Flatland

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF EDWIN A. ABBOTT

Edwin Abbott Abbott was born in 1838 to Edwin Abbott, the headmaster of the Philological School in Marylebone, England and Jane Abbott—they were first cousins. He attended the City of London School for his early education years, and then studied at St. John's College of Cambridge, where he received highest honors in classics. He was elected to a fellowship at his college and was ordained a deacon. At the age of 25, he became a priest. In order to marry Mary Elizabeth Rangeley from Unstone, Derbyshire, he resigned the fellowship and taught at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and then at Clifton College. In 1865, he was appointed as headmaster of the City of London School and stayed there for 24 years until he retired in 1889. After he retired, Abbott devoted most of his time to his literary and theological interests. Some of his widely known works are *Shakespearean Grammar* (1870), *Philochristus* (1878), *Onesimus* (1882), and *The Kernel and the Husk* (1886), but he is best known for his novella *Flatland*. He died in 1926.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Edwin Abbott lived in the Victorian era of Britain, during which Queen Victoria ruled England from 1873 to 1901. It was a time of progress and development due to the industrialization of British society. But, more importantly, it was also period of intense social and cultural tensions and changes. Victorian society was highly differentiated into the upper, middle, and lower classes. Due to the urbanization of British cities and the consequent growth of the middle class, social distinctions were intensified. On the other hand, in the field of mathematics, non-Euclidean geometry was gaining more interest and mathematicians, such as Carl Gauss, Bernhard Riemann, and Hermann von Helmholtz began thinking about the nature of extra dimensions.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In *Flatland* Abbott alludes to Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a work which satirizes human nature by describing four different exotic worlds. In his dream of Lineland, A Square of *Flatland* describes the chirping of its inhabitants as "Lilliputian grasshoppers," suggesting that Swift's satire of European society (which contained a race of tiny people called Lilliputians) might have been an influence on Abbott's work. Similar to Swift's inspiration to Abbott, *Flatland* influenced the writing of other books, such as Gustave Fechner's *Space has Four Dimensions* (1846) and Charles Howard Hinton's *An Episode on Flatland: Or How a Plain Folk Discovered the Third Dimension* (1907). Both present similar stories to that of *Flatland*.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions
- **When Written:** 1884
- **Where Written:** London, England
- **When Published:** 1884
- **Literary Period:** Victorian Literature
- **Genre:** Satirical novella, mathematical fiction
- **Setting:** Flatland
- **Climax:** A Square fully comprehends the teachings of the Sphere, of the third dimensional world, and seeks the knowledge of higher dimensions.
- **Antagonist:** Circles, the priests who consisted of the highest social class
- **Point of View:** First Person

EXTRA CREDIT

The Book's Reception. Abbott's novella did not receive much attention when it was first published. In fact, it is not even mentioned as one of Abbott's works in the British *Dictionary of National Biography*. It wasn't until after Einstein published his theory on general relativity and Abbott's book was mentioned in a 1920 *Nature* letter titled "Euclid, Newton and Einstein" that it gained more recognition

Mr. Mathematician. Although A Square was a mathematician, Abbott himself was not. His expertise lay mostly with classics, literature, and theology. Yet he was able to write about a hundred pages on abstract mathematical theories with few flaws in his thinking!

PLOT SUMMARY

Flatland is a world that exists on the two-dimensional plane, where its inhabitants—literal geometrical shapes—live in a highly-structured society organized into classes based on the number of sides of a figure. The narrator and protagonist of *Flatland*, A Square, writes from prison, intricately detailing the social organization of his country and recounting the revelations he has received from the sacred "Sphere."

In the first half of his treatise, A Square painstakingly describes the social landscape of Flatland, which is strictly regulated by natural laws as dictated by the Circles, the priests that make up

the highest class. While women are simple straight lines, the males are full polygons. Flatland society is organized from the isosceles triangles at the bottom, then the equilateral triangles, square, pentagons, hexagons, higher polygons, and finally, the priestly circles at the top. By indoctrinating the Flatlandians to "Attend to your Configuration," the Circles maintain power, limiting the freedom of lower polygons and women through oppressive policies and institutions, and immediately suppressing any rebellion through frequent executions.

In the second part of *Flatland*, A Square recalls a dream, in which he envisions Lineland, where he meets a line, who he initially mistakes as a woman, but finds out is the Monarch of Lineland. He learns that the world of Lineland is literally limited to an infinitely long line, where only two motions are possible and social interactions depend solely on the faculty of hearing. Although A Square attempts to explain the nature of the second dimension to the Monarch, he fails to find appropriate **words**, since "left" and "right" are meaningless in Lineland, and he cannot overcome the ignorance and narrow-mindedness of the Monarch. Aggravated, the Monarch attacks A Square, and he wakes up from his dream.

It is the last day of the 1999th year and A Square is sitting at home with his Wife, thinking about what his Grandson had said earlier that day. As a reward for excelling at his practice in Sight Recognition, A Square gives his Grandson a quick lesson in squaring: he demonstrates that three-to-the-second is nine, with nine squares that make one large square with sides of three units long. After meditating over his grandfather's words, A Square's Grandson asks about the significance of three-to-the-third in Geometry, but this question is shot down by A Square, and he is sent to bed. As A Square considers the absurdity of his Grandson's question, A Square and his Wife are visited by a mysterious stranger, the Sphere.

As occurs at the beginning of every millennium, the Sphere comes from Spaceland in search of a new apostle who will accept and spread the Gospel of the Third Dimension. Initially, A Square struggles to understand the Sphere's teachings and reacts violently against his unwanted visitor. Therefore, the Sphere physically takes A Square to Spaceland where he can sense and feel the solidity of three-dimensional figures.

In Spaceland, the Sphere and A Square are able to look down upon the whole of Flatland, where A Square can see the entirety of his household from above. The Sphere then points his attention to the General Assembly Hall where the Grand Council, including A Square's brother, is meeting on the first day of the 2000th year to organize their millennial search for people professing revelations of other worlds and to scourge them from society.

Newly enlightened and motivated to spread the concept of the third dimension, A Square expresses his desire to descend into the council meeting and enlighten the others. However, the Sphere stops him and enters Flatland himself, proclaiming the presence of a land of Three Dimensions. The Sphere escapes the building before the members of the council attempt to arrest him, but the poor guardsmen and A Square's brother are condemned to eternal imprisonment for being witnesses of the Sphere's dangerous revelations.

When the two return to Spaceland, the Sphere resumes his lessons on the three-dimensional inhabitants of his land. Meanwhile, A Square's thirst for knowledge grows, and he asks the Sphere about even higher dimensions. The Sphere claims that there are no extradimensional worlds beyond Spaceland, and begins to feel irritated by A Square's incessant questioning. Frustrated, the Sphere pushes A Square back into Flatland.

Back in Flatland again, A Square has another dream. In this vision, the Sphere accompanies him to the land of Pointland, the Abyss of No Dimensions. They meet the Monarch of Pointland, whose entire universe is himself. In fact, no matter what A Square says to wake the Monarch out of his complacency, the Point takes every word and thought to have originated from himself. When A Square and the Sphere return to Flatland, the Sphere teaches him the moral of the vision of Pointland and tells A Square to enlighten other Flatlandians of higher knowledge. He admits his error in ignoring the extra dimensions and initiates A Square into the deeper mysteries beyond the third dimension.

When he wakes up from his dream, A Square decides to go back to his grandson to teach him of the third dimension, since he had insightfully imagined the meaning of three-to-the-third before. Unfortunately, as A Square begins to introduce the theory of the third dimension to his grandson, the Grand Council publicly broadcasts their proclamation to punish anyone who claims to have received revelations of other worlds. A Square's grandson, afraid of being imprisoned for considering dangerous ideas, refuses to acknowledge that he meant anything by inquiring about three-to-the-third.

Discouraged by his failure to convert his grandson, A Square begins writing a treatise on the mysteries of the Third Dimensions. Eventually, the overzealous A Square is arrested after he professes his experiences in Spaceland and the ideas of the third dimension at a local town meeting. He expresses that he has been in prison for seven years as he writes *Flatland*, and the book ends with the hopeless image of the dejected apostle and his failure to spread the Gospel of Three Dimensions.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

A Square – The narrator and protagonist of the story, which he writes in prison—he has been arrested for attempting to educate others about the third dimension. A Square can be seen as the voice of Abbot himself (Edwin's last name consists of two "Abbotts," so A Square could be a pseudonym derived

from "A-squared"). Given that he is a mathematician, A Square is rational, curious, and passionate, particularly in the quest for knowledge and desire to enlighten his fellow countrymen. He is a square and, additionally, belongs in Flatland's social class of professionals and gentlemen, as a lawyer. Although he often exhibits the tendency to be overcome by his emotions, A Square is humble enough to accept the teachings of the Sphere and enthusiastic enough to spread the Gospel of Three Dimensions.

The Sphere / The Stranger – An inhabitant of Spaceland who visits Flatland at the start of every millennium in search of a new apostle who can enlighten others regarding the third dimension. A Square first refers to the Sphere as the Stranger since he cannot grasp the concept of a three-dimensional sphere. Although A Square praises and worships the visiting solid for his knowledge of higher Truths, the Sphere still exhibits flaws of his own. Although he himself roams across other worlds to enlighten those who do not know of Spaceland and the third dimension, he initially does not consider the possibility of extradimensional worlds beyond his own. Instead, it is his pupil, A Square, who expresses a greater thirst for knowledge and infers the existence of the fourth, fifth, and even sixth dimensions. The Sphere responds to such questions not with openness, but with irritability, abandoning A Square as his disciple.

The Monarch of Lineland – The king of the one-dimensional world of Lineland. Rude and ignorant, the Monarch fails to see or even consider anything that is not natural to his world. Despite A Square's efforts to explain the second dimension, the king is unwilling to hear his ideas, and resorts to violence and attacks his teacher.

The Monarch of Pointland – The king of Pointland, the Abyss of No dimension. He believes himself to be his entire world and universe. Although A Square tries to help the Point out of his complacency, the Point interprets A Square's words to be nothing more than his own thoughts, since he is incapable of conceiving of anything that isn't himself.

A Square's Grandson – The younger of A Square's two hexagonal grandchildren. He exhibits unusual insight and, thus, perfect angularity. After A Square teaches his grandson the concept of squaring through the geometrical creation of one large square with sides three units long, made from nine individual squares, his grandson inquires about the significance of three-to-the-third—a question that could lead to an understanding of three-dimensional space—and baffles his grandfather. Despite this early spirit of curiosity and insight, A Square's grandson is later frightened by the authorities of Flatland and retracts his questions about three-to-the-third.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Pantocyclus – The Chief Circle of Flatland during the time when painting was practiced and Flatlandians had color. He prevented the passage of the Universal Colour Bill and restored social order.

A Square's Wife – A Square's wife, the only female character in *Flatland*.

A Square's Brother – A Square's brother, who is also a square. He is imprisoned after witnessing the revelation of the Sphere.

The President – The head of the Grand Council who sentences A Square to perpetual imprisonment for attempting to educate other Flatlandians about the third dimension.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND OPPRESSION

Edwin Abbott wrote *Flatland* as a social satire of Victorian England, and the central target of Abbott's ire was the class rigidity that characterized English society in the nineteenth century. Because of this, fully half of his book is devoted to an exhaustive cataloguing—to the point of absurdity—of the horrifying and intricate ways in which the social hierarchy of the fictional world of Flatland is established and maintained. Abbott shows that this hierarchy is harmful, not only because it oppresses Flatlanders by limiting their freedom and justifying violence against the powerless, but also because the consuming nature of the hierarchy dominates every Flatlanders' ability to imagine any life or values other than their own.

