Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

I'm the King of the Castle

Contents

1. Plot
2. Characters
3. Themes and context
4. Form and structure
5. Key terms
6. Quick questions
7. What to do next

Plot

- After his wife's death, Joseph Hooper lives at Warings, a gloomy country house, with his son Edmund, aged 11. He hires a widow, Mrs Kingshaw, as housekeeper, and she arrives with her son Charles, the same age.
- From the first day, Hooper hates Kingshaw and bullies him: he throws a note saying he didn't want him there and puts a stuffed crow on his bed. Kingshaw is attacked by a real crow in a field and is terrified of Hooper's cruelty.
- Kingshaw runs away into Hang Wood, but Hooper follows. In the wood Hooper is helpless and frightened, and Kingshaw looks after him, but once they're found Hooper lies about what happened. At the castle ruin Hooper falls from a wall and blames Kingshaw.
- Kingshaw makes a friend, Fielding, but Hooper interferes. When the adults announce they will marry, Kingshaw feels completely trapped. He drowns himself in the stream in Hang Wood, and Hooper, seeing his body, feels a spurt of triumph.

Characters

- Charles Kingshaw: sensitive, anxious and lonely; his courage in the wood shows his goodness, but no adult listens to him.
- Edmund Hooper: cold, clever and manipulative; he enjoys power over others and becomes a sadistic bully.
- Mrs Kingshaw and Mr Hooper: self-centred adults who want to marry for comfort and status, and never see the boys' misery.
- Fielding: a cheerful farm boy, at ease with nature, who shows the friendship Kingshaw could have had.

Themes and context

- **Bullying**, power and cruelty; loneliness and **isolation**; childhood fear; the failure of adults; nature, which can be both threatening and a refuge.
- Susan Hill published the novel in 1970. It shows a 1960s world where children were often expected to be seen and not heard, and their fears were dismissed.

Form and structure

- A third-person narrator moves mainly between the two boys' points of view, so we see Kingshaw's terror and Hooper's calculation from inside.
- Settings carry meaning: the dark house, the red room full of moths, the wood and the castle ruin all reflect the boys' struggle for power. The tragic ending is foreshadowed throughout.

Key terms

Bullying	Repeatedly hurting or frightening someone weaker.
Manipulation	Controlling others in a clever or unfair way.
Foreshadowing	Hints of what will happen later.
Pathetic fallacy	Weather or nature that reflects a character's feelings.
Isolation	Being cut off from other people.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. What is the name of the Hoopers' house?
2. Why does Mrs Kingshaw come to Warings?
3. What does Hooper put on Kingshaw's bed to frighten him?
4. Where does Kingshaw run away to?
5. How does Hooper behave in the wood?
6. What happens at the castle ruin?
7. Who is Kingshaw's friend?
8. What news makes Kingshaw feel completely trapped?

Answers

1. Warings
2. She is hired as housekeeper
3. A stuffed crow
4. Hang Wood
5. He is frightened and helpless, and Kingshaw looks after him
6. Hooper falls from a wall and blames Kingshaw
7. Fielding
8. His mother is going to marry Mr Hooper

Your notes

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

Free revision for GCSE and KS3 at lycolearn.co.uk. Some notes are for one exam board only, and say so in brackets.

Your notes