actions. And in this passage, the Soundkeeper reads as selfish, just as Faintly Macabre was, though her reasoning is still a mystery.

Minutes later, Milo knocks on the fortress door by slipping a note reading "Knock, knock" under the door. The door opens and a voice calls him into the parlor, where the Soundkeeper sits next to a huge silent radio. She says she has a busy listening schedule of silence and quiet for the day. The Soundkeeper insists that silence is beautiful—the silence as a storm ends, the silence before dawn, or the quiet of a nighttime country road. The phone begins to ring, but she explains she's not going to answer it. She calls herself to check in, and she's not going to interrupt this radio program.

Milo's note is humorous, because while it makes sense in a valley where things are silent, it's still an unexpected way to request entry. Though the Soundkeeper is perhaps right that silence can be beautiful, she's also missing an important point here: that the silence after the storm, for instance, is only beautiful because it contrasts so greatly with the noisy storm that came before it. And clearly, she understands that she needs sound, or she wouldn't be calling herself to check in.

Milo politely asks how the Soundkeeper is doing. She says she's not doing well, but she suggests that Milo must want to tour the vaults. She leads him away, the bells and chimes sewn onto her clothing jingling softly. The Soundkeeper takes Milo down an elevator to a huge vault filled with bins and drawers. Every sound is here, including the sound of George Washington whistling as he crossed the Delaware in 1777. She explains that she collects them because otherwise, there would be too much sound in the air for anything to make sense. To demonstrate how it works, she asks Milo to say something and then locates it in an envelope in a cabinet. Impressed, Milo asks for a sound as a souvenir.

Again, the Soundkeeper clearly understands how comforting sound can be—it's no accident that she has the bells and chimes sewn onto her clothes. She, at least, needs the comfort of being able to hear something. So, this begs the question of why, exactly, she decided to take sound away from everyone living in the Valley of Sound. Showing Milo how sounds are catalogued is absurd, as it portrays a fantastical and impossible way of organizing intangible things.


At first, the Soundkeeper says yes—but then she says it's against the rules. Milo follows the Soundkeeper to the workshops, where people used to invent all sounds. She demonstrates by hitting a bass drum, which creates six fluffy balls. She puts them in a grinder, adds some powder, and the grinder emits the drum's booms. Milo claps, which creates pieces of paper. He admires the looms that weave music and gets very excited. But when he asks why the Soundkeeper doesn't still make sound, she tells him to take the drumbeat out of his pocket and come with her to the parlor so she can tell her story.

The Soundkeeper seems hesitant to keep the sounds for herself, which suggests that she doesn't actually want to keep sound from people—again calling her reasoning into question. Recall that in the past, Milo has listened to people's stories but didn't have much to say about them. Now, though, he's asking questions and experimenting—a sign that he's becoming more engaged with, and curious about, the world around him.



The Soundkeeper says she doesn't like keeping the sounds for herself. If people listen to the sounds carefully, they can tell someone a lot. Milo asks if she should just release them, but the Soundkeeper says she can't—people just use them to make terrible noises. And if people won't make nice sounds, she won't let them make any. Milo starts to say, "But," but he stops. The small word remains trapped in his mouth—he'll be able to carry it out to the protestors. A minute later, the Soundkeeper sends him on his way.

The Soundkeeper suggests that sounds—and not necessarily words, but non-speech sounds—function much the same way language does. This is another indicator that, perhaps, the argument of whether words or numbers are more important is misguided. The Soundkeeper reads as very selfish, as she's keeping the sounds for herself. What she's doing is essentially enforcing censorship—so this shows that censoring people is fundamentally a selfish endeavor.

CHAPTER 13. UNFORTUNATE CONCLUSIONS

Milo hurries back to the car, his mouth shut tight. He writes on the protestors' chalkboard that his sound is on the tip of his tongue. The protestors position the cannon and then, very carefully, Milo spits the word into the cannon. Moments later, the cannon goes off and the "but" strikes the fortress's door. Immediately, there's a huge crash. The fortress crumbles and all the sounds in the vaults spill out. As all the sounds fly out together, it's confusing—but once they clear, things return to normal. Only Milo, Tock, and the Humbug notice the Soundkeeper sitting on some rubble.

Milo's ability to help here again shows how far he's come. He now feels comfortable doing things to help others, rather than just trying to understand what's going on around him. Note that when the cannon knocks down the fortress and restores sound to the valley, things don't become perfect. Rather, things go back to normal. With this, the novel suggests that normalcy is something worth striving for—life doesn't have to be flashy or flawless to be desirable.

Milo apologizes to the Soundkeeper and Tock says they had to do it. The Soundkeeper says this is all her fault—"you can't improve sound by having only silence." Rather, you must "use each at the proper time." Presently, the DYNNE marches over the hill and asks if anyone wants the sounds in his bag; they're not bad enough for him. The Soundkeeper is ecstatic and invites him and Dr. Dischord to come listen to music one night. Horrified, the DYNNE runs away. Tock tells the concerned Soundkeeper that the DYNNE only likes terrible sounds. She sighs that lots of people like unpleasant sounds, and unpleasant sounds do have their place—they're how you know that other sounds are pleasant. She muses that things would be better if Rhyme and Reason were here.