Perhaps the most striking example of the oppressive nature of Flatland's social hierarchy is the difference between men and women. In Flatland, women are line segments, while men are full polygons. On an allegorical level, this gestures toward the "flattening" of women by oppressive Victorian social norms—norms that required women to rigidly adhere to an ideal of femininity that did not allow them to exhibit the more "multi-dimensional" personality allowed (and even expected) of men.

Abbott also describes the hierarchical oppression that occurs among men. All men in Flatland are polygons, and the social class of each is determined by the number of sides he has. Circles belong to the highest class—the priest class—and the polygons with the most sides (that is, those that most closely resemble circles) have the highest social standing. Conversely, isosceles triangles—with only three sides—are the lowliest. Yet despite Flatland's rigid and hierarchical method of determining

social class, there is social mobility in Flatland (at least, among men). By natural law, polygons are supposedly born with more sides than their fathers, thereby promoting families, generationally, up the class ladder. However, the possibility of social mobility obscures what is actually the strict rigidity between social classes. A Square argues that it instead further promotes the social arrangement because the occasional emergence of an Equilateral from isosceles parents offers them a hope that ultimately prevents them from seeking rebellion. Moreover, social mobility is not equally available to everyone in Flatland; it is more pronounced among the upper classes, and less so for the lower classes. The sons of polygons with several hundred sides, for example, might gain fifty more sides than their fathers, while the sons of isosceles triangles can gain only a half a degree in their angles, rather than a full side, each generation. This should be seen as a direct allegory of the increased opportunities available to upper class Victorians, and the wretched inability of the lower classes to create a better life.

Interestingly, the rigidity of this social hierarchy is rooted in the upper-class, male fear of violence and social upheaval. Abbott shows that the oppression of women is inextricable from the males' *fear* of women. As women are pointy line segments, they can easily stab male polygons to death (either by accidentally bumping into them, or by stabbing them on purpose)—a power that male Flatlanders lack. Thus, the men place a series of draconian restrictions on women, including making them use separate entrances to buildings and requiring that they constantly emit a "peace-cry" when walking in public. As evidence of how seriously men take the danger of women, the breaking of any of these rules punishable by death. Clearly, Abbott is suggesting a latent and dangerous power inherent to Victorian women, a power of which men should take note. Likewise, lower-class polygons are dangerous because their more-developed voices allow them to imitate the sounds of upper-class polygons (and even circles), a deception that threatens the integrity of the social order.

It's also important to note that most of the methods of social control in Flatland involve ensuring that all class differentiations are clearly visible to every inhabitant of Flatland. Women are required to wiggle their backsides while they walk so that it's clear to everyone that they are a line segment, rather than a point. Thus, one way to control women is to require them to be visibly female (notably, through an action that any human woman would recognize as sexualization). Similarly, Flatland's fog helps the class status of male polygons be more visually clear. Polygons with many angles recede more gradually into the fog than polygons with fewer angles. Thus, the most visible polygons are the most respected (and women, of course, who are the least visible of all, are the least respected). Finally, irregular polygons are considered to be dangerous because, unlike regular polygons, their full shape cannot be immediately discerned by seeing only one of their angles. This means that an irregular polygon could potentially present a favorable angle to the world in order to appear to be of a higher class. Because of their mysteriousness and subversive potential, irregular polygons are social pariahs who put under heavy surveillance and are stigmatized, and are even sometimes subject to euthanasia. In a similar vein, Flatland has banned the use of all colors, because lower-class polygons were using trompe l'oeil paint (a technique of painting the illusion of depth or distance) to create the appearance of having more angles. The crux of Abbott's satire is that trompe l'oeil paint is a serious enough threat to the social order of Flatland to require prohibiting color. Social hierarchy, then, is only skin-deep—it's aesthetic, rather than essential, just like the superficial yet powerful class distinctions of Victorian England.

Abbott's use of absurd allegory satirizes the rigidity of social class, but perhaps the most disturbing allegorical element of Flatland is how much space Abbott devotes to explaining the intricacies of class distinctions. When Abbott (through the voice of his fictional narrator, A Square) notes that there are a "hundred other details of our physical existence I must pass over" in order to detail the social arrangement of Flatland, he stresses how the nature of social hierarchy completely consumes the lives of Flatland's inhabitants. Not only does the rigid social hierarchy oppress Flatlanders by limiting their freedom, but it also makes them unable to focus on any part of life that is unrelated to class. As A Square's narration shows, this restricts self-knowledge and bars Flatlanders from enjoying their lives and the full complexity of the world they inhabit.

RELIGION, DIVINITY, AND THE UNKNOWN

The disconnect between faith, knowledge, and religious orthodoxy is another aspect of Victorian England that Abbott uses *Flatland* to satirize. Abbott was a devout Christian himself, as well as a prolific writer on Christian theology, and his books occasionally caused a stir in the powerful Anglican Church. Thus, Flatland's portrayal of a society's attempt to suppress the "dangerous" knowledge of other dimensions can be seen as an indictment of hierarchical religious institutions (like the Anglican Church) that attempt to suppress curiosity and difference of opinion in favor of maintaining their own power. Furthermore, Abbott's depiction of other dimensions can be seen as an allegory for the divine; Abbott believes that God exists, and that the human search for the divine is similar to grappling with the mathematical notion of extra dimensions. While humans can approach God through curiosity and intellectual exploration, the divine (like other dimensions) exists in an unknowable space that can never be fully understood.

Throughout the book, several characters are visited by beings

from other dimensions who attempt to give them knowledge of a world beyond their own. This parallels the idea of religious revelation. The Sphere periodically visits Flatland to initiate new apostles into the truth of a third dimension (A Square is one of those apostles). The metaphor of the Sphere's program of enlightenment as a training of apostles to spread the Gospel of Three Dimensions speaks to the way in which religious knowledge is disseminated. A Square also visits Lineland, where he tries to tell the Monarch of Lineland about two-dimensional existence.

However, this "divine" knowledge is almost always received as threatening and dangerous, and is therefore suppressed. The Monarch of Lineland tries to kill A Square to make him stop talking about two dimensions. A Square uses his experiences with other dimensions to extrapolate that there might be worlds of four or more dimensions, but even the Sphere—who is presented as a figure of divinity (his shape associated with the circular priests of Flatland)—is unable to concede this possibility, and he rejects A Square for it. A Square's whole mission in writing *Flatland* is to bring the truth of other dimensions to all Flatlanders, since he has been persecuted and imprisoned for his beliefs. This imprisonment is, in turn, part of a larger campaign by the priests of Flatland to consolidate their power by suppressing knowledge of other dimensions and criminalizing "dangerous" speech, curiosity, and exploration. Thus, Abbott seems to be suggesting that the power-hungry priests are so threatened by the possibility of something "greater" than they are (something with more dimensions, something with knowledge beyond theirs, something incomprehensible) that they react by violently suppressing knowledge of the possibility of such beings. This ultimately portrays their power as being ill-gotten, petty, and harmful—particularly for beings called "priests," who are supposed to be conduits to the divine. This is quite an unflattering allegorical portrait of priests in general, and the priests of the Anglican Church in particular.

In contrast to Abbott's allegory of the repressive and narrow-minded Anglican Church, Abbott presents individual spirituality and faith (as shown in A Square's quest to discern and disseminate the truth of other dimensions) as a noble and possibly liberating activity. Some of A Square's knowledge is explicitly presented as coming from the divine (the Sphere, for instance, visits him from another dimension, gives him knowledge, and deems him an "apostle"). A Square's subsequent interpretation of this knowledge—that it implies the possibility of more dimensions—is parallel to the practice of hermeneutics, which is the close-reading and interpretation of scripture (a favorite activity of Abbott's). The mysterious and unknowable aspects of A Square's theorizing of additional dimensions are then analogous to a human grappling with the presence of God. Extra dimensions can be understood only hypothetically and by analogy—the reality of living in another dimension can never be directly understood by humans because it is beyond human **language** and faculties to fully conceive of such a world. Similarly, in Christian theology, God is presented as a being unknowable to humans because of their limitations. Instead, humans gain a partial knowledge of the divine through scripture, and are expected to respect the mystery and power of the divine, even without concrete evidence or understanding of what that means. A Square's divine knowledge has the potential to liberate Flatlanders by literally allowing them to conceive of a new perspective—a three-dimensional one, say—from which the aesthetic distinctions that dictate their two-dimensional social rules seem irrelevant and absurd. Thus, A Square's knowledge has the potential to free Flatlanders from their oppression, much like Biblical knowledge is said to liberate people from the petty human laws that govern the Earth.

Abbott, then, uses *Flatland* to argue against a religious system that is centered on the Church, and to argue for an individual spirituality based in curiosity and respect for the divine unknown. Abbott suggests that powerful institutions (like the Anglican Church or the Flatland priest class) lose sight of the divine because their power leads them simply to seek more power. This desire to maintain power, in turn, leads to a systematic suppression of knowledge and the oppression of people. The only response to such oppression, for Abbott, is to live like A Square: to inquire into difficult questions, be skeptical of authority, and spread the truth at all costs.

REASON VS. EMOTION

In his treatise on Flatland and other worlds, A Square frequently ponders and hashes out the differences between reason and emotion. In Flatland, Reason is seen as superior. It is the exclusive right of the male figures, who believe themselves to be unique in having the ability to think rationally and gain knowledge of their world. Emotion, on the other hand, is limited to the realm of the women and believed to represent the exact opposite of knowledge and rationality.

The book calls these assumptions into question in a variety of ways. First, it mocks the idea that women are incapable of reason. The book does this through A Square's appeal that women receive an education. There is a scathing satirical humor in the way that A Square makes this appeal. He does so by saying that educating women will be in the best interests of the Male Sex, which, he worries, may be enfeebled by having to act emotionally around women while acting rationally when surrounded by men. In arguing for educating women as something that will benefit men, the book satirizes how the argument that women are incapable of reason is itself irrational: that it is in fact just another way for men to maintain their power.

The book then further skewers the idea that men–or

anyone–can be purely rational at all. For instance, when the Sphere first **explains** the third dimension to him, A Square reacts not with reason but emotionally by expressing frustration. Unable to understand the third dimension, A Square describes the strong urge to violently shove the unwelcome visitor out into Space, and in fact he actually does physically attack the Sphere with his right angle. But A Square is not the only male in the book to be driven by emotion rather than reason. The Sphere himself also allows his frustration to dominate reason, and in response to A Square's ideas of dimensions even higher than the third dimension, he "moodily" pushes the two-dimensional figure back into Flatland. By showing that even the Sphere is subject to emotion, Abbott reveals that the idea that men are motivated purely by reason is nothing more than a pretty lie they tell themselves and use to maintain social power.

After illustrating that men have no monopoly on reason or any special skill at avoiding emotion, Abbott then pushes further and makes the case that reason isn't any more valuable than emotion, or what he calls "affection," in the first place. In fact, the book implies that the definition of being human is not limited to man's ability to reason, but equally on the compassionate quality of humans to express emotion for and towards others. When A Square finally realizes the scope of the Sphere's teachings, he begins to express awe at how he himself has "become like a God" with the "omnividence" that will make him invulnerable to emotion. But the Sphere disapproves of A Square's self-aggrandizement because he (the Sphere) does not specifically prefer reason over emotion. Instead, the Sphere believes that affections specifically relate to the attributes of God. The Sphere associates being merciful, selfless, and loving as human faculties that emulate divinity. A Square, who sides wholeheartedly with reason, is baffled by his teacher's defense of human qualities that he and Flatlanders usually associate with women.

Not only does Abbott make a case against esteeming reason over emotion, but he also reveals how cold rationality can be potentially monstrous, particularly through the instance when A Square argues for the oppression or euthanasia of Irregulars on the grounds that it would be impossible to accommodate them because it would require extra resources. In contrast to A Square's cold-hearted and fundamentally cruel musings, the Sphere speaks of mercy and selflessness—both intricately connected to emotion—which introduces a kind of a moral dimension that should be an essence of the human condition. The Sphere says, further, that these faculties of compassion and mercy originate from God himself.

