

Teacher's notes

The Snow Goose

by Paul Gallico



SUMMARY

The *Snow Goose* is Paul Gallico's most famous book. It was first published in the USA, in the *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1940, then in book-form in 1941. The book was made into a television film in 1971.

The story, set in England, begins in 1930. Philip Rhayader is a hunchback with a crippled left arm. His physical deformity has isolated him from other people and now he lives alone in an abandoned lighthouse on the southeast coast of England. He is an artist and paints the birds that inhabit the desolate marshland by the sea. He also provides the birds with food and shelter.

One day a twelve-year-old girl named Fritha, who lives in the local village, comes to see him. She is carrying an injured bird. She is afraid of Philip, but she has heard that he knows how to take care of wild creatures. He examines the bird and tells Fritha that it is a Canadian snow goose that must have been blown off course by a violent storm.

After their first meeting, Fritha often visits the lighthouse to see the bird. When the bird flies north in the spring, Fritha's visits stop.

In October the snow goose returns. Philip sends a message to Fritha. She comes to the lighthouse, and during the winter months she returns regularly. Each year when the snow goose leaves, Fritha's visits stop. When the bird returns, her visits resume. Like the snow goose, she learns to trust Philip. Their relationship develops, although they never speak of their attachment. Philip teaches her about the marsh and its creatures. Each year the snow goose spends longer and longer periods at the lighthouse, and by the spring of 1940 it is clear that it will not leave again.

In the spring of 1940 Britain is at war. Germany has invaded Belgium and France and now thousands of Allied troops are trapped on the beaches of Dunkirk in France. Hundreds of small boats are leaving the British coast to bring the soldiers back to Britain. Philip sails across the Channel and rescues many soldiers, taking them to the bigger boats in deeper water. All the time he is accompanied by the snow goose that has followed him over the sea.

In the lighthouse Fritha finds a painting that Philip had done of her and the snow goose and she realises the depth of feeling that exists between them.

One evening the snow goose returns to the lighthouse. Fritha knows in her heart that Philip will not return. As the bird circles above her she feels that this is Philip's soul saying goodbye.

For several weeks she goes on looking after the birds. Then one night an enemy plane targets the lighthouse and completely destroys it.

The Doll is set in London. Dr Amomy buys a beautiful doll for his niece's birthday. He wants to meet the person who makes the dolls. He discovers that it is a young woman, Mary, who has a twisted leg. She is dominated by her aunt, Rose Callamit, who forces her to make the dolls, then sells them and keeps the money. Mary is dying because no-one loves her; her dolls are her only children. The doctor falls in love with her, rescues her from Rose Callamit and finally marries her.

The Silver Swans is set on the River Thames in London. Doctor Fundoby, who has an important job at the British Museum, meets a young woman who lives on a houseboat on the river. She calls herself Thetis (a character from an old Greek story who lived

under the sea). She is really called Alice and she is a professional actress. She asks Dr Fundoby: 'How will I know when I'm really in love?' He suggests a test. Alice puts the test into practice with a handsome ocean scientist, Richard Hadley, whose boat is on the river. The test is successful and Alice marries Richard.

ABOUT PAUL GALICO

Paul William Gallico was born in New York City, on 26th July, 1897. His father was Italian, and his mother came from Austria; they emigrated to New York in 1895. In 1916 he went to Columbia University, where he graduated in 1921 with a Bachelor of Science degree. He then worked for the National Board of Motion Picture Review, and finally took a job as the film critic for the *New York Daily News*. The newspaper did not like his film reviews, so he moved to the sports department.

He wrote an article about the famous boxer, Jack Dempsey. He wanted to know what it was like to be hit by the world heavyweight champion, so he asked if he could spend a few minutes in the ring with Dempsey. He was knocked out in under two minutes! But he had a great story for the newspaper. He became Sports Editor of the *Daily News* in 1923, and was one of the best known sports writers in the USA.

But he had always wanted to be a fiction writer, and he wrote short stories and sports articles for magazines like *Vanity Fair* and the *Saturday Evening Post*. In 1936 he went to live in Europe and concentrated on his writing.

In 1941, *The Snow Goose* was published and Gallico became as well known in Europe as he was in the USA. He wrote over forty books, on a wide range of subjects:

Lou Gehrig: Pride of the Yankees (1942) is a biography of Lou Gehrig, one of the greatest American baseball stars. It was made into a film in the year of its publication. *The Lonely* (1947) is a romance about an American soldier stationed in England during the war who falls in love with an English girl.

Flowers for Mrs Harris (1958) tells the story of a London housecleaner who wins a lot of money and goes off to Paris to buy the Christian Dior dress of her dreams.

The Man who was Magic (1966) is a magic fable that deals with the problems that someone with different attitudes and talents can have in a closed society.