The Soundkeeper advocates for balance: silence is what makes sound so beautiful, and vice versa. And as she engages with the DYNNE, they show that bad sounds are what make nice sounds so pleasant. This also has implications for Azaz and the Mathemagician's argument over the importance of words or numbers: perhaps both are important and necessary. When the Soundkeeper invites Dr. Dischord and the DYNNE to visit, it symbolically shows that people on opposite sides of an argument can coexist (if both sides are willing to cooperate, of course).

Milo announces that he's going to rescue the princesses, so the Soundkeeper gives him a small wrapped **gift**. She says there are sounds in the package; a lot of the sounds are laughter. She then tells him how to get to Digitopolis. Milo, Tock, and the Humbug drive away in their car. Everything seems to be going well—until the Humbug says that nothing can go wrong now. At this, he flies out of the car to a little island off the shore. Tock says they'll have plenty of time and flies away with the bug; Milo says the day couldn't be nicer and inexplicably flies to join his friends.

The Soundkeeper's gift again symbolizes that Milo has learned another lesson: that all types of sounds are worth paying attention to and appreciating, and that it's necessary to have balance in life. Recall that in Dictionopolis, the Humbug made it clear that this journey was going to get even harder between Dictionopolis and the Mountains of Ignorance—he as much as said that things can go wrong. So, saying that things can't go wrong reads as naïve and misleading.

From the shore, the island was beautiful. Now it looks dead and awful. Milo asks the first man he sees where they are, but in return, the man asks who he is. After a brief huddle, Milo asks the man to describe himself. The man says he's "tall as can be," "short as can be," "strong as can be," and "smart as can be." The Humbug says it's simple, and Milo says the man is Canby. Canby is ecstatic.

The island—and Canby—seem to reinforce the lesson Milo learned earlier about not judging people or things until he's had the time to think about them carefully and critically. Milo, Tock, and the Humbug didn't do that when they flew to this island—instead, they made assumptions.

Tock asks where they are. Canby says this is the Island of Conclusions; they got here by jumping to conclusions (this happens when you decide something without reason). Milo says it's very unpleasant as more people fly onto the island. The Humbug says he's going to jump back, but Canby says you can't *jump* from Conclusions. You have to swim back. Nobody likes doing it, he says, but it's the only way—and some people swim through the Sea of Knowledge and still come out dry on the other side. Canby excuses himself to go greet newcomers.

Canby confirms that Milo, Tock, and the Humbug didn't think through their assessments of how their journey is going to go. And the fact that they end up on this island and then have to figure out how to get back suggests that jumping to conclusions, just like jumping to the fantastical Island of Conclusions, wastes time. It may take some time to think things through, but the novel suggests that doing so will actually save time in the end.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug all make the difficult, cold swim. The Humbug emerges on the beach dry and says it wasn't so bad, but Milo says he's not going to waste any more time jumping to Conclusions. They all get back in the car and drive for Digitopolis.

The Humbug comes out of the Sea of Knowledge dry because he's essentially impervious to learning new things—he doesn't change or learn much over the course of the novel. This suggests that he'll be back to Conclusions at some point (representing the idea that he figuratively jumps to conclusions), since he rejects critical thought.

CHAPTER 14. THE DODECAHEDRON LEADS THE WAY

The road suddenly splits into three and a sign appears. There are arrows pointing down all three roads and the sign says how far away Digitopolis is in various units of measurement. The Humbug suggests they travel by miles, while Milo suggests it'd be shorter to go by half inches. Tock doesn't care what units they use; he thinks they need to pick a road. As they argue, a small, strange figure steps out. He's "constructed" of lines and angles that comes together into a many-sided shape. (The narrator directs readers to look at the picture to see what they mean.)

Here, Tock essentially encourages Milo and the Humbug to not get lost in specifics. Whatever units they use to measure their travel, the bigger question is which road to take. Milo's suggestion that it'd be "shorter" to use half inches betrays how little he knows about math—choosing a smaller unit of measurement doesn't make a measurement any shorter.

The figure introduces himself as the Dodecahedron, which is a shape with 12 faces. He shows off his 12 faces; each has a different expression. When Milo introduces himself, the Dodecahedron frowns—Milo only has one face, and his name is odd. The Dodecahedron thinks it's strange that other people with only one face have names like John or George—around here, "everything is called exactly what it is." This is Digitopolis, and everything is very precise.

The Dodecahedron's many faces are funny—but his inability to understand that a human face isn't the same as a shape's face (meaning one of its sides) shows how lacking Digitopolis is in figurative "rhyme or reason." He doesn't allow for the possibility that everything isn't *"called exactly what it is." A person's name or appearance, for instance, aren't the full story of who they are.*

Milo asks the Dodecahedron which road they should take. In response, the Dodecahedron gives a math problem asking which of the three cars going at different speeds along different routes will arrive at their destination first. The Humbug shouts that the answer is 17, while Milo can't figure it out and admits he's bad at math problems. The Dodecahedron says that's a shame. With math, you know that if a small beaver can build a small dam in two days, a massive beaver could build Boulder Dam. The Humbug mutters that beavers don't come that big, but the Dodecahedron notes that if you could find one, "you'd certainly know what to do with him." Milo insists that's absurd, and the Dodecahedron says it's accurate nevertheless—if you want the questions to be right, you have to find some sense.