Although *Flatland* is a work fully-immersed in the logical theories of mathematics, Abbott warns against the dangers of steadfastly valuing reason over emotion, and shows how such a viewpoint condones discrimination and social oppression, and results in the inhumane treatment of the weak and the poor.

On the one hand, he argues for a healthy balance between rational thinking and emotion and compassion. At the same time, he implies that reason and emotion are not distinct at all, and are, in fact, linked. The book's fixation on math—which is often considered to be the most rational and logically-based discipline—and its exploration of unimaginably higher dimensions speaks to Abbott's attempt to explore abstract theories that are mathematically conceivable but beyond human reason. Thus, in a way, Abbot uses reason to transcend reason. By writing *Flatland*, he uses reason in order to create a metaphor for the divine, which is generally considered to exist outside the bounds of rational thinking. With his work, Abbott attempts to tether rationality and religion, and in doing so makes the case for the connection between rationality and the love and compassion that the Sphere argues exists at the core of religion.

KNOWLEDGE AND TRUTH VS. DOGMA

The second half of Flatland is particularly invested in the search for knowledge and truth. After A Square learns of a higher three-dimensional world, he gains a thirst to discover and understand worlds of four, five, and even six dimensions. Part 1 of the book intricately describes what is taken to be truth in Flatland. However, the exploration of other dimensional worlds in Part 2 immediately exposes how limited that knowledge really is, and, in particular, how oppressive those "truths" are. Therefore, Abbott makes explicit distinctions between knowledge and truth and dogma.

The book presents society's prescribed truths (its dogma) as oppressive and irrational, and as existing only to preserve hierarchies of power. In Flatland, the "laws of nature" are defined by those in power as a means of sustaining the status quo. The idea of "Nature" is particularly restricting because it does not allow doubt, and basically proclaims that "it is what it is." For example, A Square describes one law of nature that dictates that every male child will have one more side than his father had. Apparently, however, this rule does not apply to everyone. In fact, this law excludes the isosceles triangles altogether. The arbitrariness of how and who this rule applies to exemplifies the power of those in the higher classes to control knowledge and keep the weak eternally on the bottom rungs of the social ladder. The circles, who are the leaders of Flatland, do not tolerate any person who makes public mention of other worlds and newer knowledge. Thus, at the beginning of every millennium, the Grand Council meets to imprison or execute any "ill-intentioned persons pretending to have received revelation from another World." In the novella, A Square's Brother is arrested for simply having witnessed the Sphere's act of revelation, and A Square himself has been imprisoned for 7 years when he writes *Flatland*.

The book presents knowledge as having the potential to fight dogma. At the same time, it shows true knowledge as, by

definition, never being more than partial. Put another way, it is not necessarily knowledge itself that can combat dogma, but rather the curiosity and open-mindedness that makes A Square such a devoted seeker of knowledge that truly threatens dogma. Knowledge, unlike dogma, is about seeking—A Square seeks knowledge by being curious, open-minded, and smart. Plus, he is willing to defy the oppressive laws that the circles have put in place. In contrast to the inhabitants of Pointland, Lineland, and Spaceland, A Square is open to accepting the unfamiliar concept of the third dimension because he is humble enough to consider a world beyond his own. Also consider how A Square's Grandson insightfully devises the concept of "three-to-the-third," but then ends up denying it in the face of dogma. His precocious vision first stems largely from his innocence and humility, since he is not fully aware of his hexagonal social status. However, A Square's grandson's potential to gain knowledge is squashed when the Council begins proclaiming their resolution to punish any "revelators". The grandson is smart enough to understand that he must not make such dangerous claims about mathematical theories that deviate from the prescribed truths in Flatland. Therefore, despite A Square's efforts to educate his grandson, his grandson has accepted the position of remaining complacent and ignorant to higher truths.

The pursuit of knowledge is ultimately presented in the book as an effort to piece together Truth. This effort is shown as never entirely achievable—A Square can never fully understand the "truth" of multiple dimensions—but the book shows that the pursuit itself is valuable. A Square's humility and open-mindedness are presented in the book as superior to the priest's desire to hold and maintain power at all costs, and the book makes clear that A Square's values are a direct result of his devotion to pursuit of a truth that he can never fully understand or **articulate**. The broader implication here is clear: that just as A Square's humble pursuit of an impossible-to-comprehend truth offers him a kind of salvation, so will humans' pursuit to understand and connect with a God who is beyond their ability to comprehend bring them closer to the divine. Flatland pulls no punches in its depiction of the effort that those in power will go to in order to enforce dogma and maintain their own power, nor does it suggest that such efforts will be unsuccessful (they are clearly successful with A Square's grandson, after all). But nonetheless, through A Square's devotion to the truth, *Flatland* asserts that the quest for truth and the divine is a vital necessity for both personal fulfillment and morality.

ANALOGY AS SATIRE

Throughout *Flatland*, analogy is used as the primary method for explaining new and unfamiliar concepts by using what's already familiar to the one being taught. When the Sphere attempts to describe the third dimension, for example, he uses geometrical and arithmetic progression to help A Square make sense of the concept. However, it is soon obvious that analogy, or more specifically, **words**, fail to fully convey an unfamiliar concept because of the lack of a useful lexicon, or vocabulary. For instance, the Sphere gets stuck because he is unable to define "upward" and "figure" to the confused and frustrated A Square. Similarly, the word "side" also has a different meaning to the Flatlander than it does to the three-dimensional Sphere. Therefore, the teachers, such as the Sphere to A Square, or A Square to the Monarch of Lineland, resort to using deeds and actions (instead of words and analogies) in order to educate their respective pupils.

Abbott, thus, suggests the limitation of words to bring about change. In order to enlighten those who have not yet grasped new knowledge, he shows that the teacher must actively seek change through visual demonstration or physical motion. Since he could not describe "left" and "right" solely with words, A Square actually moves in and out of Lineland to actively demonstrate the directional motions. The Sphere touches the stomach of A Square to prove that he indeed can see into two-dimensional figures. When this fails, he physically takes A Square into Spaceland to prove the existence of the third dimension once and for all.

In a way, Abbott's writing of *Flatland* is an educational action in and of itself. Just as the Sphere takes A Square into Spaceland to make A Square see the world in a new way, Abbott takes the reader into the fictional world of *Flatland* to demonstrate analogically the absurdities of Victorian society. To make this "deed" work, Abbott must fully create the world of Flatland—it must be something that his readers can see and feel. Abbott has A Square call the two-dimensional shapes of Flatland "humans", "men", and "people" because he needs them to feel real to readers. Only by creating a bizarre world that feels both real and like a very direct analogy to the way in which British society was organized during the Victorian Age, can Abbott satirize the dangers inherent in a society so strictly organized and run by those with and in power.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

LIGHT AND SHADE

Light and shade, as well as dimness/darkness and brightness, are constantly referred to in *Flatland* as the ways in which the third dimension creates perspective. Throughout his description of Flatland, A Square repeatedly expresses that his readers from Spaceland have been blessed with the gift of perceiving light and shade. As such, the two represent the knowledge that Spaceland inhabitants have of

the third dimension. In the same way that light and shade allow for visual perception of the third dimension, so too does knowledge broaden one's perspective to understand higher Truths. Yet this particular symbol also speaks to the dual nature of knowledge, which can be either enlightening and approaching Truth (light) or exploited by those in power to suppress rebellion (shade).

WORDS

Also mentioned as language. Throughout the book, the characters who are teaching their respective pupils, such as the Sphere with A Square and A Square with the Monarch of Lineland, find it difficult to convey the concept of a higher dimension using only words. In that sense, words symbolize the limits of understanding abstract knowledge, like that of extra dimensions or of divinity itself. Therefore, eventually, these "teachers" resort to using deeds and action in order to persuade their students. A Square physically moves in and out of the line that the Monarch believes is his entire world. The Sphere also moves in and out of Flatland. He even physically pulls A Square out into Spaceland.

What should be made clear is Abbott's intention in pointing out the insufficiency of words. After all, his own work predominately relies on words—literally—and it depends on the function of language and rhetoric to convey his satire of Victorian Britain. Thus, it must seem almost contradictory and self-defeating to suggest the deficiency of words. But, consider the purpose of both Abbott and A Square in writing *Flatland*, which is to incite their readers to adopt a spirit of rebellion against oppression and to seek higher knowledge. Both are specifically interested in inspiring action, and not simply educating their readers. Therefore, it may be more helpful to view the limitation of words not as a way of undervaluing their function, but highlighting that they may not be enough to effect change. In the same way that *Flatland* and A Square's own treatise include diagrams and illustrations to communicate their message, the authors and readers alike must take an active role beyond writing in noticing and resisting oppression.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *Flatland* published in 1992.

Chapter 1 Quotes

To the Inhabitants of SPACE IN GENERAL
And H. C. IN PARTICULAR
This Work is Dedicated
By a Humble Native of Flatland
In the Hope that
Even as he was Initiated into the Mysteries
Of THREE Dimensions
Having been previously conversant
With ONLY TWO
So the citizens of that Celestial Region
May aspire yet higher and higher
To the Secrets of FOUR FIVE OR EVEN SIX Dimensions
Thereby contributing
To the Enlargement of THE IMAGINATION
And the possible Development
Of that most rare and excellent Gift of MODESTY
Among the Superior Races
Of SOLID HUMANITY

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page vi

Explanation and Analysis

This dedicatory note marks the beginning of *Flatland* and states clearly and concisely Abbott's purpose in writing this work. Written in the voice of the narrator, A Square, it mentions the importance of humility and modesty in gaining and seeking new knowledge of higher dimensions, which he hopes will lead to an expansion of the imagination. As a satire of Victorian Britain, Flatland is particularly invested in persuading its readers to understand the reality of their lives and to pursue higher truths and knowledge in search of better worlds (in this case, extra dimensions) and, more importantly, a faith in God that isn't controlled by those in power.

Alas, a few years ago, I should have said 'my universe:' but now my mind has been opened to higher views of things.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 3

Explanation and Analysis

A Square is reflecting on the effects that his past experiences—which make up the story of the book—have had on his self-development. At this moment, he is already the fully-developed character that has learned and grown from what he has experienced in his Flatland life. Due to the knowledge he gains from the events that he is about to narrate, he obtains an elevated sense of his world that causes him to change the way he speaks. What he would have called his "universe," he now simply calls his "country." The knowledge that he gains from this narrative journey is clearly something larger and grander than all of Flatland, and it is this transformation that A Square is hoping to share with his readers. In this way he also encourages his readers to perhaps expand their views of their own "universes," and consider whether what they think of as a universe might actually just be a "country" within a larger world.

Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ How admirable is the Law of Compensation! And how perfect a proof of the natural fitness and, I may almost say, the divine origin of the aristocratic constitution of the states of Flatland!

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 9

Explanation and Analysis

The ruling class of Circles establish many different "Laws of Nature," which cast their (often arbitrary, and shamelessly self-promoting) laws as divinely determined and impossible to refute. Notice how A Square cites the very "natural" quality and "divine origin" of the Law of Compensation. Although A Square is clearly being very sarcastic in this quote and in describing the Priests' laws, it will be evident in later chapters of the book that A Square is not immune himself in adopting these dangerous ways of thinking. Since the Circles' power is considered to be divine and natural, it literally precludes any sort of resistance or rebellion. In this way, the social hierarchy is maintained indeterminately and new knowledge is never sought.

Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ A Male of the lowest type of the Isosceles may look forward to some improvement of his angle, and to the ultimate elevation off the whole of his degraded case, but no Women can entertain such hopes for her sex. 'Once a Woman, always a Woman' is a Decree of Nature; and the very Laws of Evolution seem suspended in her disfavour.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 14

Explanation and Analysis

This is another decree of "Nature" that specifically pertains to the women of Flatland. What is particularly striking is that the way Flatland regards and treats their women is an allegory for the way women were treated in Victorian Britain. By establishing Flatland as an analogy for England, Abbott satirizes the horrific ways women were kept powerless and forced to act as simply flat and one-dimensional beings in both his fictional and real world. Once again, the social hierarchy is preserved precisely because it call upon "Nature" as its main constructor. If the world is built in a certain way, then reality cannot be argued against—but it's the ones in power who decide how to say it's built.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ It is with us a Law of Nature that the brain of the Isosceles class shall begin at half a degree, or thirty minutes, and shall increase (if it increases at all) by half a degree in every generation until the goal of 60 degrees is reached, when the condition of serfdom is quitted, and the freeman enters the class of Regulars.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 17

Explanation and Analysis

The number of "natural laws" that govern Flatland society is never-ending. Note how absurd this particular law is. It equates the amount of intelligence a person has with their angle measure, and it states a specific degree at which the Isosceles class (and their very "brain") begins. It must be mentioned that this number is clearly arbitrary. Whether

the class begins at half a degree or one degree does not matter. This law is put in place in order to establish concrete social boundaries between classes and strengthen the underlying foundation of the social hierarchy, of which the Circles occupy the very top. The specific word choice in describing non-Regulars as belonging to "serfdom" and becoming a "freeman" makes clear that these figures truly have little social authority in Flatland—and, moreover, are clearly analogous to social classes in Europe.

Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ All this very plausible reasoning does not convince me, as it has not convinced the wisest of our Statesmen, that our ancestors erred in laying it down as an axiom of policy that the toleration of Irregularity is incompatible with the safety of the State.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 24

Explanation and Analysis

Recall that A Square himself enjoys a relatively normal life in Flatland as a square. Thus, he is mostly aligned with and accustomed to the doctrines of the Circles, and for most of his life has seen no reason to contradict them. Throughout several points in the book and in this quote, he finds it difficult to completely extricate himself from the kind of thinking espoused by the Circles and other nobility. Here, A Square agrees with society's intolerance of Irregularity (that is, figures with unequal sides or angles) without offering any sort of rational reason for why irregularity is truly a vice, besides the fact that it allows irregular figures to present a larger angle to others. Through A Square, Abbott illustrates how dangerous and embedded the doctrines of those in power can become, and how absurd it is to equate physical appearance with morality or value.

Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ As to the doctrine of the Circles it may briefly be summed up in a single maxim, "Attend to your Configuration."

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 37

Explanation and Analysis

Flatland society is governed by this single, all-encompassing axiom that basically commands all Flatlanders to accept their places in society and live complacently with their fates, which are entirely decided by their number of sides and the regularity of their angles. It is truly terrifying to see how completely the Circles dominate Flatland society. Notice also that the Circles are considered the "priests" of Flatland and they teach certain "doctrines"—suggesting that to the Flatlanders, the Circles' teachings equate to the teachings of a religion they wholeheartedly accept as true and indisputable. (In the analogy to Victorian England, this would be as if the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Queen were the same person.) This is the way in which the Circles consolidate their power, by restricting what is deemed as knowledge and teaching their own doctrines to the people as sacred and "natural" laws.

Chapter 13 Quotes

❝ It seemed that this poor ignorant Monarch—as he called himself—was persuaded that the Straight Line which he called his Kingdom, and in which he passed his existence, constituted the whole of the world, and indeed the whole of Space.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker), The Monarch of Lineland

Related Themes:

Page Number: Pages 44-45

Explanation and Analysis

The Monarch of Lineland is the epitome of ignorance. Importantly, he demonstrates that the biggest obstacle to learning is arrogance and close-mindedness. In fact, understanding the concept of extra dimensions is not a problem of intelligence in the book. Although the Circles dictate that intelligence is measurable by the degrees of one's angle, and thus restrict educating those who do not have the "brainpower" to understand complex concepts, Abbott instead suggests that knowledge is not achievable to those who are not *willing* to accept new ideas. Thus, the Monarch of Lineland stands in as a harsh representation of anyone from the aristocratic nobility who is so self-absorbed that he takes for granted his world as the entirety of the universe.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"Go to bed," said I, a little ruffled by this interruption: "If you would talk less nonsense, you would remember more sense."

Related Characters: A Square (speaker), A Square's Grandson

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 53

Explanation and Analysis

When the Grandson asks A Square about the geometrical meaning of three-to-the-third, A Square sends the precocious hexagon to bed, annoyed by the boy's "nonsense" question. Despite professing himself to rational and logical (after all, he is a male figure of Flatland), A Square cannot prevent being swayed by his emotions. Thus it's easily revealed as false that reason is the exclusive quality of men, and emotion the domain of women. Notice also that A Square's response to his Grandson is not unlike that of the Monarch of Lineland, who refused to listen to A Square's lessons on the second dimension.

Chapter 17 Quotes

Why will you refuse to listen to reason? I had hoped to find in you—as being a man of sense and an accomplished mathematician—a fit apostle for the Gospel of the Three Dimensions, which I am allowed to preach once only in a thousand years…

Related Characters: The Sphere / The Stranger (speaker), A Square

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 62

Explanation and Analysis

In response to A Square's frustrated attempt to ram his hardest angle into the Sphere, the Sphere professes his disappointment in his pupil, who he hoped could be his next apostle to preach the "Gospel of the Three Dimensions." This quote is full of religious metaphors that illustrate Abbott's intention of interrelating religious knowledge with the very rational field of mathematics. Abbott did not see the two as mutually exclusive, but presented scientific thinking and research as having a role in individual spirituality, as a means of understanding the mysteries of God. However, the Anglican Church, like the Circles of Flatland, have a monopoly on controlling what is deemed as legitimate religious knowledge, restraining people from having a freely meaningful connection with divinity.

Chapter 18 Quotes

"Either this is madness or it is Hell." "It is neither, calmly replied the voice of the Sphere, "it is Knowledge; it is Three Dimensions: open your eye once again and try to look steadily."

Related Characters: The Sphere / The Stranger , A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 64

Explanation and Analysis

When the Sphere finally takes A Square physically into Spaceland, the Flatlander first sees darkness and assumes that he is either imagining things or has been sent to the depths of Hell. Yet the Sphere announces that this darkness that he perceives is actually the landscape of Spaceland. It is the knowledge of the third dimension that appears as dark to A Square at first. Once he adjusts to seeing light and shade and perspective, he will understand the totality of Three Dimensions. What is interesting is Abbott's choice in symbolizing knowledge as both light and dark. In literature, the common convention is to associate light with knowledge and dark with ignorance. However, in *Flatland*, both represent knowledge, such that darkness is a different form of knowledge. It symbolizes the awareness that some mysteries will remain unknowable, or unable to be explained. A Square may never fully grasp the third dimension to its fullest, but what is truly noble is his effort in seeking that truth.

Behold, I am become as a God. For the wise men in our country say that to see all things, or as they express it, *omnividence*, is the attribute of God alone.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker), The Sphere / The Stranger

Related Themes:

Page Number: 66

Explanation and Analysis

After A Square is shown the landscape of Flatland from above in Spaceland, he expresses how he feels elevated to a status of divinity. Note that A Square is speaking exclusively from what he has learned from Flatland and the Circles' teachings. The Circles have constricted the art of sight recognition to themselves and teach the idea that those who can "see" are naturally more divine. That is how they legitimize their authority in Flatland, and, thus, A Square thinks in those same terms. However, the Sphere denies the Circles' doctrines and demonstrates how meaningless those teachings are in his own world. In keeping with the Flatlanders' elevation of reason, A Square's faulty ideas rely entirely on ability or "configuration," and not at all on morality, which is, according to the Sphere, the true measure of holiness.

Chapter 19 Quotes

❝ Henceforth, I have to relate the story of my miserable Fall:—most miserable, yet surely most undeserved! For why should the thirst for knowledge be aroused, only to be disappointed and punished?

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 70

Explanation and Analysis

After A Square climactically realizes the truth of the third dimension, he goes on to tell the story of his unfortunate downfall. Consider the religious intonations that are conjured up by this "Fall." A Square has fully grasped new knowledge of a higher world and has gained a new thirst for more knowledge, but he is defeated in the end by the powers that be. This story is not unlike the "Fall of Man," in which Adam and Eve ate from the forbidden Tree of Knowledge, and were punished for it by being cast out of Paradise. Thus Abbott attaches more religious layers to his allegory, and deepens his story's tragedy with the theme of too much knowledge leading to suffering.

❝ And even as we, who are now in Space, look down on Flatland and see the insides of all things, so of a certainty there is yet above us some higher purer region, whither thou dost surely purpose to lead me…

Related Characters: A Square (speaker), The Sphere / The Stranger

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 71

Explanation and Analysis

After having understood the immensity of the Gospel of Three Dimensions, A Square discovers a thirst for knowledge of even higher dimensions. In fact, for the curious mind knowledge begets the desire for more knowledge. Through the faculty of analogy, A Square reasons that there are even higher dimensions and requests that the Sphere teach him more. Thus, Abbott shows the full potential of analogy. Not only does he use analogy as a satirical device to expose the flaws inherent in the society of Victorian Britain, but he also demonstrates how analogy can be used to generate new knowledge and infer into deeper truths of higher dimensions—in the case of Flatland—as well as the mysteries of God.

Chapter 20 Quotes

❝ It was not so clear as I could have wished; but I remembered that it must be "Upward, and yet not Northward," and I determined steadfastly to retain these words as the clue which, if firmly grasped, could not fail to guide me to the solution.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: Page 75

Explanation and Analysis

Back in his home in Flatland, A Square continually thinks about what he has learned from his visit to Spaceland. What is interesting is his constant concern over losing his understanding of the concept of the third dimension, suggesting that some knowledge cannot ever be fully understood without being experienced. Just like the mysteries of God, some knowledge is simply too abstract and difficult to understand solely with human faculties. However, the importance lies in the effort and determination to seek a fuller comprehension, even if that end is impossible to achieve. Notice also how A Square

repeatedly relies on the words of this short axiom to retain his idea of the third dimension. Although words symbolize the limitations of understanding abstract knowledge, this particular quote illustrates their potential usefulness.

❝ Yet mark his perfect self-contentment, and hence learn his lesson, that to be self-contented is to be vile and ignorant, and that to aspire is better than to be blindly and impotently happy.

Related Characters: The Sphere / The Stranger (speaker), The Monarch of Pointland

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 75

Explanation and Analysis

In another dream, A Square visits Pointland, a world of no dimension, with the Sphere. There they meet the Monarch of Pointland, who is even more ignorant and self-absorbed than the Monarch of Lineland. It is clear here that knowledge cannot be gained by anyone who is not willing to take in any new knowledge that does not pertain to themselves. Thus, the Monarch of Pointland, similar to that of Lineland, offers a harsh representation of ignorance, and firmly condemns the idea that "ignorance is bliss." We can then project this idea onto the Circles, who refuse to tolerate anyone who claims to have knowledge of other worlds, and the Victorian nobility that possesses social authority in Britain.

Chapter 22 Quotes

❝ Yet I exist in the hope that these memoirs, in some manner, I know not how, may find their way to the minds of humanity in Some Dimension, and may stir up a race of rebels who shall refuse to be confined to limited Dimensionality.

Related Characters: A Square (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: Page 82

Explanation and Analysis

A Square ends the book with hopes that his writing inspires his readers to seek enlightenment and gain knowledge, even if that means rebellion against the existing authorities or social order. In a way, Abbott is here speaking directly to his readers through the voice of A Square and expressing his own purpose and hopes of writing *Flatland*. Both A Square and Abbott speak of raising a rebellion among those who are trapped in the throes of a rigid and unfair society (or, in the case of Flatland, limited dimensionality)—and the way to freedom is through knowledge. Knowledge has the power to liberate by opening the eyes of the oppressed and offering salvation through the understanding of better worlds.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

A Square, the narrator and protagonist, opens the book with Part I by introducing his readers to his world of Flatland, which he likens to a sheet of paper on which straight lines, triangles, squares, pentagons, and other figures roam about.

