

Mr Chips Summary

Screenwriter and novelist James Hilton (1900-1954) wrote the psychological novel *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* during Hitler's rise to power. It follows the thoughts and memories of a popular English schoolteacher, Mr. Chipping (nicknamed Mr. Chips); Hilton dedicated it to his father, who was a school teacher. Published in a newspaper then reprinted as a book in 1934, the novella became a best-seller and would be adapted to film twice.

The book has been charged with sentimentality, but it remains a classic for its endearing tale of a beloved teacher and its chronicling of major social events, including the Glass Palace Exhibition (1851); the Franco-Prussian War (1870); World War 1 (1914-1918) and the rise of Hitler (1933). *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* has the major themes of mortality, the value of education, and reverence for one's forebears.

The book opens with Mr. Chips, an eighty-five-year-old man who takes every opportunity to confirm that he is not ill and about to die. He is semi-bald and white-haired. The doctor says he should not venture out in the cold, but also has to admit that Mr. Chips is in finer health than himself. Mr. Chips is unaware though, that Mrs. Wickett, the landlady, has been tasked by the doctor with keeping Mr. Chips safe from the cold, because his lungs are very weak.

Mr. Chips spends his youth and entire adult life working for Brookfield School, a fictional preparatory school in southeast England. The episodic novel is linear with no driving plot. Major events take place inside of Mr. Chips's head, and the story progresses based on the impact Mr. Chips had on several students. Hilton relied on an omniscient third person voice, which keeps the reader in Mr. Chips's stream of memories; he also relied on dialogue from other characters to demonstrate the affection that the students had for Mr. Chips.

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Mr. Chips was born in London in 1848. One of his first memories is visiting the Great Exhibition of 1851, a world-famous event that solidified London as a world-class city.

In 1870, he was hired by the Brookfield Preparatory School for boys. The school is well respected but not particularly prestigious. He is very enthusiastic going in, and the boys respond to his caring demeanor while acknowledging he is inexperienced. They also perceive that he is not athletic, good at most games, or scholastically gifted. Still, the boys like him despite his disheveled appearance and non sequiturs.

The headmaster coaches Chips to discipline the boys with greater force; for Chips, who is very kind-hearted, this does not come easily.

Chipping's credentials are average, and his passion for Greek and Latin, which he teaches, is minimal. He views them as dead languages and thinks the boys would learn more from detective novels. In the traditional sense, he is not an effective teacher. Yet over time, he improves and becomes a favorite of students and administrators. The caustic humor he develops later in life puts everyone he meets at ease. In fact, generations of boys like to exchange jokes told by Mr. Chips with each other.

Mr. Chips recalls his first day of class. A boy, last name Colley, dropped his desk cover with a great whack, and Mr. Chips punished him by assigning 100 lines for his misbehavior. He had no trouble with Colley after that. Mr. Chips also recalls teaching Colley's son and grandson. He is revered for never forgetting a face.

As the years progress, Mr. Chips becomes the only teacher who remembers what the school was like in its earlier days. He is also the only one who remembers Headmaster Wetherby, who hired him back in 1870. Mr. Chips looks at that period with nostalgia because there was a sense of self-respect and obligation to family

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and society that he thinks has diminished with the turn of the century.

Mrs. Wickett checks in on him periodically, and she cannot tell if Mr. Chips is crying or laughing.

Mr. Chips knew early on that he was not cut out for a leadership role. While trying to be a headmaster, he realizes his talents are better suited to teaching.

He remembers having tea and biscuits with his students. Some of them remarked that Mr. Chips was a jolly, ordinary bachelor. It pains him that no one is alive to remember his wife, Katherine Bridges. He was forty-eight and thought he would never marry; she was twenty-five and took an interest in him.

Mr. Chips was slightly conservative and did not let the boys have too much fun in class.

After he marries Katherine Bridges, his views broaden and he loosens his rules in the classroom. Katherine, full of charm, also wins the approval of Chipping's pupils and his coworkers.

Katherine (whom he calls 'Kathie') is the opposite of what Mr. Chips thought he wanted in a woman. She is deeply liberal and opinionated. Yet her passion brings out a vivacious, dormant side of Mr. Chips. With her by his side, Mr. Chips speaks more openly and laughs more often.

Unfortunately, a year after their marriage, Katherine dies giving birth. That same day, their infant son also dies. Mr. Chips dovetails into a depression, but recalling Katherine's buoyant spirit, he manages to continue with life. The love he had for Katherine he channels toward his students.

When Mr. Chips retires, he moves across the street from Brookfield to keep in touch with all the students. He also introduces himself to the new arrivals. When WWI strikes, he returns as a teacher because much of the faculty has gone off to

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fight the war. Mr. Chips is deeply hurt throughout the war when he hears about the deaths of many of his former students.

Near death, Mr. Chips overhears a colleague say that it was a pity Mr. Chips was never a father. He corrects his former peer by saying that he, in fact, had thousands of children over the years. When he shuts his eyes and dies, he gains solace in thinking of his students.