Absurdity can be fun—the Dodecahedron's anecdote about what a massive beaver can do is ridiculous and funny. But, as Humbug and Milo note, this isn't the most useful way of looking at things if one wants to solve a practical problem—like building such a large dam. For that matter, beaver dams differ wildly from manmade dams, so this is also a language misunderstanding (as when the Dodecahedron got confused about Milo's name having nothing to do with his single face). Digitopolis's focus on only numbers makes it difficult for the Dodecahedron to effectively and meaningfully communicate with the newcomers.

Tock has been working on the original math problem, and he says the cars will arrive at the same place at the same time. Milo asks if the roads are all the right way then, but the Dodecahedron says they're actually all the wrong way—not all choices are right. He spins the sign and the three roads converge into one. It's a bumpy road, and it leads to a rocky land. Milo asks if the numbers are made here. The Dodecahedron says they're mined and asks if Milo knows anything about numbers. Milo admits he's never thought of them as important, which infuriates the Dodecahedron—you need numbers to have tea for two, or to know how high your hopes are. At this, the Dodecahedron leads the party into a cave. This is the numbers mine.

Because of Milo's incomplete grasp of math and logic, he discovers again that he needs to ask for and accept help. His willingness to ask the Dodecahedron questions shows he's learning and becoming more engaged. Keep in mind that before this, Milo hasn't considered numbers important because he hasn't had anyone tell him why he should care. The Dodecahedron, then, fills this role and notes that numbers are a part of everyday life—and even figures of speech. His figures of speech, though, show again that words and numbers are intimately connected.

Milo squints and sees that they're in a big cavern. Men his size are digging and pushing carts. Milo asks who the mine belongs to—and a booming voice answers that it's his. The figure coming toward Milo is clearly the Mathemagician: he wears a flowing robe covered in equations and carries a staff that's a giant pencil. Milo asks if there are precious stones in the mine, and the Mathemagician says there are. He picks a small object out of a cart, which turns out to be a sparkly five. Tock says the numbers are exceptional. As Milo gives a handful of numbers to the Dodecahedron, he drops several. The Mathemagician says they use the broken ones for fractions, and then he shows them a pile of emeralds, rubies, and diamonds. They're a nuisance, and nobody knows what to do with them. He whistles; it's lunchtime.

Milo and the Mathemagician clearly take "precious stones" to mean different things. Milo is talking about the rubies and diamonds, which to the Mathemagician are useless. The Mathemagician is talking about the numbers that come out of the mine, which to Milo aren't as valuable as the precious stones. This becomes another lesson in perspective—because of their differing backgrounds, Milo and the Mathemagician look at the Numbers Mine very differently.

CHAPTER 15. THIS WAY TO INFINITY

Eight miners rush in with a huge, bubbling cauldron. It smells delicious. The Mathemagician offers Milo, Tock, and the Humbug something to eat. They all quickly finish their bowls. The Mathemagician keeps serving them again and again—and Milo feels hungrier with every bowl. When the miners take the cauldron away again, the Humbug is 23 times hungrier than he was before; he had 23 bowls of soup. The Dodecahedron says this is the kingdom's specialty: subtraction stew. Here, the more you eat, the hungrier you get. Milo asks how anyone gets enough, and the Mathemagician says that here, people eat when they're full and eat until they're hungry. It's an economical system that ensures that people always have "more than enough," even when they have nothing.

Just as in Dictionopolis, Milo has to adjust to a totally new way of moving through the world. Because he's not familiar with math concepts, it's much harder for him to make this transition. It's also worth noting that logic is a crucial part of math—this is why, in Digitopolis, people tend to rely on logic more than they did in Dictionopolis. But again, because there's no rhyme and reason guiding Digitopolis, the subtraction stew and eating habits in Digitopolis are pretty nonsensical—food only works this way in theory, not in practice.

The Dodecahedron walks Milo through how this works with a math exercise and then assures the ravenous Humbug that he'll be full in time for dinner later. Milo muses that he only eats when hungry, which the Mathemagician deems "curious." Suddenly, the mine vanishes and he, Milo, Tock, and the Humbug are standing in the Mathemagician's circular workshop. Everything is labeled with various measurements. When Milo asks if the Mathemagician always travels like that, the Mathemagician says he normally takes the shortest distance—unless he needs to be multiple places at once, in which case he multiplies. He writes 7 x 1 = 7 and suddenly, there are seven Mathemagicians.

In his workshop, the Mathemagician shows Milo that with the right baseline knowledge, it's possible to look at the world only in mathematical terms. Where Milo might see that something across the room is a few steps, or a few seconds, away, the Mathemagician knows exactly how far away things are. And while it's of course fantastical and absurd that the Mathemagician can multiply himself to be in several places at once, it also shows readers clearly what multiplication is and how it works.

Milo gasps, but the Mathemagician says it's easy with "a magic staff." The Humbug snaps that it's only a big pencil—but the Mathemagician says that still, you can do lots of things if you know how to use it. The Mathemagician then shows Milo how to make things disappear by giving him a complex problem that equals zero—when Milo solves it, the written numbers disappear. Next, the Mathemagician shows Milo the biggest number they have (a three that's twice the Mathemagician's height) and the longest number (an eight that's as wide as the three was high).

The Mathemagician's magic staff might just be a big pencil, but he makes the case that a pencil can tell a person all sorts of things. If one knows how to do math, it's possible to make things disappear, multiply, and divide, all on paper. So, Milo is finally seeing that there's a purpose to learning math. Math problems aren't just useless and boring—he can actually do things with them.