The narrator immediately starts the book with an analogy to help the reader compare the paper-like landscape of his world to what will later look a lot like Victorian Britain. This very mathematical world, governed by geometrical concepts and theories, shows that reason and logical thinking will be an important theme throughout the work.

A Square says that Flatlanders, lacking the ability to distinguish each other by sight, only see each other as straight lines, much in the way one sees the side of a penny from the edge of a table. He includes three figures that illustrate how a triangle appears from above, close to the level of a table, and at the level.

Abbott's inclusion of actual images suggests that analogy may be limited if only conducted through words. The fact that Flatlanders all see each other as lines will later prove ironic, since they distinguish each other by more absurd means.

CHAPTER 2

A Square continues to illustrate his world by describing its physical environment. Flatland is organized by four cardinal directions (North, South, East, and West), and by a "Law of Nature" there is a constant attraction to the South, which functions as a compass to Flatlanders. A Square explains that this attraction affects the weak, the elderly, and women more than it affects men.

The way in which a physical law of nature (a southern attraction) establishes distinctions of the weak from the strong illustrates how knowledge is manipulated in order to divide society into hierarchies, straying away from truth and becoming dogma.

Flatland houses do not have windows because **light** shines on Flatland equally day and night. From the topic of light, A Square makes a digression and begins rambling about how learned men who questioned the origin of light were heavily taxed and put into asylums.

In this book, light symbolizes knowledge and its regulatable boundaries. While it seems that everything is unquestionable in Flatland (light shines equally), the upper classes brutally punish those who seek after higher truths and the unknown.

Houses in Flatland, diagrammed by the author, are legally required to be pentagonal to ensure public safety, because the angles of square and triangular houses pose a safety hazard to careless people. These houses have separate entrances for men and women.

Notice the juxtaposition between how the state seems to prioritize the well being of its people (the law regarding pentagonal houses) and how it exploits this same "humane" law to discriminate between sexes.

CHAPTER 3

A Square describes the inhabitants of Flatland and how they are organized into social classes based on their shape. Women are straight lines, and isosceles triangles compose the lowest class of workmen and soldiers. The middle class consists of equilateral triangles, and the professional and gentlemen class are squares and pentagons. The nobility begins with hexagons and other polygons. When the number of sides become too numerous that they cannot be distinguished from a circle, that figure is accepted into the highest class, the Circular or Priestly order.

The intricate way in which Abbott (or A Square) describes the organization of Flatland society eerily coincides with the way Victorian Britain was arranged in social classes. It is difficult to overlook these similarities, especially since Abbott uses familiar terms, such as workmen, soldiers, and gentlemen, to illustrate Flatland. Thus, this extended analogy of Flatland as Britain is fundamental to his satirical objective.

Another "Law of Nature" dictates that a male child is born with one more side than his father. However, A Square says, this rule does not consistently apply to the lower social classes of the triangles. Only through difficult demonstrations of greatness or intermarriages between more intellectual members are the isosceles able to give birth to an equal-sided triangle.

Once again, "nature" is used to manipulate the way in which power resides with the upper class. The social hierarchy remains rigid because fewer opportunities are given to those with lower status, while the upper classes find it easier to climb even higher up the social ladder.

The birth of a true equilateral triangle from isosceles parents is strictly regulated by the state. The child must be examined by the Sanitary and Social Board. If he is certified as "Regular," he is ceremonially admitted into the class of Equilaterals. He is also adopted by new Equilateral parents to prevent the child from reverting to his hereditary disposition.

Even though Flatland is a made-up world of shapes, it also looks like an actual society, with an official state department, such that the reader cannot help but compare Flatland to their own world and the bureaucracies therein. That births are so highly regulated illustrates how social hierarchy is strictly maintained, even through cruel and inhumane practices like taking a child from its parents.

This tedious method of social mobility offers a glimmer of hope to those of the lower classes and prevents them from staging revolution against the upper echelons of society.

The way the statesmen of Flatland regulate the lower classes is terrifyingly sophisticated. Instead of exerting brute force, they provide small ways of gaining power that keep rebellions at bay.

A Square adds that the natural "Law of Compensation" also stifles sedition, because as the working class gain intelligence generationally, they wane in the power of penetration (meaning the acuteness of their angles) that could be used to their own advantage. The Circular Party also incites jealousy and suspicion within the working class and pits them against each other through mutual warfare.

The circles hoard power for themselves by specifically regulating knowledge and defining what "nature" is. The fact that the circles are "priests" is notable as well, since they can define their "laws of nature" as divine laws that also happen to keep the circles themselves in power. Here Abbott also slyly mentions the common truth that the oppressed masses usually have the potential *to overthrow their oppressors—they just rarely take advantage of this potential because they are distracted by things like "mutual warfare."*

CHAPTER 4

A Square begins a discussion of the women of Flatland. He starts by warning his readers of the power of women, whose two pointy extremities (since they are straight lines) are dangerous in any collision. They also can make themselves invisible by turning a certain way.

Abbott's emphasis on the potential threat posed by Flatland women (who are clearly analogous to real women) illustrates one of the powerful effects of satire—its discrete ability to convey a real-life message to readers.

In order to minimize the dangers posed by women, there are prescribed laws that restrict them. First, every house must have an eastern entrance that is designated for women. Second, they must always emit a "peace-cry" whenever they are in public. And third, any female who is suffering from a disease that causes involuntary motion will be immediately destroyed.

Again, take notice of how those in power establish barriers (through legislative and punitive means) to keep the powerless eternally weak—and they do this particularly because women are not inherently weak, but in fact very dangerous.

An additional law requires women to wiggle their backs from left to right as they walk, in order to indicate their presence. Other states in Flatland ask women to be accompanied by someone when travelling, while others even restrict women from leaving their houses except for religious festivals.

The laws passed in Flatland are humorously absurd and satirical, even as they also portray a brutally repressive society. Clearly, Abbott is making a point that one should question the way in which society and its laws are organized.

In light of the social restrictions on women, A Square explains, the statesmen of Flatland have found that a too prohibitive Code has the tendency to result in backlash from women, which then causes more harm than good to the State.

Similar to the way the state utilizes the hope of social mobility to prevent rebellion, it also finds an optimal amount of prohibition to preserve the hierarchy.

A Square asserts that Flatland women are prone to affection as a result of their unfortunate configuration. They lack brainpower and the ability to reflect, judge, and remember. Thus, he notes the occasional violent outbursts of women against men who have gotten on their bad sides.

A Square describes women in a very matter-of-fact tone, as if he is citing facts. However, it must be noted that the supposed "emotional" tendency of women is a constructed piece of knowledge that is taught as true in order to discriminate between the sexes. This gendering of emotion and reason is also another piece of satire that strikes very close to home in the real world.

Although A Square acknowledges how horrifying Flatland's treatment of women would seem to his readers in Spaceland, he explains that nature has established that "Once a Woman, always a Woman."

A Square illustrates how declaring something as "nature" renders it as permanent truth, even it is discriminatory (and seemingly arbitrary as well).

CHAPTER 5

Unlike those who are fortunate enough to perceive **light and shade** in Spaceland, Flatlanders must take other measures to recognize each other's configurations. A Square lists three methods of recognition. First, hearing is a basic way of distinguishing each other by voice. But this is not particularly useful because of the potential for trickery and voice assimilation.

That there are three different ways of ascertaining the social status of other beings in Flatland exemplifies how much social hierarchism dominates the citizens' lives. Flatlanders accept everything they know to be the entirety of knowledge, and distinguish each other by convoluted ways.

Feeling is a second method that is more commonly used, mostly by Women and the lower classes. Introductions occur by touching the angles of the other party and ascertaining his or her configuration. The practice of feeling is taught extensively in school. However, the reliability of this method breaks down with members of the higher classes, since it becomes difficult to distinguish between twenty- and twenty-four-sided figures.

Even the methods of recognition are hierarchized and practiced by specific classes. Flatland institutionalizes the education of recognition and, thus, the knowledge that each class is allowed to learn and retain.

A Square states that introduction by contact can also be potentially dangerous, as any sudden, unexpected movement can cause injury. As an example, he tells the story that his grandfather had told him of his own great-great-great grandfather, a working man with a brain of 59.5 degrees (intelligence is measured by their angles) who had accidentally killed a polygon while being felt. He was sent to prison and his family was thrown back 1.5 degrees, to 58 degrees.

The precise numerical measurement of intelligence through angles (perhaps a reference to eugenics, a racist pseudoscience that linked intelligence to skull size and shape) and the harsh punishment of A Square's ancestor for an accident simply add to the long list of ways that the circles maintain the social status quo.

At this point, A Square addresses a question he believes his readers may have about discerning an angle and its precise measurement. He answers that though Flatlanders cannot see angles, they can infer through touch.

A Square immediately introduces a weak point in the Flatland system of distinguishing: they do not see, but infer. Through analogy, a reader may recognize that each social system has weak spots that can easily be argued against.

A Square describes another law of Nature in Flatland that dictates that the brain of the Isosceles class begins at 30 minutes, or half a degree, and increases by half a degree generationally until it reaches 60 degrees and may enter the class of Regulars.

One should recognize how absurd this "law" is. In fact, it is entirely arbitrary. Although it's considered natural, whether the isosceles "brain" begins at 30 minutes or 29 makes no difference—instead, this "law" is about creating clear boundaries between the lower and upper classes.

A Square then digresses into a topic of school board politics. Due to the abundance of individuals with angles ranging between 0.5 and 10 degrees (called Specimens), Flatland accords them no civic rights and, instead, utilizes them to educate the children of the middle class.

By now, it should be obvious that the highest class of circles have complete control over the lower classes, using them to support the education of their own children. These "Specimens" are essentially living persons used as science experiments for the powerful.

CHAPTER 6

A Square lists a third and final method of recognition, that of sight, which is practiced only by the higher classes and depends on the naturally abundant fog in Flatland. By comparing relative **dimness and brightness** of the sides of another, Flatlanders can infer the configurations of each other.

Although light and shade (higher knowledge) do not exist in Flatland, they can compare relative brightness in order to infer another's shape, which speaks to the way in which knowledge always has the potential to seek higher truths. However, the upper classes exclusively keep this knowledge to themselves, again maintaining the social hierarchy.

A Square explains this with a specific example of discerning between a merchant who is an equal-sided triangle and a pentagonal physician. While the sides of the merchant recede rapidly into the fog, the physician's sides shade away less rapidly to and, thus, are distinguishable from the merchant (two exemplary figures are included).

Note here again how Abbott uses analogy (a merchant and a physician) to illustrate how in Flatland figures are distinguished by social status. In addition, analogy is aided by another illustration.

In Flatland, sight recognition is considered an Art form because of the inherent difficulties involved in the act. The fact that one may be approached from another's side (instead of his angle), as is illustrated, and the motion of polygons makes sight recognition even more complex of a method.

Because of the inherent complexity involved with sight recognition, the higher classes are able to easily keep the method from the lower classes.

Therefore, A Square states that the higher classes prohibit the practice of "feeling," and from early on, their children are sent to Seminaries (and not Public Elementary schools) to learn the art of "Sight". On the other hand, "sight" is an unattainable skill to the lower classes. Thus, the children of the poor learn how to "feel" at the early age.

Not only are Flatlanders socially hierarchized by configuration, but they are also kept in distinct social classes based on what they know (which is, of course, only taught to them based on their configuration, again perpetuating the status quo).

