

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Good-bye, Mr. Chips

by  
James Hilton

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### Book Information

James Hilton, Good-bye, Mr. Chips

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Book Level: 6.5

Interest Level: UG

This classic story tells of a most beloved, triumphant schoolmaster.

**Topics:** Careers, Teacher; Classics, Classics (All); Community Life, School; Popular Groupings, College Bound

### Main Characters

Chatteris the likable Head who succeeds Ralston; he finds the position nerve-wracking

Katherine Bridges a vivacious and contemporary young woman of twenty-five who marries Mr. Chips; she dies while childbearing

Meldrum the Head at Brookfield after Wetherby

Mr. Chipping (Mr. Chips) the main character of the story, a kind-hearted and honest man who is loved by both pupils and faculty; his presence keeps the school stable during trying times

Mrs. Wickett the former linen-room maid at Brookfield who now runs a boarding house where Mr. Chips lives

Ralston the Head who succeeds Meldrum; he is efficient and ambitious, but ruthless

### Vocabulary

**cricket** a team sport that originated in England; the object is for two batters to defend their team's "wickets" from a hard ball pitched by the opponent

**fen** a bog or swampy land

**hoardings** billboards

**implacable** impossible to make happy

**mnemonic** a little rhyme or formula that aids in remembering

**rissole** a fried meat pastry

### Synopsis

Mr. Chipping, affectionately called Mr. Chips, is an old schoolmaster, fifteen years past his second retirement. He spends his days at Mrs. Wickett's boarding house reading detective stories and reminiscing. For many years he had taught at the Brookfield School and still organizes his days by the school bells, since his residence is just across the road from the School. He seems in good health, though Dr. Merivale warns Mrs. Wickett to look after him when there is a chill in the air. Chips sits by the fire and remembers his earlier days.

He was hired at Brookfield in 1870 by old Wetherby, the Head at that time. Wetherby had ascertained discipline was not one of Chips's strong points and gave Chips advice. On the first day of classes, Chips came down hard on a boy and got off to a good start. Chips never forgot that boy, nor the faces of the others, and over the years he would often tease the sons and grandsons of former students. Chips loved to make little jokes, and the boys took delight in hearing them.

Many years of teaching went by, and at forty-eight, another joy entered his life. While vacationing in the mountains, he saw a girl waving as if in distress. While attempting to save her, he twisted his ankle, so she rescued him instead. Her name was Katherine Bridges, and she was twenty-five. Katherine visited him during his recuperation and, though she was a liberal thinker and new woman of the 1890s, while he was a conservative and quiet gentleman, they fell madly in love and married. Kathie's presence changed Chips. Discipline was less of a struggle; he began to joke with the boys and he became more courageous in his teaching. With her encouragement, Brookfield became more socially conscientious. However, less than two years after the couple married, Katherine died in childbirth, along with their child.

After Katherine's death, Chips moved back to his old bachelor quarters on the school grounds. He became what some call "old," developing a mellowness about him. In 1900 Chips was asked to

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become Acting Head for a short time when the current Head, Meldrum, died. The new Head, an efficient and demanding manager named Ralston, was then hired. Chips felt his seniority protected him but, in 1908 when Chips was sixty, Ralston suggested he retire. Chips refused, and Ralston criticized his appearance and teaching methods. Unbeknownst to them, a boy overheard the disturbance and spread the news. There was a groundswell of support for Chips, and Ralston had to back down when the Governors told Chips he could stay as long as he liked.

When Ralston left a few years later, Chatteris replaced him. He was friendly, sympathetic, and accepted Chips as a Brookfield institution. Chips retired in 1913 after a bout of bronchitis and moved across the road to Mrs. Wickett's, maintaining close contact with the School. Chatteris asked him to return to the classroom again in 1916 during World War I. Chatteris admitted the pressure of the job was getting to him, and said he would appreciate Chips's involvement at the school again. Chips readily obliged. The young boys loved his humor, and he added new jokes to his repertoire. When Chatteris died unexpectedly, Chips was again asked to be Acting Head. This time Chips took on an additional task of reading the list of Brookfield alumni killed in battle. Chips could sometimes be seen shedding tears over the list. When the War ended, Chips gave up the Headship and returned to retirement.

