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The chrysalids chapter 1-10 summary

LitCharts assigns a color and icon to each theme in The Chrysalids, which you can use to track the themes throughout the work. Racism and Fear of the Unknown Summary Chapter 1 David recounts the day when he began to have doubts about the world he lives in. On this day, David is about ten years old, and decides to go off by himself to play in an area beyond the bank. The bank is a border that exists at the edge of David’s town, a large and long hill that runs off into the distance. David is unsure of whether the bank was made by the Old People or is instead a natural formation. David chooses one part of the bank to slide down in one area where there is a sand gully, landing in some soft sand below. While he is doing this, a young girl, Sophie Wender, pops out of the bushes and surprises David. Sophie is a little younger than David, with a small sunburned face, brown dungarees, and hair tied up on either side of her head with yellow ribbons. While David is puzzled that he has never met Sophie before, due to the fact that all of the community children in his village know each other; nevertheless, he invites Sophie to slide down the hill with him. The third time Sophie slides down the gully, her foot gets stuck between two rocks when she lands. David attempts to assist Sophie in getting her foot out, and recommends to her that she remove her shoe. Sophie is crying and in much pain, but she is opposed to taking off her shoe. Eventually she realizes there is no other way to get her foot out, so she agrees to remove the shoe. David doesn’t notice at the time that she has six toes. David walks Sophie home, but Sophie stubbornly refuses any help in walking and instead crawls. David goes ahead of Sophie to her home, where he knocks and meets Mrs. Wender, Sophie’s mother. After Sophie’s mother comforts her injured daughter, she addresses another concern: whether or not David has seen Sophie’s foot. David describes how he watched Sophie’s foot being washed and cared for, but did not at the time think of the commandments and precepts he knew from his religion: that every man has one body, two arms, etc., all the way through to five toes on each foot. He only remembers feeling sorry for Sophie’s distress. David notes that the Wenders’ cottage, although smaller than his home, feels friendlier, with drawings of horses on the wall instead of religious scriptures. After they eat and Sophie goes to bed, Mrs. Wender sits down with David. David describes feeling of “thought shapes” of anxiety coming from Mrs. Wender-- this is the first time he describes how he feels when he is receiving telepathic communications. However, David notes that he cannot communicate telepathically back to Mrs. Wender, he can only receive her shapes. Mrs. Wender asks David to promise to never tell anyone about Sophie’s foot. David asks if he can visit Sophie again, and Mrs. Wender agrees as long as David does it in secret. On the way home, David suddenly realizes that in his religion’s texts, it states that any person who falls outside of the guidelines of the correct number of body parts, etc., is not considered human and is considered a “Blasphemy against God.” David is puzzled and perturbed: he does not understand how it would be possible that Sophie is not an ordinary little girl. Chapter 2 David walks home to Waknuk, his farm community, by cutting through the woods, keeping his hand on his knife for fear there could be dangerous and large wild dogs or cats. He cuts across four fields to get home, sneaking past Old Jacob. David describes the house he lives in, built by his grandfather, Elias Storm. The house was built fifty years ago, the first house in the settlement; now it has many rooms, including storerooms and barns that were added over the years. The frame of the house is made of wood, and the walls are filled in with remnants of the buildings left by the Old People. David is unsure of where the name Waknuk comes from, suggesting that it may have been part of the name the Old People used. The great room is the center of the home, where the hearth is located, and the room is decorated with the religious text of Nicholson’s repentances. The repentances serve as reminders to remain pure and be wary of mutants. In describing his grandfather, David states that Elias came from the East. His grandfather may have left his homeland because of their “ungodly ways”, but David suggests Elias may have been forced out. Elias, at age 45, arrived in the area that is now Waknuk before it was developed. He found a young lovely wife, who died soon after their second son was born. Elias raised his son, Joseph Storm, with a strong faith, both from the Bible and from Nicholson’s Repentances. David describes his father as a man of “local consequence” who preaches in the local church. He married David’s mother because their views were in harmony with one another. An Offence to the religious decrees of the Repentances usually consists of some form of genetic mutation. Sometimes the mutation occurs in an animal, requiring that a ritual “Purification” slaughter of the animal takes place at dawn. The ritual consists of singing hymns and slitting the throat of the mutant animal. Other times, the Offence is a vegetable that mutates or is malformed, and the entire field needs to be burned. If there is an question or disagreement about whether something qualifies as an Offence, the inspector is called in to judge. David notes that his father has a “keen eye” for Offences and that some community members feel that their community would have an overall improvement in their “deviation rate” if Joseph Storm were not so vigilant about pointing out Offences. Outside of David’s community there is a region called the Fringes. The inhabitants there are considered inhuman because they are genetically mutated: they are labeled “Deviations.” As a tale of warning for misbehaving children, mothers used to invoke images of two specific Fringe monsters: Hairy Jack lives in a cave and eats children, and Old Maggie is multi-limbed and multi-eyed. The actual Fringe people sometimes attack the area around Waknuk, stealing weapons and livestock. Beyond the Fringes are the Badlands, where no one has ever gone and survived. The Government is in Rigo, located in the East, where it is safer. The Government does not provide much protection against attacks from the Fringes. David describes his