A Square states that there is a Final Test of sight recognition given to the polygonal class at the University. He explains that the statesmen have dictated that those who fail the test be either imprisoned for life or put to death, since it is from these specimens that leaders of past rebellions arose.

Holding official examinations and executing those who fail is another method that the higher classes maintain power, by destroying any potential sources of rebellion. Once again Flatland is shown to be a rather terrifying place to live, despite A Square's matter-of-fact tone in describing it.

CHAPTER 7

A Square begins by explicitly laying down a fundamental social rule, which has been only assumed thus far. He states that "every human being in Flatland is a Regular Figure" and that the equality of sides is a fact of Nature.

Notice how Flatlanders are referred to analogously as "human beings." Furthermore, the idea of "regularity" in math may allow the circles to promote it as an essential quality. However, in real life, there is no such quality, which makes it even more absurd that British society is dictated by similarly arbitrary social criteria.

A Square posits that if Flatlanders were irregular, then civilization would "relapse into barbarism" because most, if not all, of the time would devoted to feeling all the angles of another person. Thus, "irregularity" in Flatland is considered equivalent to moral depravity and criminality.

The absurd way in which irregularity is equated with moral defunctness illustrates how those in power establish arbitrary definitions that are advantageous to themselves.

A Square defends the way in which the ancestors of Flatland have secured the safety of the state by purging Irregulars. Although A Square finds the strict program of executing infants whose angles deviate even by half a degree extreme, he still advocates for the execution of Irregular Offspring who cannot even be medically repaired.

As much as A Square is a revolutionist for writing Flatland, *he still cannot escape from thinking in the way that the circles have taught him, that is, to consider irregulars undesirable in society (and even deserving of death). Thus, knowledge and control of a society's worldview is an essential aspect to maintaining power.*

CHAPTER 8

A Square proclaims that life is artistically dull in Flatland, since all they perceive are straight lines. However, he states that life was not always like this. In the far-off past, a Pentagon (who is unnamed) discovered color, began painting houses and eventually other figures, and started the Color Revolt.

A Square looks back onto better times when color not only added beauty to life, but also introduced the prospect of equality. That this has happened in the past suggests that equality is possible again.

The act of painting gained popularity throughout society and began a "Chromatistic" movement. Coloring figures was desirable since Flatlanders no longer had to "feel" to distinguish each other and movements could now be all accounted for.

The way in which color becomes a device that equalizes society is new knowledge that was not familiar in the past, but promises a brighter future.

Within two generations, everyone was painted, except for the women and circles. The adage of the time was that the "distinction of sides is intended by Nature to imply distinction of colors," but this did not apply to women, who had only one side, and the circles, who lack sides altogether. Due to the beauty of color, that ancient era also ushered in a period of eloquence and poetic language.

The new practice of color is interpreted as a product of natural law, suggesting that "Nature" is not fixed, but can shift according to the times and those in power. The way that color inspires poetry demonstrates that knowledge and creativity are self-proliferating.

CHAPTER 9

At the same time, A Square continues, the intellectual arts were dying. The arts of sight recognition and feeling were no longer practiced, and other academic subjects, such as Geometry or the Physics of motion, were soon neglected. Then the Isosceles classes grew in size, since Specimens were no longer needed in the service of education.

What is striking is how subjects so familiar to Abbott's readers (i.e. physics and geometry) start to lose favor as painting is practiced. It suggests that knowledge is never entirely objective, but can be manipulated by those in power.

As time passed, the lower classes began to advocate for equality and asserted that there was no difference between them and the highest class of Polygons. They demanded that the aristocratic Arts be prohibited and that the funding of the studies of Sight Recognition, Mathematics, and Feeling be ceased. Eventually, they argued that all individuals and classes should be recognized as equal.

Consider the fact that the knowledge of something new, in this case, color, literally inspires Flatlanders to desire something better, equality among all the figures. Yet at the same time the rise of a new power leads to new corruption, as the "Chromatistes" then try to suppress the teaching of older forms of knowledge.

Finding the higher classes indecisive, the leaders of the Revolution finally demanded that women and priests be painted as well. Against the objection that women and circles had no sides, they presented the Universal Color Bill to the General Assembly, proposing that both women and priests be painted half red and half green.

The way in which color schemes are proposed onto the women and priests illustrates how arbitrary social distinctions are, whether they be the number of sides or colors.

A Square asserts that the bill was devised in such a way that would gather the women's support for Chromatic Innovation. Surely the prospect of being treated like a Priest—since they were assigned the same two colors—was attractive to the women. A diagram is included illustrating how a woman could be confused for a priest.

That color can easily be used to trick one's social status again speaks to how meaningless class distinctions can be. As the Color Revolution progresses, it does not promote equality, but it instead just shifts the power to the revolutionists.

Secondly, the bill sought to disempower the Circles, who had still held onto their social status by refusing to give into the fashion of painting. Once painted, the circles would demoralize each other and, eventually, the aristocracy would be overthrown.

It is not difficult to notice that the Chromatistes are acting in the same way the circles, who have also pitted the isosceles against each other to keep them contained and powerless.

CHAPTER 10

The revolution continued for three years, A Square says, during which violence ensued between the army of Isosceles triangles and that of Polygons. Many Circles were killed by their wives, who were furious at their opposition to the Bill.

As a satire that depends on analogy to make a point about British society, it would seem that the Color Revolt is alluding to Britain's past, but in some ways this section seems more applicable to other European countries, like France with its violent Revolution.

It seemed that the Priests would soon have to give in to anarchy or face death, when the course of events changed in their favor due to the fraudulent act of one Isosceles triangle. This triangle had painted himself with the 12 colors of a dodecagon and tricked the daughter of a noble Polygon into marrying him. When the daughter discovered the truth, she committed suicide.

Despite the Chromatistes' efforts to effect social change, it is evident from the triangle's attempt to impersonate a higher polygon that it is difficult to overturn existing social attitudes on class and status. Deeply engrained conventions are difficult to change.

In response to the news of this tragic event, women across Flatland began to see the Bill in a new light and were opposed to its passing. The Circles quickly jumped on this opportunity and organized an Assembly of the States.

The Circles, who still possess some social superiority, immediately find a way to regain power by exaggerating the potential consequences of passing the Bill.

Pantocyclus, the Chief Circle during those days, declared publicly that the Priests would concede and accept the Bill. He then delivered a speech that lasted an entire day. He warned the lower classes that if they were to accept the Bill, they would have to sacrifice the potential opportunity of their children to enter the class of the Regulars. Power would belong in the hands of the majority (which would be the largest Criminal class). He also appealed to the Women by arguing that color would increase fraud.

The speech given by Pantocyclus illustrates how social hierarchy is maintained. While the Circles certainly use direct oppression to maintain power, the social system is also preserved by those in the lower classes who seek to someday climb up the social ladder and enjoy the perks of the higher classes.

When Pantocyclus cried "Sooner than this, come death," the Isosceles triangles and Women took that as a signal to being attacking the Chromatistes. The battle did not last long. In the heat of the violent chaos, the Isosceles convicts began attacking each other and within half an hour, everyone was killed.

It is ironic that the people from the two lowest classes are fighting on the side of the Priests. Once again social hierarchy is maintained in many ways besides oppressive measures.

The Circles, then, sealed their hard-earned power by reducing the Working class to a tenth of its size, destroying any triangle suspected to be irregular, and conducting home visitations to purge any excess soldiers and tradesmen. Color and painting were, thus, permanently banned.

Power is restored to the Circles because their social ideology (a systematic body of concepts accepted by a certain group) is so embedded within the minds of the Flatlanders that it is difficult for them to conceive of a society organized by something other than the number of sides. Tragically, the end of this rebellion also means an end to the richer world of color and poetry in Flatland.

CHAPTER 11

A Square states that all the previous chapters have been introductory notes, and he says that Part II will begin discussing the central topic of his book: the mysteries of Space. He proceeds to painstakingly list all the details about Flatland—their method of motion, infrastructure, their alphabet, etc.—that he must omit describing due to limited time.

Abbott does not sacrifice any space to describing a Flatlanders' daily life—instead, he chooses to use the entire first part of the book to explain how this fictional society is organized. Now, the second part is devoted to satirizing another aspect of Victorian Britain: the Church and its control over religious dogma.

Before A Square attends to the main subject of his book, he makes a few remarks on the Priest class of Flatland, the Circles. In Flatland, they are the ultimate decision-makers of all aspects of life, such as business, art and science, and theology. However, A Square reveals that no Circle truly a circle, but rather a polygon with numerous small sides. Furthermore, he mentions that feeling a circle is socially unacceptable in Flatland, so this allows the Priests to remain mysterious. By convention, it is assumed that the Chief Circle has 10,000 sides.

Note the specific decisions made by the author, such as Abbott's choice to focus on describing the amount of influence held by the Circles, who he deliberately names as "priests." Surely, he is alluding to the priests that have a similar stronghold in Victorian England. Abbott immediately challenges religious authority by asserting that no priest is truly a real circle, but instead, they claim prestige by setting conventions (i.e. claiming to have 10,000 sides while also making it socially unacceptable to actually count a Circle's sides).

A Square continues by explaining the unique way circles are born. By "natural law," as circles ascend the social ladder, their development accelerates, while at the same time, the race becomes less fertile. Therefore, the rare son of a 500-sided polygon may have a son with 550 sides.

Similar to other laws, this law of nature also perpetuates social stratification by giving more power to those in higher classes and also limiting the size of the upper classes in order to enjoy a larger share of the benefits. Once again, notice that they claim that the law is of divine design—that it is decided by God.

A Square also describes how Art can intervene in the process of "evolution." Flatland physicians have discovered a way of adding more sides to infant circles whose frames have not completely set. Although rarely one out of ten survive, many Circular parents send their children to the Neo-Therapeutic Gymnasium.

The cruel measures that are taken by Circular parents to elevate their own statuses through their children illustrate how power-hungry one can become. They are so greedy for power that they seek artificial (and potentially deadly) ways to increase the number of sides of their sons.

CHAPTER 12

A Square discusses the doctrine of the Circles, which is concisely expressed by the axiom "Attend to your Configuration." Their teaching strives for individual and collective improvement towards the most desired configuration, that is, of the Circles. They reject the values of will, effort, and praise, and contend that configuration dictates how a figure behaves. Thus, irregularity is considered a disease that must be cured lest one be imprisoned or executed.

The way the Circles preach against personal improvement and hard work allegorizes the Anglican Church's teachings of respecting ecclesiastical authority over individual spirituality. Thus, they limit the self-expression and exploration that is potentially threatening to their hold on power.

Pantocyclus attributed any faults or deviations from normal social conduct to irregularity. Thus, he concluded that praise and blame are meaningless gestures. However, A Square points out the downsides to the indisputable doctrine. In the case of an Isosceles triangle guilty of stealing, the penalty of death is easily sentenced, since he could not help but steal because of his natural lowliness. On the other hand, in minor domestic cases where execution is unnecessary, such as with the disobedience of A Square's grandsons, blame is evaded and instead put on configuration.

Abbott illustrates that there are unexpected consequences that arise when those in power try to enforce absurd rules in order to preserve their authority. Because irregularity was dictated as a natural product, it allowed blame to be put on Nature, instead of the criminals and their own lack of a moral conscience. This is the beauty of a satire, which strives to point out the horrifying effects of whatever it chooses to criticize. For Abbott, this is the Victorian social hierarchy and the often absurd ideas underpinning it.

Despite the doctrine's teaching, A Square confesses that he sees the value of scolding and disciplining on his Grandson's configuration, although he cannot explain why he thinks that it is so. A Square mentions that he is not the only one who believes in discipline, and says that even Circles use praise and blame towards other figures and even their own children.

Despite the Circles' insistence on irregularity as being an inevitable determinant on behavior, they still use praise and blame, highlighting how arbitrary and absurd their teachings are. This shows that one must question why certain social mores and values are established, since some are clearly in place simply in the interests of the ruling class.

