

Voltaire's *Candide* is a philosophical tale of one man's search for true happiness and his ultimate acceptance of life's disappointments. Candide grows up in the Castle of Westfalia and is taught by the learned philosopher Dr. Pangloss. Candide is abruptly exiled from the castle when found kissing the Baron's daughter, Cunegonde. Devastated by the separation from Cunegonde, his true love, Candide sets out to different places in the hope of finding her and achieving total happiness. The theme of *Candide* is that one must strive to overcome adversity and not passively accept it in the belief that all is for the best.

Candide's misfortune begins when he is kicked out of the castle and experiences a series of horrible events. Candide is unable to see anything positive in his ordeals, contrary to Dr. Pangloss' teachings that there is a cause for all effects and that, though we might not understand it, everything is all for the good.

Candide's endless trials begin when he is forced into the army simply because he is the right height, five feet five inches. In the army he is subjected to endless drills and humiliations and is almost beaten to death. Candide escapes and, after being degraded by good Christians for being an anti-Christ, meets a diseased beggar who turns out to be Dr. Pangloss. Dr. Pangloss informs him that Bulgarian soldiers attacked the castle of Westfalia and killed Cunegonde - more misery!

A charitable Anabaptist gives both Candide and Dr. Pangloss money and assistance. Dr. Pangloss is cured of his disease, losing one of his eyes and one of his ears. The Anabaptist takes them with him on a journey to Lisbon. While aboard the ship, the Anabaptist falls overboard in the process of rescuing a crew member. Candide finds it more and more difficult to accept Dr. Pangloss' principle that all is for the best.

In Lisbon there is an earthquake which kills thousands of people, throwing the city into ruins. Later, Dr. Pangloss is hung as part of an auto-de-fe. Candide is miraculously taken in by an old woman and is brought to his love, Cunegonde. She tells him of the torture she suffered and how she barely survived. She further explains that she was "shared" by a Jew named Don Issachar and the Grand Inquisitor. Candide kills the two men and escapes with Cunegonde and the old woman.

At this point we begin to see Candide struggling and fighting to make his existence worthwhile, in the hope that he and Cunegonde would marry and live happily ever after. We saw Candide taking matters into his own hands, instead of accepting his fate, when he killed Cunegonde's two lovers. At this point one begins to see his maturity from a naive young man into a realist.

Candide's travels take him to "the new world" where he hopes that Dr. Pangloss' theory might be justified. Candide finds people of wealth who are bored and still unhappy. When he finds a nation of happy people he learns that they must be secluded from the rest of the world to preserve their happiness. Cunegonde leaves Candide for a man of wealth but that turns out to be the beginning of her ruin. Candide is robbed of great wealth and, when he tries to help others, he finds that they are not appreciative of his efforts. Candide's doubts about Dr. Pangloss' theory continue to grow. He learns to make his own happiness, battling hardships.

At the end of the book, Candide is reunited with Dr. Pangloss who gave Candide details of how he survived his hanging. They go off in search of formerly beautiful Cunegonde who had become fat,

ugly and bitter. Nevertheless, he had vowed to marry her and so he does. The reader might expect that now Candide would be happy, having realized his dream of marrying his own true love, Cunegonde and being reunited with his teacher and mentor, Dr. Pangloss. Candide is not happy! He no longer loves Cunegonde and no longer believes in the principles of his teacher.

Throughout Voltaire's *Candide* we see how accepting a situation and not trying to change or overcome obstacles is damaging. What comes to mind, for me, is the attitude of many Jews during the Holocaust. While there was mass murder and torture of innocent people the world's countries did nothing. Even the victims themselves rarely fought against the tyranny. If only people accepted that they have the power, in many instances, to influence their fate, not accept reality, waiting for things to change, history might have turned out differently. We learn that in life there will be many obstacles which can and should be overcome. Life has its struggles but it would be a miserable place if people passively accepted that everything was for the best, shrugging off responsibility. We see, in contrast to Dr. Pangloss, Odysseus in Homer's *The Odyssey*, is a man of great courage who masters all situations and even searches for new adventures and challenges.

Voltaire believes that people should not allow themselves to be victims. He sneers at naive, accepting types, informing us that people must work (be active) to make their happiness.

CANDIDE

by Voltaire

