Concept/Vocab Analysis for
The Little Prince
By Antoine de Saint Éxupéry

Literary Text: The Little Prince, by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Organizational Patterns:
This book is divided into 27 chapters, each of which varies in length from less than a page to a maximum of 3-4 pages, depending on the size of the edition read. While it presents itself primarily as a narrative in the style of a journal, the book actually contains what may be interpreted as two distinct story lines—one involving the story of the little prince, the other involving the pilot/narrator. There is a dedication before the body of the text appears, which intimates at one of the major themes of the story itself. There are also numerous illustrations in the book, drawn by the author himself, and a small after-word (one paragraph) follows the text of the novel.

Issues Related to the Study of Literature:
Theme:
This story uses several sub-themes to illustrate a central theme, which is difficult to put into words. I suppose if the main theme had to be put into words, I would use the phrase “The important things in life.” Nevertheless, the sub-themes include
1. That which is important is invisible to the eye.
   “And now here is my secret, a very simple secret: It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye” (73)
2. The importance of simple sense in humanity.
   “On making his discovery, the astronomer had presented it to the International Astronomical Congress, in a great demonstration. But he was in Turkish costume, and so nobody would believe what he said. Grown-ups are like that . . .” (12).
3. Individuality in the crowd.
   “To be sure an ordinary passerby would think that my rose looked just like you—the rose that belongs to me. But in herself alone she is more important that all the hundreds of you other roses: because it is she that I have watered; because it is she that I have put under the glass globe; because it is she that I have sheltered behind the screen . . . Because she is my rose” (73).
4. Friendship and love.
   “So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to, until I had an accident . . .” (3).
5. Compassion for others.
   “The fact is that I did not know how to understand anything! I
ought to have judged by deeds and not by words. She cast her fragrance and her radiance over me. I ought never to have run away from her . . . I ought to have guessed all the affection that lay behind her poor little stratagems. Flowers are so inconsistent! But I was too young to know how to love her . . .” (29).

“‘The grown-ups’ response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors . . . and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter’” (2).

7. Loss/separation.
“In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night . . . You—only you—will have stars that can laugh” (89).

Setting:
The story begins, ends, and for a large part takes place in the Sahara Desert in the early- to mid-twentieth century. However, there are numerous excursions to the home planet of the prince, and to other planets as well.

Foreshadowing:
While not a central device to the novel, foreshadowing does occur in at least one place.
1. The little prince’s death/voyage home is alluded to near the middle of the book.

“‘I can carry you farther that any ship could take you,’ said the snake” (58).

However, the author uses a narrative style throughout that could be understood as foreshadowing: facts are nearly always introduced before their true significance can be understood. For example, “So you, too come from the sky! Which is your planet?” (8) introduces the fact that the little prince comes from another planet. The explanation of this doesn’t come until the next section in the book.

Point of View, Narrative Voice:
While the entire story can be taken as a first person narrative, the narrator also includes numerous episodes of the Little Prince's life, which are narrated in the third person. Basically, the narrator tells the story of his involvement with the little prince in the first person, and uses third person narrative to explain the life and circumstances of the little prince.
Tone:
The tone is one of the hallmarks of this novel; being both perfectly suited to younger readers and to adults alike, it achieves a sense of almost conspiracy with the reader, which in turn gives credence or reliability to the narrator. I use the term *conspiracy* because it seems that the author is sharing secrets only with those who take the time to read the novel; hence, those that read the novel become intimate and partakers of the secrets the author shares.

Irony:
One basic point of irony that is visited and revisited in the book concerns the belief (read "fact") that, as people get older and wiser and become grown-ups, they lose much of their wisdom and intrinsic sense of what is really important in life. Alas, this seems completely contrary to what the world presents. Nevertheless, the point is well-argued in the book in many places.

“I myself own a flower . . . which I water every day . . . . It is of some use to my flower . . . that I own [it], but you are of no use to the stars [that you claim to own].

“The grown-ups are certainly altogether extraordinary,” he said simply, talking to himself as he continued on his journey. (46)

Affective Issues Related to the Work:
In reading and understanding the relationships that develop between the little prince, the rose, the fox, and the pilot, students (especially those of the teenage angst variety) will appreciate and better understand the need they have both to love others and be loved by them.

Students may also come to a greater understanding of what it means to be unique, especially in a world where they are only part of an immense crowd.

Students may also be able, through the resolution of the story, to become more capable of dealing with the loss of and/or separation from a loved one.

Vocabulary Issues:
Other than the word "baobab," all the words in the book should be familiar to most, if not all, readers. One thing to be concerned with, however, is the extensive use of metaphorical language, such as "It is such a secret place, the land of tears" (25). This can easily be dealt with by flagging its existence, and reminding the students to be looking for it as they read. Perhaps it would be wise to have them underline passages that stand out to them especially.

Background Knowledge:
Nearly none is needed, with the possible exception of what a desert is.

Implications for Students of Diversity:
As acceptance is a major issue in this novel, students of diversity, and their peers of the majority group, may be interested in learning to accept individuals for who
they are, and recognizing the impossibility of imposing change on them. Particularly useful to this end will be the sections wherein the little prince finally learns to accept his rose, even though she has a very particular personality.

**Gender Issues:**
While gender does not play an especially overt role in this book, if one interprets the relationship between the prince and the rose as an amorous one, then much of the plot can be taken as commentary on the basic trials, breakups, and reconciliations of such relationships—although that might be pushing the meaning too much and committing an affective/intentional fallacy.

**The Central Question/Enduring Issue/Essential Question:**
- What is friendship?
- What is wisdom?
- What is important?
I feel that this book can serve as a great introduction to these three Essential Questions, effectively couching a debate that has no concrete answer, but nevertheless will allow students the opportunity for introspection and inspection of the concepts that these questions invoke.

**Research Issues/Project Ideas:**
**Pre-reading:**
- **Informative/Persuasive:**
  Have the students divide into 5 groups, and read together a description of one of the following deserts: Mohave, Gobi, Sahara, Atacama, and Great Victoria. Then have them list on the board the different aspects of these deserts, and choose which desert they would most/least like to be stranded in. Have them write separately why they chose as they did.
- **Expressive:**
  Have students write a journal entry describing what they would anticipate their feelings to be if they were stranded in a desert.
- **Discussion:**
  Discuss the 3 essential questions.
  - What is friendship?
  - What is wisdom?
  - What is important?

**Post Reading:**
- **Introspective/Expressive:**
  Students ponder the questions, “What would you like to be when you grow up? What would the little prince say about that choice of career? Would you agree or disagree with him?” and answer said questions in their journals, justifying their responses.

- **Literary:**
  Have students read 2 more short stories about friendship in
literature, and then compose a narrative about friendship, be it either a real or imagined, but it must comport both 1st person narrative and 3rd person narrative. Compile these stories and publish them, either in a real book format, or in a cheap bound edition. If real, use proceeds to buy books, if cheap, sell them at an open house to buy books for classroom use.

**Informational/Functional Texts:**
1. How to make a desert still for collecting water (and a demonstration!)
2. Informational texts describing the major deserts of the world.