Tock comes to Milo's rescue and says Milo would actually like to see "the number of greatest possible magnitude." The Mathemagician coaches Milo through adding one to a massive number, again and again—Milo can never stop, he says, because the biggest number is always bigger than the number you currently have. It exists, he says, the same place where the smallest number is. He asks Milo to divide 1/1,000,000,000 in half again and again until Milo asks if it ever stops. When Milo asks where you could keep something so tiny, the Mathemagician says it stays in a box so tiny it's invisible, tucked within furniture just as tiny. But he'll show Milo where to find it.

Infinity is more of a concept than an actual number, which the Mathemagician shows here through this exercise. But this doesn't mean infinity isn't still fun to think about. Moreover, it's a mark of how much Milo has changed that he's curious about infinity at all—such a thing wouldn't have interested him before coming to the Lands Beyond. He's gaining the confidence to ask questions about things he doesn't understand, and the novel presents this as a positive change.

The Mathemagician leads Milo to a window, where a line stretches to the ground and keeps going forever. If he keeps going forever and turns left, he'll find the land of Infinity. Milo says he doesn't have that much time, so the Mathemagician leads him to a flight of stairs. Milo bounds up the stairs, asking Tock and the Humbug to wait for him.

This is another matter of perspective: Milo realizes the line goes on forever, and he's never going to reach Infinity. But because Milo probably believes that stairs stop eventually, he goes into this thinking Infinity is something he can actually reach.

CHAPTER 16. A VERY DIRTY BIRD

At first, Milo climbs the stairs quickly. But he slows down and, finally, he sits—he realizes these stairs go on forever, just like the line. Someone tells Milo he wouldn't like Infinity anyway, since there, "they can never manage to make ends meet." Milo looks up to see the left half of a child. When Milo says he's never seen half a child before, the boy says he's actually .58 of a child. He explains that his family is average, with a mother, father, and 2.58 kids. He's the .58 kid. The boy says it's great—all average families have 2.58 children, so he has friends. And he's the only person small enough to drive 3/10s of a car, since average families also own 1.3 cars.

Milo is initially excited to get to the top of the stairs—but he has to confront that it's impossible to reach Infinity. Finding this half-child introduces Milo to averages, which are much more literal in the Lands Beyond than in the real world. Again, this is absurd—average families don't actually have half children. But it allows the novel to illustrate how averages work by making them real.

Milo insists that averages are just imaginary, but the child disagrees. He points out that if Milo had no money but was with other people who had money, using averages, Milo would have money. The child offers more examples, but they just confuse Milo. Milo insists that none of this is possible. The child, though, says that the nice thing about math (and other subjects) is that impossible things can be real, just like Infinity. You can know it's there and even if you can't reach it, it's still worth looking for. Milo bids the boy goodbye and heads back downstairs. He realizes he'll have to learn a lot more to rescue the princesses.

The child essentially suggests to Milo that math (or anything else, for that matter) doesn't have to make perfect sense, or be totally logical, to be fun. Indeed, it's possible to read this passage as justification for the book as a whole. The novel is fantastical and presents a number of things that aren't real, but it's still entertaining, worth reading, and worth picking out its lessons. And this encounter—and the book—shows Milo just how much he has to learn. His education will never be over, even once the novel ends.

When Milo reenters the workshop, he laments that everything in Digitopolis is too hard for him. The Mathemagician comforts Milo and notes that the easiest thing to do is to be wrong—but it's not worth it. Attempting to understand everything he's seen, Milo asks why things that are correct aren't actually right. The Mathemagician sobs that it's been like this since Rhyme and Reason were banished, which he shouts is all Azaz's fault. The Mathemagician refuses to discuss the matter with his brother, since Azaz didn't answer his last friendly letter. Milo accepts the letter, which is entirely numbers. Milo doesn't get it and suggests Azaz didn't either, but the Mathemagician bellows that numbers are the same no matter where you are in the world.

While Milo is sad that everything seems too difficult for him, he's no longer rejecting learning outright just because things are hard—rather, he wants to learn more. And again, it's a sign of how much Milo has changed that he can now frame a question to the Mathemagician about why things are so hard in the Lands Beyond. The Mathemagician encourages Milo to keep trying to learn. However, the Mathemagician shows Milo that despite being able to dispense some good advice, he's also very set in his ways—to the point that he can't, and won't, communicate with his own brother.

Tock asks for the Mathemagician's permission to rescue Rhyme and Reason. When he hears that Azaz has already agreed to this, the Mathemagician refuses—he'll never agree with his brother on anything. Milo thinks carefully and, using logic, is able to show the Mathemagician that he and Azaz are actually in agreement, since they agree to disagree with whatever the other agrees with. The Mathemagician cries out, but he gives his permission. Then, he warns Milo that the demons will know about him—and once they appear, it'll be too late. He also has a grave problem to tell Milo about, though he can't talk about it until after Milo returns.

Milo has learned a lot about logic if he's able to beat even the Mathemagician at his own game. Things might be hard in Digitopolis and the Lands Beyond more broadly, but Milo is still learning how to navigate the land. And despite the Mathemagician throwing a fuss, he seems to agree very easily to help Milo get past the demons. So, he may not be as dedicated to fighting with his brother and keeping the princesses locked up as he initially made it seem.