The Poseidon Adventure (1969) is a serious thriller describing the adventures of a group of people trapped inside an upturned ocean liner. The book was made into a film and was the first of the 'disaster movies' of the 1970s.

He also wrote children's books and several books about cats!

During his life he lived in many places, including England, Mexico and Lichtenstein. He was married four times, and had several children. He died in Monaco on 15th July, 1976.

Gallico's great talent is to draw his readers into the fascination of the story and into the emotions of the characters, who he describes with great warmth and understanding.

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The Snow Goose is a story about love and compassion set

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against a background of war and mistrust. Philip loved all living things, yet, because of his physical deformity, he got no return of the warmth that he showed to other people. Only the snow goose trusted him and rewarded him with its companionship. And its greatest gift to him was Fritha's love and friendship. The bird was the catalyst that brought Philip and her together. Their love is sadly unspoken and tragically shortlived. The final irony is that Philip's love for his fellow men brings his death and separates him from Fritha, the one person in the world he loved the most.

The Doll and *The Silver Swans* are two other stories about love. In *The Doll* Gallico's message is clear – the people who give all their love without receiving any in return, will slowly be destroyed. Mary puts all her love into the dolls she makes and all she receives is her aunt's cruel disdain. Dr Amony represents for Mary what the snow goose and Fritha represent for Philip. He returns Mary's love and almost literally brings her back to life. In *The Silver Swans* the question asked is: What is love? Dr Fundoby suggests to Thetis/Alice a test of true love – if she can still feel love for her beloved when he is ill and ugly, then she can be sure that she is in love. This reminds us of how Fritha saw beyond Philip's physical ugliness and loved the whole man.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopyable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

'The Snow Goose'

Put students in pairs. Tell them to look at the picture on page 4 and discuss possible answers to these questions: *Look at the bird – what's the problem? What kind of bird is it? Look at the man. What is he going to do with the bird?*

Now tell them to look at the picture on pages 20–21: *This is the same man in his boat. Can you imagine what he is doing? Compare the soldiers with the bird on page 4. Is their situation the same?*

'The Doll'

Tell the class that you saw an amazing doll in a shop window. It had a beautiful face, but its eyes were sad. Its clothes were made by hand, not by a machine. It looked like a real child. Tell the class to imagine the person who made the doll. Ask them to describe her. Take answers from the whole class and write them on the board to build up a description of the woman.

'The Silver Swans'

Put students in pairs and tell them to match the two following lists:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| 1 The story takes place in London. | a She had an octopus in a glass case. |
| 2 A young woman lives on the river. | b How will I know when I'm really in love? |
| 3 She likes sea creatures. | c Thetis lives on a houseboat. |
| 4 She wants to learn about love. | d Dr Fundoby likes walking along the River Thames. |

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

'The Snow Goose'

- Get students to think of a sentence about the story. The sentence can be true or false.

Put the class into two teams. Student A from Team 1 reads his/her sentence and Student A from Team 2 must answer *True* or *False*. Then a student from Team 2 reads his/her sentence, etc. Teams get a point for each correct answer.

- Tell students to think about Philip, Fritha, the snow goose and the soldiers at Dunkirk. How are their situations similar? Get students to write sentences about the connections between them.

'The Doll'

- Students work in groups of four or five. Each student writes down a question about the story. They then exchange their questions and try to answer the question in front of them.
- Students work in groups of three. Each student chooses either Dr Amony, Rose Callamit or Mary and writes sentences which describe the character and what he/she feels. Students then share their sentences with the whole class until a full picture of each character is built up.

'The Silver Swans'

- Students work in pairs and discuss the significance of these sentences from the story:
 - "My name's Thetis."
 - "Four dirty white swans went past us. Their feathers were dirty with oil from the river ..."
 - "I've sailed every ocean and sea in the world, and in all sorts of weather - and I haven't been sick yet."
 - "I'm a kind of ocean scientist. I do a lot of my work under water."

Finally, the whole class discuss their ideas.
- Students work individually and write down short descriptions of Thetis, Dr Fundoby and Richard Hadley.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- Ask students to work in groups and decide which of the stories they liked best. Ask them to explain why.
- Ask individual students to say which of all the characters they liked best and why.

Glossary

'The Snow Goose'

bomb (n) a weapon made of material that will explode
commander (n) an officer of any rank that is in charge of a group of soldiers
enclosure (n) an area of land surrounded by a wall or fence
feather (n) one of the things that covers a bird's body, consisting of a stem and fine hairs growing on either side
gentle (adj) kind or careful in your character or behaviour
goose (n) a bird that is similar to a duck but larger
hunchback (n) someone whose back has a large raised part because their spine curves
lighthouse (n) a tower with a powerful flashing light that guides ships away from danger
marsh (n) an area of low flat land that is always wet and soft
mine (n) a type of bomb that is hidden just below the ground
twisted (adj) bent in many directions
wing (n) one of the parts of a bird's body that it uses to fly

'The Doll'

doll (n) a child's toy that looks like a small person
niece (n) the daughter of your brother or sister

'The Silver Swans'

bank (n) land along the side of a river or lake
deck (n) the outside top level of a ship that you can walk on
houseboat (n) a boat that you live in
museum (n) a place where important cultural or historical objects are kept
octopus (n) a sea creature with eight tentacles
swan (n) a large white bird with a long graceful neck



Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only exercises are marked.