As Chips sits by the fire, his reminiscing is interrupted by a knock. Chips answers the door and a new boy says he was told Mr. Chips wanted to see him. Chips recognizes the joke and invites the boy in for tea. After visiting and providing friendly reassurance, Chips sends the boy on his way. Finality comes to the scene when the boy states, "Good-bye, Mr. Chips...." Chips tries to get up again but feels tremendously weak. When he awakens he finds himself in bed, with Dr. Merivale, Mrs. Wickett, and others around him. He wavers between consciousness and a dream-like state long enough to respond to a comment about him never having children. He begins to recite the roll call of his many

children, all of them boys. He dies quietly in his sleep that night.

## Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

### Initial Understanding

What are some ways Mr. Chips keeps in close contact with Brookfield in his later years?

*By taking up residence at Mrs. Wickett's boarding house across the road, he is able to maintain a close tie with the school. The house is within hearing range of the bells of the school and he continues to organize his life according to Brookfield's schedule. By inviting the new boys to tea, he continues to add to the chorus of names he knows. He also remains active with the Old Boys' club and talks with the current Head. Chips is generous to the school in terms of donations to various funds, which helps him keep an emotional tie to the institution.*

### Literary Analysis

How does the author, James Hilton, maintain the sentimental tone of the story?

*Hilton uses a number of devices. He begins with Chips as an old man, looking back over his years as a teacher. Time and age always seem to blur memories a bit; so that which may have been troublesome at a particular moment can be looked back upon with humor. Chips himself is a good natured character, a type people often remember with fondness. Hilton also chose not to dwell on sad episodes, such as Katherine's death or the loss of lives in the War, which shows that Chips is able to move on after these times without bitterness.*

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### Inferential Comprehension

One of the "sharply remembered pictures" Chips has is of the striking railwaymen. Why are the school boys so shocked when they discover Chips is talking to a striker?

*The boys most likely equate a striker with violence or disruption. They probably have a picture in their mind of a foreboding individual. Their shock is due to the contrast between their mental image of a striker and the unassuming gentleman to whom Mr. Chips is speaking.*

### Constructing Meaning

Private boarding schools in England usually take boys between the ages of ten and eighteen. Would you like to attend a boarding school? Why or why not?

*Answers will vary. Some students may feel they are too young to be separated from their families for long periods of time. Others may think this environment could offer more structure to their lives and a greater sense of self-sufficiency. They may feel they would have more loyalty to their school and peers. Some may worry about the increased academic expectations while others may welcome the challenge.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** The story contains many references to various wars, political alliances, and sociological movements. Have the students choose a narrowed topic based on one or more of these references and research it. They may write an essay on the topic or give an oral presentation of their work.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** There are many examples of reversals in the story. An example occurs when Chips tries to rescue Katherine but becomes the rescued in the process. Have the students review the book and list other reversals that occur. Note how the reversals add interest to the story.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Death and

mourning are things most people must confront at some point in their lives. Chips is faced with the unexpected deaths of his wife and newborn child. Various cultures have different ways of grieving the death of loved ones. Choose a culture other than your own and find out the rituals that surround the death of a person. Then, in chart form, compare and contrast the death rituals and grieving practices with that of your own culture or faith. Students may wish to choose an ancient civilization as their culture.

**Understanding Dialogue** Mr. Chips teaches Latin at Brookfield. Even though Latin is rarely taught in the modern curricula of schools, all educated people were once expected to know it. Obtain a Latin dictionary or text. Have the students review *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and write down the various Latin phrases that are used. Then, have them decipher their meaning. Do the meanings of the jokes become clearer? How does this increase the students' appreciation of the story?