A Square describes how the Circles' emphasis on configuration has reversed the relational arrangement between parents and children. In contrast to Spaceland, where children are taught to respect their parents, Flatland parents must honor their sons and grandsons. Therefore, a man must prioritize the interests of posterity above his own.

Notice the humorously ridiculous effect the Circles' emphasis on configuration has on the relations between parents and children. Clearly, this doctrine has been established solely to conserve the power of the Circles.

After humbling himself and his square status, A Square indicates what he believes is the weak point of the Circles' system: their relations with women. Following the doctrine of regular configuration, irregular births are highly discouraged. In a similar manner, women who have any ancestral history of irregularity are unfit for marriage.

The way in which women in Flatland are treated is appalling. They have little to no social agency and are considered the most irrational beings. And in the scheme of marriage, they must be carefully checked for irregularities in their ancestry.

Since women are only straight lines, their irregularities are instead documented by detailed pedigrees that are recorded by the State. Only women with certified pedigrees are allowed to marry. Thus, A Square entertains the fact that it might be supposed that Circles would be careful in choosing a wife. On the contrary, the Circles do not stress the regularity of their wives. Instead, those of the lower classes who are desperate to climb the social ladder through their sons take more care into taking Regular wives.

The fact that the Circles do not put much care in choosing wives shows how much they enjoy the fruits of being associated with the highest class of Flatland society. On the other hand, figures from the lower classes can only rise in social status through their children, so they cannot afford to ignore the ancestral histories of their potential wives.

Despite the fact that such careless marriages of Circles can result in a decrease in the number of sides or even be simply barren, the Circles do not give much thought to this, since the loss of a few sides is not very noticeable and can be compensated at the Neo-Therapeutic Gymnasium. Yet A Square warns that if this does not stop, the circular race may cease, and Flatland will no longer exist.

Note the sarcastic tone of A Square when he expresses concern for the future of the Priest class. While the lower classes stick strictly to system's rules, the Circles are free to marry women with a history of irregularity, since they already possess so much power.

A Square offers an additional warning, one relating to the relations between men and women. Three hundred years ago, the Chief Circle declared that women should not be treated as rational, since they lack Reason and are more emotional. From then on, women were no longer provided education.

It is obvious to see what Flatland esteems between reason and emotion. Women are considered to lean 100% towards emotion, entirely gendering this crucial aspect of human experience. However, Abbott suggests that the blind valuing of reason over emotion is also dangerous.

A Square fears that this program of educational negligence of females is harmful to the Male Sex, since men must live bi-lingual lives and use a different vocabulary in the presence of women. He thus makes an appeal to the statesmen of Flatland to reconsider female education in order to lessen the burden on the young, who have to unlearn the language of their mothers and learn the male language of science.

Again, Abbott's biting humor is evident. A Square is not concerned about the well being of women, but instead argues for their education in the interests of the male *sex. The regulation of knowledge is intricately manipulated here in order to keep the women ignorant and submissive to men.*

CHAPTER 13

Chapter 13 marks the beginning of Part II, which describes other worlds visited by A Square. On the last day of the 1999th year, he dreams of visiting Lineland, a one-dimensional, linear world populated by small straight lines and points. An illustration of A Square's view of Lineland is included. In the dream, A Square assumes that the strange chirping creatures he sees must be women. He approaches one of the largest, which happens to be the Monarch of Lineland, and places his mouth right in front of the creature.

Part II marks the section where Abbott more directly deals with knowledge and ignorance. Lineland represents a world that is devoid of higher truths, such as the second dimension that Flatlanders enjoy. It then demonstrates the consequences of remaining ignorant, as made evident in the way the Monarch of Lineland is portrayed.

A Square apologizes for possibly startling the Monarch of Lineland, and proceeds to ask him questions about Lineland, despite the king's arrogance in responding. A Square finds out that the ignorant king believes the Straight Line (on which they live) is the entirety of his kingdom, world, and universe. The Monarch is incapable of conceiving of anything outside the line that he inhabits. Therefore, he did not acknowledge A Square at all until he positioned his mouth along the line, in the king's world.

The Monarch is a good example of what a person can become if they refuse to think beyond what they already know. He is arrogant and does not offer a listening ear to A Square at all. In some way, the Monarch is an analogical representation of the Circles in Flatland, content with the power they hold and refusing to accept any new knowledge that threatens the status quo.

The inhabitants of Lineland are male lines and female points who are stuck in motion and in vision to the straight line that consists of their whole world. All Linelanders can see are points, and they distinguish another's sex and age through voice. Since no one can move left or right, no Linelander can pass each other, and thus they have the same neighbors for life. A Square notes that the limited lives of the Linelanders seem dismal, and he is surprised that the Monarch of Lineland is so cheerful and lively.

Lineland offers a bleak view of what it is like to be willfully ignorant. Physically stuck on a line, the people of Lineland are doomed for life, in both literal and religious senses. Thus, Abbott suggests how important it is to seek knowledge and religious truths. At the time Abbott firmly opposed the Tractarians, whose influence was growing in England, and who strongly emphasized the authority of the Church and scripture, much in the same way that the Linelanders take for granted their world as the entirety of existence.

A Square then asks the Monarch of Lineland how his people marry and produce offspring when they are confined to a line. The Monarch answers impatiently that proximity is not necessary for the generation of children, and that it instead occurs through sound and the sense of hearing.

Since the Linelanders are limited to one dimension, they depend solely on their sense of hearing. However, take note of the fact that they still have the means to perceive new ideas if ever presented them. Thus, Abbott argues that wisdom depends on the will to receive new knowledge and the humility to accept one's ignorance.

The Monarch of Lineland continues by explaining that every man has two mouths and two voices, a bass and a tenor one. He admits that he assumed A Square to be a feminine monster with a bass voice. The king then states that Nature has dictated that every man should wed two wives to harmoniously meld the bass and tenor of the man to the soprano and contralto voices of two women. Once a week, every man sends out their most beautiful sound, marriages are consummated, and two girls and one boy are born from each union.

Lineland is similar to Flatland in the way it is governed by certain "laws of nature," and the way that those laws uphold the social hierarchy—allowing for those who don't fit in to be considered "monsters," while others can be considered the head of the state.

CHAPTER 14

Tired of the Monarch of Lineland's narrow-mindedness and ignorance, A Square decides to teach him of the nature of the second dimension and Flatland. He begins by asking the king how he ascertains the shapes and positions of his people. The Monarch replies that it is impossible to do so with the sense of sight. Instead, the length of a person is measured by hearing and comparing the time difference in the arrival of a man's two voices.

Although A Square is unaware of it, he is trying to reveal the mysteries and knowledge of the second dimension to the Monarch in the same way that a religious leader spreads doctrine to non-believers in the hopes of converting them. The truth of the second dimension is thus an allegory of the mysteries of God.

In defiance, A Square asks then how fraud (that is, disguising one's voice) is detected and checked for. He asks if feeling is a possible method. The Monarch of Lineland is appalled at A Square's suggestion, because feeling is an offense punishable by death, to protect the frailty of women. He continues by saying that touching is unnecessary, since hearing is an efficient and unalterable process.

Ignorance is truly self-defeating and limiting. This is shown through the Monarch, who is so content with the way his life is organized (predominately through hearing) that he sees no need to consider any other methods. Hearing is apparently efficient enough.

A Square points out to the Monarch of Lineland that life in Lineland must be very boring since all they can see is a point. A Square explains that as he entered their world, he saw the Monarch moving left and right, having 7 men and 1 woman to his left and 8 men and 2 women on his right. Yet the Monarch does not understand A Square's use of the **words** "left" and "right," and confuses them for "northward" and "southward."

Abbott introduces an aspect of knowledge that we must keep in mind: there is a limit to what we can understand. God cannot be fully comprehended by human faculties, and we must respect divine mystery. So "left" and "right" represent higher knowledge that is difficult to grasp when one is limited to one's dimension. However, the potential to understand that knowledge is not non-existent, as exemplified by A Square.

The Monarch of Lineland asks A Square to demonstrate "left" and "right." But A Square feels limited when he tries to explain them only with **words**, so he decides to literally move in and out of Lineland. A diagram illustrates his position relative to Lineland. But the Monarch still is not able to grasp left and right motion and instead attributes A Square's movement to magic. A Square scolds him for his refusal to think beyond his own world. In response, the Monarch and his army threaten to attack A Square, who wakes up from his dream.

New knowledge can sometimes be viewed as threatening. The Monarch dismisses A Square's demonstration as magic, or something absurd or even dangerous. Thus, Abbott claims that one must be humble and trusting in order to be receptive to new ideas. Eventually, the Monarch responds to A Square's efforts with violence, since he is not willing to learn and rejects any threat to his worldview.

CHAPTER 15

Still the last day of 1999, A Square is sitting with his Wife and recalling an earlier incident with his Grandson. A Square had been teaching him that 3 to the second power can be represented by the construction of a large square with sides 3 units long with 9 smaller ones, when his Grandson asked if 3 to the third power has any geometrical meaning. Although A Square replied that it did not, his Grandson insisted that it must, in the same way that 3 to the second power is a square. Annoyed by his Grandson's nonsense, A Square sent him to bed.

In the way that Abbott relies on analogy to satirize British society, A Square relies on analogy to teach his Grandson the meaning of exponents with geometry. Yet he reacts to his Grandson's extrapolating with annoyance (an emotion), much in the same way that the Monarch of Lineland did to him. Thus, Abbott challenges the idea that reason trumps emotion, or that emotion is solely the realm of women.

A Square exclaims out loud that his Grandson is a fool, and immediately he feels a presence in the room. When A Square further states that 33 is meaningless, a voice replies, "The boy is not a fool; and 3 to the third power has an obvious geometrical meaning." A Square and his Wife suddenly see a figure before their eyes. A Square's Wife asks to feel the Stranger, and believes him to be a perfect Circle. The Stranger then asks for A Square's Wife to allow him and A Square to have a word alone, and she leaves the room.

A Square is no different from the Monarch of Lineland regarding new knowledge. He dismisses his Grandson's enlightened insight, offering an additional example of how potentially dangerous ignorance can be. Thus, the Stranger appears in response to A Square's display of self-contentment and willful ignorance.

CHAPTER 16

Unable to clearly see his unexpected visitor, A Square feels the Stranger and believes him to be a perfect Circle. The Stranger announces that he has come from Space, a land of three dimensions. He speaks of height, breadth, and length, but A Square does not understand these **words**. The Stranger tries to prove the third dimension by stating that he has seen the entirety of A Square's family and household from above. However, A Square is not convinced, and argues that any Circle would have to the power to obtain that kind of personal information.

The Stranger appears to A Square as a kind of revelator to enlighten his pupil. The resemblance of this situation to A Square's vision of Lineland is clear, and is another analogy that demonstrates the difficulty of spreading new knowledge. A Square is unwilling to accept any of the Stranger's claims, and stubbornly tries to explain away the third dimension with what he is already familiar with.

The Stranger then attempts to convince A Square with a different argument concerning A Square's Wife. The Stranger argues that, although, theoretically, the Wife is a one-dimensional line, in actuality, she is really a very thin parallelogram with an additional dimension, that is, breadth. In the same line of reasoning, then, the Wife must also have a "height." But A Square confuses "height" with "**brightness**" and does not grasp the Stranger's meaning.

The Stranger utilizes analogy to the fullest. He uses A Square's Wife to argue that although lines are one-dimensional, they still have a second-dimension, which is breadth. Thus, she must also have a third-dimension, if she can indeed possess a second. In a way, dimensionality represents the capacity for knowledge, since it is latent in everyone. What A Square believes is "brightness" represents deeper truth.