The Mathemagician transports Milo, Tock, and the Humbug to the edge of Digitopolis. Ahead is a narrow path leading to the mountains. Milo laments that he won't be able to get the car up the road, but the Mathemagician warns Milo that in Ignorance, he'll have to take things step by step anyway. The Dodecahedron appears out of nowhere with Milo's **gifts**. The Mathemagician gives Milo his own magic staff, and then he and the Dodecahedron bid the travelers goodbye.

The Mathemagician saying that Milo will have to take things step by step in Ignorance is humorous, because it means two different things here. Milo has to walk and literally step through Ignorance, and he also has to take things slowly, carefully, and logically. Giving Milo a magic staff means that Milo has learned what he needs to about math—and now he can go on to work problems for himself.

As Milo climbs the difficult path, the light fades. It's not dark like the night, it's "more like a mixture of lurking shadows and evil intentions." As a heavy mist descends, Milo grabs Tock's tail and wonders if they should wait until morning. Just then, a dirty bird quips that "They'll be mourning for you soon enough." When Milo says they need a place to spend the night, the bird says it's not Milo's to spend. As Milo tries to explain what he wants, the bird continually interjects to call Milo rude and tell him to use other words that make more sense. Tock asks the bird not to interrupt, but the bird says it's his job—he's the Everpresent Wordsnatcher.

The Everpresent Wordsnatcher continues the novel's habit of playing with homophones, words that sound the same but have different meanings and sometimes different spellings. By using them, the Wordsnatcher is able to trip Milo make up and make it impossible to say—or learn—anything useful or intelligible. This shows that having a firm grasp of language doesn't make a person good or helpful—language, just like anything else, can be abused and manipulated.

Milo asks the Everpresent Wordsnatcher if everyone in Ignorance is like him. The bird says folks here are worse, but he's from a place called Context. The Humbug suggests the bird go back home, but the bird shudders—he spends "almost all [his] time out of it." The bird then says he's not a demon and flies away. When Milo shouts at him to wait, the bird replies, "thirty-four pounds." The Humbug, pretending to be brave, suggests they find the demons. Tock starts to tremble.

The Everpresent Wordsnatcher's one-liner about spending time out of Context is funny, especially since the bird seems to fit right in in Ignorance. He may be from Context and may call Context home, but within the context of Ignorance, he makes perfect sense. The Humbug may have absorbed some of the same lessons Milo has, given that he's trying to be brave here.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug continue to climb until they come across an elegant gentleman leaning against a dead tree. The man's expression is totally blank—he has no face at all. But the man greets the travelers, and Milo is shocked to meet someone so nice. The man requests Milo to help him with some small jobs. He asks Milo to move a huge pile of sand from one place to the other using tweezers. He asks Tock to empty a well with only an eyedropper, and he assigns the Humbug to dig a hole with a needle. The travelers work on their tasks for hours.

At first, Milo is drawn in by this pleasant, mysterious man. He allows himself to assume that this is a person he can trust—which, from the looks of things, seems like a mistake. But this just goes to show that it's okay to make mistakes, and that this is something everyone does—even someone as wise as Tock.

CHAPTER 17. UNWELCOMING COMMITTEE

After hours and hours, neither Tock, Milo, nor the Humbug have made much progress. Milo finds this strange—especially since he's not hungry or tired. He could go on forever. But Milo wishes he could find out how long this will take. At Tock's suggestion, Milo pulls out his magic staff and figures out how long these tasks will take. When he realizes it'll take 837 years to finish these tasks, he confronts the man and suggests this doesn't seem worthwhile or important. The man says that's the point, just as Tock's **alarm** starts to ring. Tock asks why they should bother, and the man says that it's most important to do unimportant things—that way, you'll never get where you're going.

Milo's journey into Ignorance is, essentially, a drawn-out practical test, where he has to show that he's internalized the concepts he's learned along his journey. Here, he learns that math is useful, and it does have an important purpose: helping him figure out how long a pointless task like this is going to take. When Tock's alarm clock goes off, it's a signal that these tasks are indeed pointless; Tock is, perhaps unconsciously, warning Milo (and readers) of this fact in his capacity as a watchdog.

Milo gasps, and the man finally introduces himself: he's the Terrible Trivium, the demon of worthless jobs and petty tasks. He orders Milo and Tock not to leave, but Milo asks why people should only do unimportant things. (He now realizes how much time *he* spends doing unimportant things.) The Terrible Trivium insists it saves **time** and means you never have to do the difficult, important tasks. And if you don't have a "dreadful" magic staff, people have no idea how much time they waste. He starts to step forward and asks Milo to stay and become a "monster of habit."

Even though the Terrible Trivium is evil, he's still able to teach Milo important things—for instance, Milo now realizes that he often wastes time on unimportant tasks. This means that going forward, Milo will be able to make what the novel suggests are better choices as to how he spends his time. The Terrible Trivium also suggests that math is important, and that relying on a tool like a magic staff (or, in the reader's world, a calculator) is inferior to doing math mentally or by hand.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug are transfixed—until someone shouts for them to run. They all run, each thinking the other is yelling to run. They wade into a puddle of ooze that turns out to be waist-deep; the Trivium finds a mound of pebbles to count and doesn't follow. The voice tells Milo and his friends to head straight and step up—but suddenly, they find themselves in the bottom of a deep pit. Annoyed, Milo says the voice said to go up. The voice responds that nobody will get anywhere listening to him; he's an expert in bad advice. He's the "long-nosed, green-eyed, curly-haired, wide-mouthed, thick-necked, broad-shouldered, round-bodied, short-armed, bowlegged, big-footed monster," and he's terrifying.