Activities before reading the book

Look at the Introduction on pages v and vi and answer the following questions:

'The Snow Goose'

- 1 What is Philip Rhayader's profession?
- 2 Why does the girl bring the snow goose to Philip?
- 3 Where does Philip go in his boat in the spring of 1940? Why?

'The Doll'

- 4 Why does Stephen Amony buy the doll?
- 5 What does he want to know?

'The Silver Swans'

- 6 Is this an adventure story? What kind of story is it?
- 7 Thetis meets a sailor. Do you think he's a good partner for her? Why?

Activities while reading the book

'The Snow Goose'

- 1 Who says these things? Who are they talking to? What/Who are they talking about?
 - (a) "I found it" she said, quietly.
 - (b) "I'm glad that the Princess is staying. Now you won't be so lonely."
 - (c) "I must go away," he said.
 - (d) "They are afraid, and they need help, my dear, like the birds."
- 2 Choose the correct answer.
 - (a) Each year Fritha came to the lighthouse
 - (i) when the snow goose was there.
 - (ii) when the snow goose wasn't there.
 - (b) When the snow goose returned to the lighthouse,

The Snow Goose



- (i) Philip went to Fritha's house to tell her.
- (ii) Philip left a note for Fritha at the post office.
- (c) In the spring of 1940 the snow goose
 - (i) flew north with the other birds.
 - (ii) stayed at the lighthouse.
- (d) In the spring of 1940 Philip
 - (i) realised that he was in love with Fritha.
 - (ii) told Fritha that he was in love with her.
- (e) At Dunkirk, Philip rescued seven men at a time off the beach
 - (i) and took them back to the British coast.
 - (ii) and took them to a bigger boat.
- (f) Fritha knew that Philip was dead
 - (i) when the snow goose came back to the lighthouse alone.
 - (ii) before the snow goose came back to the lighthouse.

3 The Snow Goose is about

- (a) love
- (b) cruelty
- (c) separation.

Work with a partner and find examples of a, b and c in the story.

- 4 You are Fritha. Philip is dead. The snow goose has gone. Tell your story to a friend. Say what happened and how you felt, and how you feel now.

'The Doll'

- 1 Look at these sentences about the story. Underline the words that are incorrect and write the correct words.

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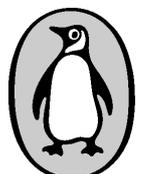
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Student's activities

- (a) Stephen Amony was a shopkeeper.
 (b) He saw the doll in the flower shop.
 (c) The doll was made of plastic and had a painted face.
 (d) Rose Callamit called the doctor because she was ill.
 (e) Dr Amony knew that Rose Callamit made the dolls.
 (f) Mary's leg was twisted in a train crash.
 (g) Mary sold the dolls that she made.
 (h) When Mary was ill, she stopped making dolls, and Rose Callamit was pleased.
 (i) Mary was dying because everyone loved her.
 (j) She made dolls because she had children.
 (k) She wasn't surprised when Dr Amony said he loved her.
 (l) When Mary married Stephen she started making dolls.
- 2 You are Mary Nolan. You are now married to Stephen. Write a letter to your aunt, Rose Callamit and tell her why you were so unhappy and so ill.

'The Silver Swans'

- 1 Complete these sentences.
- (a) She called herself Thetis because ...
 (b) She asked Dr Fundoby about love because ...
 (c) Richard Hadley asked Thetis for some cotton because ...
 (d) Thetis gave Dr Fundoby some medicine because ...
 (e) Dr Fundoby was very surprised when he went to the theatre because ...
 (f) Thetis doesn't give Richard Hadley the medicine because ...
 (g) Richard was ill, but Thetis was pleased because ...
 (h) The song of *The Silver Swans* came true because ...

- 2 Look at these words. Write a sentence for each word. Explain how they are used in the story.
- (a) octopus
 (b) scientist
 (c) medicine
 (d) trousers
 (e) actress
 (f) British Museum
 (g) song
 (h) swans
 (i) theatre
 (j) Alice
 (k) houseboat
- 3 Dr Fundoby says that if you can love somebody when they are ill, you can be sure that you are in love with them. Work with a partner and think of other tests of true love.

Activities after reading the book

Think of the characters and the situations in the three stories. Can you find any similarities? Discuss this question with a partner.