family as consisting of his mother, his two sisters, Mary and Sarah, and his Uncle Axel. There are also maids and farm workers and their families who live in their complex of houses, and everyone shares meals together in their big room at the end of the day. Waknuk is a very busy farm, and David often avoids work by sneaking away when no one is looking, hiding away playing until dinner time. Chapter 3 David continues his friendship with Sophie by visiting her two or three times a week after he finishes school in the mornings. She shows him her territory, and he brings her to his side of the bank to show off his community’s steam-engine. Sophie and David discuss the Old People, wondering whether they are the magical beings that David imagines, who can fly, or if they are simply human, as Sophie believes. David introduces John Wender, Sophie’s father, with whom he has a serious “man to man” understanding. David reflects that years later he could appreciate how grave the situation was for the Wenders, given that David knew their secret and was the son of one of the most powerful men. David narrates a time when he is dressing a splinter wound on his hand, and frustratedly exclaims that he wishes he had an extra hand of his own. His father becomes enraged that his son would express a desire to be anything outside of the image of God, as is stated in their religious texts, and has David go to his room to pray. That night David has a dream that Sophie is going to be sacrificed in the same manner in which the Storms usually sacrifice mutant animals, in a Purification ceremony at dawn. Sophie runs barefoot around the circle of people and begs for help, but Joseph Storm catches her and holds her down as his knife glints in the first light of the sun. David awakes crying. Analysis The book introduces the first-person narrator, David, who begins his story at the age of ten. He shows the reader the world through his eyes, those of a child but also those of his current self, who is looking back and adding some commentary to the story. The tale of how David meets Sophie is the beginning of David’s doubts about the belief system that he was taught in his youth. David specifically is puzzled as to why Sophie would not be considered human, when she is clearly just another child who does not seem any different from him. In addition, David feels Sophie’s home is more friendly and less judgmental than his home. The horse motif appears in the Wenders’ home, as David notes that the Wenders do not have the Repentances on their wall, instead featuring pictures of horses. Horses as a symbolize freedom and escape throughout the book, a foreshadowing of what the Wenders will do when their secret is discovered. David has internalized his own abnormality, which no one else can see, and already feels he is an outsider even though people in his family do not know about his special ability. David feels at-risk for doing something wrong, such as revealing something about himself that is abnormal, like the dreams he has. In Chapter 3, David dresses a wound on his hand and exclaims he wishes he had a third hand so he could do it himself; as a result, his father punishes him. Thus David lives in a world in which even small steps outside of the accepted boundaries of normality-- such as a dream or a wish--can make one subject to punishment. Sophie’s mutation of having an extra toe on each foot demonstrates just how exacting and punishing the world of Waknuk is, because a seemingly harmless abnormality marks someone as inhuman. David recognizes this as wrong, but he also confused because he has been brought up to believe the religious readings in the Repentances, which have a didactic and intimidating tone much like the Bible or the Ten Commandments. David had believed that the “deviant” humans were scary monsters, such as Hairy Jack and Old Maggie, the childhood allegories he describes when discussing the Fringes in Chapter 2. However, meeting Sophie causes him to question this logic. In describing his grandfather, David alludes to the fact that he would eventually doubt the honor-laden picture of him that the rest of his family espouses. One again, David is emphasizing his breaking out of the constraints of his society. Elias Storm is an allusion to Abraham of the Bible, the patriarch of his people, directed by God to leave his own country for another land. Much like Abraham, Elias left his own country because of his strong religious beliefs. Also like Abraham, we find out later that David knows that Elias disowns and would have sacrificed his own son, Gordon Storm/the spider-man, because of his abnormality. The community of Waknuk and David’s family home serves as the setting for a large portion of the book. Specifically, David describes the solid architecture of his home, and how it was the first home that was built in their settlement. The Storms’ home represents the solidity of the foundation of the community, based on religion and the power of the genetically pure. Another symbol that is introduced in these chapters is the Steam Engine, a paragon of technology in a world that has only very basic farming, transportation, and communication methods. The Steam Engines represent the power of the Old People, and serve as a way of showing how far the Waknuk people have come; at the same time, the Steam Engines are juxtaposed to the world that David dreams of, with horseless vehicles and flying machines. Initially, David believes this dream city may be a world of the Old People. However, this image is actually a foreshadowing to a place that David will learn more about later in the novel. The dream that David has of Sophie being sacrificed in a Purification ceremony serves a few literary purposes. The Purification process itself is an allusion to the sacrificing that took place in the Old Testament, as a way of pleasing God by sacrificing a lamb. The dream is also a hyperbolic form of foreshadowing how David’s community will treat Sophie when she is discovered as a mutant. In addition, it is an allegory for the morally exacting way David’s society feels about people who fall outside of their definition of pure. David’s dreams of the beautiful city and Sophie are part of David’s characterization as a dreamer and a sensitive, insightful child. His dreamer qualities also paint him as somewhat lazy, preferring to avoid work, dream, and talk through think-shapes with his cousin Rosalind.

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