Again, Milo, Tock, and the Humbug make the mistake of trusting someone they have no reason to trust, and again it backfires. But this is just another instance where they have the opportunity to learn. As the creature introduces himself, he paints a fearsome picture of a dangerous monster. It doesn't seem like Milo has yet seen the monster, so this shows how powerful words are—just by using words, this monster is able to frighten Milo and his friends.

Tock and the Humbug are scared, but Milo now knows that people aren't always what they say they are. With his telescope, he peers at the creature—and sees a furry, worried-looking creature. Milo shouts that the creature isn't a frightening monster, and he asks what kind of demon the creature is. Sobbing, the creature says he's the Demon of Insincerity. He doesn't mean anything he says or does, but most people believe him anyway. He curses Milo's telescope and stomps away. With the demon gone, the three travelers carefully climb up the sides of the pit.

Because Milo knows he has to think critically and gain multiple perspectives after his time with Alec Bings, it's second nature to him to pull out his telescope. In this way, Milo passes this test with flying colors by not getting drawn into the Demon of Insincerity's deceitful words. Rather, Milo is able to think for himself and use the tools around him to make a logical, rational decision about what to do.

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug travel until they reach a mountain, where they stop to make plans. But then, the mountain suddenly stands up—and they're in the Gelatinous Giant's hand. The giant, which looks like a huge bowl of jelly, roars at the travelers, scolding them for disturbing his nap. Milo apologizes; he didn't see the giant. The giant says that's understandable, since he looks like whatever is around him. Standing out is dangerous. Seeing that the giant wants to eat them, Milo quickly flatters the giant by insisting he's too big to be afraid, but the giant says he's afraid of everything—he acts ferocious to hide that fact. Milo suggests the giant is actually a "fearful demon," which the giant can't even agree with (it's too scary to "make a positive statement").

The Gelatinous Giant is spineless—he's afraid to be who he really is and to think for himself. But because he's big, he still manages to be frightening. This is another lesson for Milo on perspective and thinking critically about what people say. Looking at the giant, Milo perhaps should *be afraid—the giant is, after all, much bigger than Milo. But by listening to what the giant says, Milo discovers that he should actually be able to trick the giant using logic, or by trying to get him to agree with something.*

As the Gelatinous Giant again tries to eat the travelers, Milo asks the giant to help them rescue Rhyme and Reason. The giant refuses; it'll never work, and change is scary. He's starting to lose his appetite and suggests he'll just eat one person, but Milo says he has a better idea. Now the giant looks very ill; ideas are hard to digest. Milo holds up the **gift** from King Azaz—which sends the giant into fearful hysterics. He sets the travelers down and runs away. By this point, the Wordsnatcher, the Trivium, and the Demon of Insincerity know about Milo, Tock, and the Humbug, and they've told the other demons. Now, the demons begin to pursue the travelers so they can "protect Ignorance." Tock suggests they hurry.

It's interesting that the Gelatinous Giant, who's arguably an antagonist, expresses much the same kind of complacency that Faintly Macabre did. Complacency, the novel suggests, is one of the biggest enemies of education and learning—and it can show up in allies as well as in enemies. Milo fights back against complacency by continuing to fight to rescue the princesses. And specifically, he fights back here by showing the giant Azaz's words. New ideas are frightening, he realizes, for those who fear change.

CHAPTER 18. CASTLE IN THE AIR

Milo, Tock, and the Humbug climb higher and higher, the demons behind them. Milo catches sight of the **Castle in the Air**—but he and his friends don't see the sleeping little man at the bottom of the stairs to the castle. He has a ledger and a quill pen. Just as the travelers start to climb the stairs, the man asks them for their names. The man introduces himself as the official Senses Taker; he needs information before he can take their senses. He asks for family information, demographics, and various sizes of clothing items for each person. Humbug gives his information first, then Milo, then Tock.

The Senses Taker initially looks reasonable and like he's doing a meaningful job, with his ledger and his pen. "Senses Taker" is, after all, a play on the term "census taker," someone who records basic information about a population. But the fact that he stops Milo and his friends should raise suspicions, since this seems to be what demons in Ignorance do: try to hold up travelers. And what he asks them for reads not just as ridiculous, but as invasive. He never tells them why he needs this information, just that he needs it. It again seems like a mistake on Milo's part not to ask more questions.

This information recorded (the demons are gaining on the travelers), the Senses Taker says Milo can continue—after giving more information, such as how much ice cream he can eat in a week and his favorite color. He also gives the travelers forms to fill out. Milo, the Humbug, and Tock fill out the forms as fast as possible and then start up the steps. But the Senses Taker asks them for their destination. Milo says they're going to the **Castle in the Air**. The Senses Taker asks why bother, and then suggests Milo would rather see something else. Milo suddenly sees a wonderful circus. Tock can smell a delicious smell, and the Humbug can only hear a huge crowd cheering for him. The three stand in trances, focusing only on what the Senses Taker is showing them.

Now the Senses Taker is asking for truly ridiculous information—but as with the Terrible Trivium, this seems designed to distract and slow down Milo and his friends. Complacency, the novel shows, is by no means the only enemy of education and learning. Rather, it works alongside busy work, pointless tasks, and other things that distract a person from what they really should be doing. The pun of the Senses Taker's name comes to light here, when he robs the travelers of the ability to use their senses to see the real world—he's not a census taker, which is what it sounds and looks like he should be.

The demons get closer and closer, but Milo, Tock, and the Humbug don't notice. Milo is so engrossed that his bag of **gifts** slips off his shoulder and the package of sounds breaks open. Laughs fill the air and, suddenly, Milo, Tock, and the Humbug are laughing and no longer paying attention to the Senses Taker. They realize they've been tricked, but the Senses Taker says he *is* the Senses Taker—his job is to help people find what they're not looking for and steal their sense of purpose. The only thing saving Milo is the laughter. If Milo can hear laughter, the Senses Taker can't take his sense of humor.

Just as with the other demons Milo has encountered, the Senses Taker isn't all bad—he's still capable of teaching Milo an important lesson. He proposes that it's important to have a sense of humor, as that will help keep a person on track. The novel itself is, in a way, a lesson in how people can cultivate a sense of humor in themselves by learning enough about language to understand puns and wordplay, so what the Senses Taker has to say makes sense.

Seeing the demons, the Humbug leads the others up the stairs. The demons are right behind them now. Finally, they break through the clouds and enter through the castle gates. Two sweet voices greet Milo, Tock, and the Humbug. The two women are clearly the Princess of Pure Reason and the Princess of Sweet Rhyme. Milo says they've come to rescue the princesses. The princesses assure him that the demons won't enter the castle, and they'll all get down soon. They suggest the travelers rest. Tock instantly falls asleep, as does the Humbug.

Milo is almost done with his quest—and now he can take a moment to rest in the presence of Rhyme and Reason. The simple fact that the princesses are here suggests that Milo might finally get some reasonable answers to his many questions. Milo having made it at all is a mark of his tenacity and his newfound belief that education is meaningful and worthwhile.

Milo climbs onto the couch between the princesses and apologizes for taking so long. He made mistakes that slowed them down. Reason assures him that mistakes are fine, so long as he learns from them. Milo sighs that there's so much to learn, but Rhyme says that learning isn't even the most important thing. Rather, what's more important is knowing what to do with what one learns, and learning why you have to learn. Milo complains that so much of what he learns seems pointless. Reason, though, says that everything has a purpose and affects others. Just as one person being happy can make others happy, learning something makes the world richer. Rhyme adds that Milo will reach every place on the map he'd like to go, all because he's learning things that will help him out tomorrow.

Here, Rhyme and Reason distill many of the novel's ideas about education. Reason validates the idea that mistakes are fine—as Milo discovered when talking to the demons, making the mistake of trusting them allowed him to demonstrate his skills and gain mastery over them. And then, both princesses say that learning doesn't just benefit the person learning. It benefits everyone, as it creates a bigger knowledge pool for people to learn from. And even if something doesn't seem useful in the moment, it may become useful later—as when Milo used math to best the Trivium.

Milo has another question, but at that moment, he hears something chopping. The demons are cutting the stairway loose, and the princesses suggest they leave. Milo notes that **time** flies and Tock offers to carry everyone down. Rhyme and Reason climb onto Tock's back, while Milo and the Humbug can hold onto his tail. The Humbug asks what they'll do with the **Castle in the Air**. The princesses insist they should let it go. It's beautiful, but it's still a prison. With this, Tock's passengers settle themselves, and he leaps through the window.

Milo's question is, presumably, whether numbers or words are more important. When nobody can answer this question, it drives home that it's not really a useful question anyway—both are, as the princesses said years ago, equally important. The way that the princesses frame the Castle in the Air as a prison suggests that readers shouldn't get too attached to their idea of something. Ideas, they suggest, can trap someone if they're unwilling to see other perspectives.

CHAPTER 19. THE RETURN OF RHYME AND REASON

Tock flies just past the demons and, with Rhyme and Reason still on his back, leads the way down the mountainside. The demons shriek. Milo looks back as he runs and sees the Triple Demons of Compromise, who settle their disputes by doing what none of them want. He notices the Horrible Hopping Hindsight, who leaps before he looks and is happy as long as he knows he did what he shouldn't have. Most terrifying are the Gorgons of Hate and Malice. Tock shouts for them to run faster, and Milo catches sight of the Overbearing Know-it-all, which is mostly mouth and spreads misinformation. Then comes the Gross Exaggeration, who "mangle[s] the truth." The Threadbare Excuse tags along.

Meeting all these other demons introduces readers to literal, physical manifestations of some of the world's problems. Through them, the novel suggests that compromise isn't always the best way to settle a dispute, since it might mean that nobody is happy. The fact that Milo and his friends are running so hard away from these demons speaks to the idea that these are the things keeping people from becoming educated, enjoying life, and being sensible and logical.

Milo's lungs burn, but the path gets flatter and wider. He can see light and safety ahead as the demons close in behind him. The Terrible Trivium and the Gelatinous Giant urge their fellows on—and the Dilemma looks ready to catch someone on his horns. The Humbug is ready to give up when lightning and thunder steal his words. Suddenly, just as the demons are ready to snatch Milo, Tock, the Humbug, Rhyme, and Reason, they suddenly stop. Up ahead are Wisdom's armies. A trumpet sounds, and then horsemen race forward. King Azaz and the Mathemagician lead the way, Dr. Dischord, the DYNNE, and Chroma behind. Everyone Milo has met in the Lands Beyond joins the fight.

Milo is steadfastly dedicated to getting away from the demons—the very demons that kept him bored and unsatisfied at the beginning of the novel. Milo is, at this point, a changed little boy. And he's also brought about change in the Lands Beyond, as evidenced by the fact that Azaz and the Mathemagician are now working together to help Milo defeat the demons and rescue the princesses. Thanks to Milo, everyone in the Lands Beyond—including and especially those in power—see how important it is to have reason, and not just live in absurdity.

The monsters of Ignorance are terrified. They turn back to the mountains and Milo greets the victorious army. Everyone cheers, and then, a man unrolls a huge scroll and announces that Rhyme and Reason will reign again in Wisdom. The scroll also designates Milo, Tock, and the Humbug as heroes, and it declares a three-day carnival holiday. Messengers spread the word throughout the kingdom as Milo and his friends join a parade. They sit in a carriage with Azaz, the Mathemagician, and the princesses. As people cheer, Rhyme tells Milo they're cheering for him. He says he had a lot of help, and finally, Azaz and the Mathemagician tell Milo what the problem was: rescuing the princesses was impossible. But since Milo didn't know that, he could complete the task.

When all of the friends Milo met along his journey are able to scare away the demons by banding together, it essentially makes the point that being a well-rounded person can help drive away all the things those creatures represent. Appreciating a variety of things—music, color, sound, math, and language—means that there's so much more to appreciate in the world, and it gives a person more skills to use as needed. On another note, the Mathemagician and Azaz essentially suggest that when accomplishing a task, the most important element of a person's success is believing they can do it.

The parade stops between Digitopolis and Dictionopolis, and the carnival begins. There are fireworks, music, and laughter, and Alec Bings sets up a telescope. There's a banquet every evening, followed by songs and poems praising Rhyme, Reason, and their rescuers. King Azaz and the Mathemagician vow to take armies to the Mountains of Ignorance yearly to drive out the demons.

Things seem to be back to normal in the Lands Beyond. This celebration allows everyone to remember how things used to be and look forward to things returning to normal, now that the princesses are back. And the kings' vow to fight the demons is, essentially, a vow to continue to fight for education and knowledge.

Finally, after three days, the carnival packs up and Reason says it's time to go. Milo now remembers his home, but he's sad to leave. Milo looks around at his new friends and asks the Humbug and Tock to come with him, but they refuse. Milo thanks his friends, and then, King Azaz claps and Milo's car appears. Milo hops in and waves goodbye to his friends. He promises to remember the importance of words and numbers, just as Azaz and the Mathemagician start to argue again.

Things might not stay so great in the Lands Beyond, judging by the kings beginning to argue again. This suggests that arguments like this will never have a satisfying conclusion. And this isn't necessarily a bad thing—the desire to do better and prove oneself leads to progress. The problem comes, the novel has shown, when people become so specialized in their subject area that they can't acknowledge that anything else is important.

CHAPTER 20. GOOD-BY AND HELLO

As Milo drives, he realizes he's been gone for weeks. He hopes no one is worried. Finally, the **tollbooth** comes into view. Milo drops in his coin and suddenly finds himself sitting in his bedroom—and it's only six in the evening. He's only been gone an hour, and Milo had no idea he could get so much done in a short **time**. He's exhausted, so he goes to bed right after dinner.

This is the first time that Milo has even acknowledged that he has people at home who care about him. His time away has seemingly taught him to care more about those people. He's also learned that by using his imagination, he can travel anywhere he likes—and still be home for dinner. In addition, he's learned the value of using his time efficiently and productively rather than wasting it.

After school the next day, Milo plans to go back to the Lands Beyond—but when he gets home, the **tollbooth** is gone. Instead, there's an envelope addressed, "FOR MILO, WHO NOW KNOWS THE WAY." Inside, the note reads that hopefully Milo was satisfied with his trip, but that they had to collect the tollbooth and send it to another boy or girl. If he wants to see other lands on the map, he should be able to figure out how to get there himself. The signature is unreadable.

Milo is so excited to go back through the tollbooth because it was such a novel and eye-opening experience for him. At this point, he believes that using the tollbooth is the only way to access the Lands Beyond (and indeed, his imagination). But the note explaining the tollbooth's absence suggests that Milo doesn't actually need the tollbooth—he can use his imagination, without a crutch, and go anywhere he likes.

Sad, Milo curls up in his armchair. He thinks of Tock and the Humbug, Rhyme and Reason, and his other friends. But though he's sad, he also notices how pretty the sky and trees are. He can take walks, find caterpillars, and smell each day. In his room there are books to read, things to build and invent, and songs to sing. Eagerly, Milo rushes around his room, ready to try something new. He decides he doesn't have **time** to make another trip with so much to do here.

After his journey through the Lands Beyond, Milo can now appreciate the world around him. And most important for him, since he used to be chronically bored, is that he now realizes he can amuse himself anywhere. Milo has learned how to use his time well and keep himself engaged—and this will allow him to continue learning, wherever he goes and whatever he does.

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