Since dimension has a direction and is something that can be measured, A Square asks the Stranger to measure his "height." The Stranger decides to use plain **words** and a visual example to convince his pupil. He argues that Flatland is a plane and that he is not a figure, but a *solid* that is made up of an infinite number of circles that vary in size from a point to a circle of 13 inches in diameter. He proclaims that he is called a sphere.

What is interesting is that the characters in Flatland are constantly asking for proof. There is a consistent need for logic to be the arbiter in each situation. So Abbott's message is even more striking, since he is suggesting that religious revelation and knowledge (symbolized by higher dimensions) should depend on rational thinking, not only "leaps of faith."

The Sphere makes an **analogy** between the way A Square appears as a line to the Monarch of Lineland and the way he himself looks like a circle in Flatland, since each lower realm (that is, Lineland and Flatland) is but a slice representing the whole (that is, the Sphere's Land of Three Dimensions). When A Square still expresses doubt, the Sphere physically demonstrates the third dimension by rising in Space and showing that his sections become smaller. A diagram is included.

Notice that the Sphere is making the same demonstration that A Square made in Lineland. They both physically move in and out of the lower world in order to make their point about higher knowledge. Pay attention to the difference in responses between the Monarch of Lineland and A Square, though.

Although A Square indeed sees that the Sphere decreases in size as he "rose," he still does not understand the nature of the third dimension, and instead begins believing the Stranger to be a mystical sorcerer. After a moment of silence, the Sphere decides to use **analogy** as the last resort before convincing A Square through action.

A Square's initial reaction to the Sphere's movement is the same as the Monarch of Lineland, who associates A Square's motion with magic. However, Abbott's deliberate analogy is not just to repeat the same scene, but to convey a more refined idea about the reception of knowledge, which will become more obvious later.

The Sphere begins by asking A Square what a point moving northward creates with its path of motion. A Square answers "a straight line." He then continues and asks what a straight line moving parallel to itself and leaving a wake of lines creates. A Square answers "a square." Then, the Sphere requests that A Square consider what a square moving upward parallel to itself. A Square, frustrated, becomes impatient, because he does not understand the **word** "upward."

Note the emotional response of A Square, who feels angry at the Sphere's incomprehensible lessons. Although throughout Flatland *A Square favors reason over emotion, and associates the former with men and their supposed superiority, he clearly demonstrates that reason isn't inherently masculine, and isn't inherently superior to emotion. In fact, A Square's response is very natural. Of course one would feel frustrated when he cannot understand something.*

The Sphere claims that he can describe the **word** "upward" with Flatland language, and proceeds to present another analogy. He begins with a single point, which produces a line with two endpoints. A line creates a square, which has four terminal points. Thus, he demonstrates the geometrical series of 1, 2, and 4, and he asks A Square for the next number, which is 8. The Sphere says that the object with 8 points is called a cube.

The various methods that the Sphere uses to prove the existence of three dimensions truly illustrate that knowledge can be achieved through many pathways. There is no one right way. This also could apply to faith and understanding. While the Anglican church exerted its authority as the sole path to salvation, Abbott seemed to believe that individual spirituality was more important.

A Square asks if this resulting creature has sides. The Sphere answers that what Flatlanders call "sides" are actually called "solids" in his own world. He states that a point has 0 sides, a line 2, and a square 4. This is an arithmetical progression, so A Square answers that the next number is 6. The Sphere states that A Square is correct, and says that a cube is bounded by six sides. However, A Square is enraged by this, and hurls himself at the Sphere.

"Sides" mean different things in Flatland and Spaceland, which are lines and figures, respectively. Thus, Abbott affirms the importance of language in determining thought. Without the appropriate words and meanings, such as "upwards" or "sides," thinking about the third dimension is almost impossible. While A Square was more patient than the Monarch of Lineland, in the end he acts the same way—giving in to his frustration and attacking the person trying to enlighten him.

CHAPTER 17

A Square violently tries to rush his strongest right angle into the Sphere, but the Sphere raises himself out of Flatland. Intent on making A Square an apostle that will spread the Gospel of the Three Dimensions, the Sphere decides to use deeds instead of **words** to make his point. He tells A Square that he will descend into a cupboard and empty a box full of money that A Square had locked away half an hour ago. A Square then discovers that the box is indeed gone, while the Sphere continues to explain that Flatland is simply a plane and A Square can see all that the Sphere sees if he has the determination to.

The portrayal of A Square as an apostle spreading the gospel makes the religious overtones of Abbott's allegory very clear. Although A Square resorts to violence, the Sphere is not harmed in any way. The knowledge that he possesses affords him an elevated status (literally), such that he cannot be hurt by A Square's attempt to lash out. Once again words are shown to be insufficient in communicating certain kinds of knowledge.

The Sphere describes how his aerial view of Flatland broadens as he rises, while the objects become smaller. He then declares that he will touch the inside of A Square to prove that he comes from the third dimension. A Square feels pain from the Sphere's touch and decides to rush at his visitor again. He alerts the entire household for help. The Sphere tries to calm the square down, since no other figure must know what he has taught A Square. To no avail, the Sphere eventually takes A Square physically out of the plane.

The Sphere's reaching "into" A Square resembles the biblical story of the doubtful apostle Thomas who only accepts Christ's resurrection after he literally feels Christ's wounds. But this Flatland rendition has the apostle (that is, A Square) bear the touch, and yet A Square still doubts the Sphere. The only way left for the Sphere, then, is to take A Square into the "miracle" itself.

CHAPTER 18

The terrified A Square first perceives **darkness** and is initially confused at seeing everything in three dimensions. The Sphere calms him by telling him that what he sees is "knowledge." A Square then realizes that he is in a new world (called Spaceland), and begins to comprehend its beauty. He starts to worship the Sphere as his divine teacher.

Light commonly represents knowledge and darkness ignorance, but in this case, A Square's ascent into Spaceland begins with a veil of darkness. Here, darkness represents the mysteries of higher dimensions, which are at first inscrutable. Note how A Square immediately conflates new knowledge with the divine.

The Sphere shows A Square the whole layout of Flatland and the inside of his house, where his grandsons are sleeping and his Wife is pacing the room in worry (illustration included). After they explore Flatland some more, A Square then expresses that he feels like he has "become as a God" because omnividence (the ability to see all things) is an attribute of God alone.

Recall that in Flatland, no one can "see" anything except lines, but the higher classes infer shape through sight recognition. Thus, sight and, by extensive, omnividence are faculties exclusive to god-like figures. This is how the Circles/Priests claim power, by restricting education and knowledge.

The Sphere scorns A Square for his shortsightedness, and argues that if omnividence is really a quality of the divine, then the pick-pockets and murderers of his country should be worshipped as gods by Flatlanders since they see everything, too. He asserts that omnividence does not make one more just, merciful, selfless, or loving. Thus, it does not make one divine.

The Sphere claims that the attributes of God include justice, mercy, and love—attributes that seem more "emotional" than "rational." In fact, the reason-obsessed Flatlanders would be more likely to worship the criminals of Spaceland. Thus, Abbott critiques the sexism of Flatland (and England) while also asserting that knowledge alone does not bring true enlightenment—that requires wisdom and virtue as well.

A Square is confused by his teacher's **words**, because he believes that being more merciful and more loving are the qualities of women. On the contrary, the wise men of Flatland regard knowledge and reason with more esteem than affection. The Sphere retorts by saying that the wisest in Spaceland are more in touch with emotion than reason, unlike the Flatlanders. But he cuts off this discussion, and points to the General Assembly Hall of the States of Flatland.

Although Abbott speaks through A Square throughout Flatland, *in this case, he also speaks through the Sphere, who values emotions as much as reason, if not more. Not only does he claim that some of the wiser men in Spaceland are very much emotional beings, but he also points out the importance of emotion in religion.*

A Square and the Sphere descend into the building. It is the first hour of the first day of the year 2000, and the Circles are gathered for a meeting. A Square recognizes his Brother at the meeting, which is held every millennium to conduct trials on misguided persons who claim to have received revelations of other worlds. Any figure found guilty is to be arrested for eternity or put to death.

The Circles are afraid of any figures who claim to enlighten other Flatlanders with revelations from other worlds, particularly because this would threaten their hold on power by presenting a force (higher dimensions, for example) that is greater than they are.

A Square declares that he is confident that he can enlighten the Circles. However, the Sphere stops him and descends himself into the meeting room, proclaiming the existence of a land of Three Dimensions. The Sphere leaves the room before he is arrested, and instead A Square's Brother is condemned to eternal imprisonment for having witnessed the Sphere's revelation.

While A Square's enthusiasm is commendable, Abbott warns against rash action. The Circles' stronghold on power should not be taken lightly. Their crackdown on anything that threatens their authority is evident from the imprisonment of A Square's brother, who only witnessed *the Sphere's revelation.*

CHAPTER 19

The two return to space and the Sphere introduces A Square to the concept of solids. He stacks many square cards on top of each other to demonstrate how two-dimensional figures can be built into a three-dimensional solid (and an illustration is attached). A Square says that the demonstration is painful to see, since it looks like an Irregular figure to him. The Sphere explains that A Square is not used to seeing **light and shade** and perspective, so he introduces A Square to the cube, a living being. After detailed **explanation** and tactile demonstrations, the concept is clear to A Square.

The Sphere again teaches A Square using analogies, and this scene itself is an allegory of the process of teaching and learning. The new knowledge initially is painful to A Square, since it is so unfamiliar to him. Yet this knowledge is crucial for him to learn in order to enlighten other Flatlanders who live under the Circles' oppression. This is where light and shade, a symbol for knowledge in general, appears.

A Square states that this is climax of the story. He then proceeds to recount his fall. Although it is painful for him to recall, he hopes it will arouse a spirit of rebellion in his readers, who may be stuck in their own dimensions. While the Sphere is teaching him the conformations of other regular solids, A Square interrupts him, asking if he could expose his intestines. A Square argues that since the Sphere had revealed the insides of all things in Flatland, there must be a similar way of seeing into the insides of solids.

One main purpose of Flatland *is clearly stated here: A Square hopes to enlighten his readers on the knowledge of higher dimensions in order to incite them to fight against oppression, such as the Circles' dominance over Flatland or the aristocracy's rule of Victorian England. Note how A Square thinks in analogy, and now starts to grow curious about ideas even beyond the Sphere's teachings.*

A Square posits the existence of a land of Four Dimensions. However, the Sphere denies its existence, and argues that it is simply impossible to think about such a world. In response, A Square further probes his teacher by arguing that just as the Sphere had proved to him the existence of a higher world, and as A Square had attempted to teach the Monarch of Lineland of two dimensions, there must other even higher worlds. He theorizes a structure with 16 terminal points and 8 bounding cubes, following the Sphere's previous logic.

What makes A Square different from the Monarch of Lineland, who refused to think beyond his linear world, is that he is humble enough to accept what is proven to him, and then has the curiosity to actually seek out more forms of higher knowledge. However, when he asks the Sphere about this knowledge, his teacher acts no differently from the Monarch, and assumes that his three-dimensional world is all there is to the universe.

A Square asks the Sphere to confirm or deny his hypothesis. The Sphere admits that some of his countrymen have considered a fourth dimension, but have not adopted an official theory. Therefore, he ends the **discussion**. But A Square continues to theorize higher worlds, even those of five, six, seven, and eight dimensions. Angered at A Square's unending questioning, the Sphere pushes A Square back to his Flatland home.

A Square shows the liberating and elevating effects of knowledge. After learning about the third dimension, A Square is eager to seek for higher knowledge of even more mysterious ideas and worlds. In fact, knowledge is also salvation, since it promises a better future in higher worlds. Despite being a figure of wisdom, even the Sphere reacts emotionally to A Square's eagerness. Notably, Abbott was theorizing about multiple dimensions (including time) long before Einstein published his theory of relativity.

CHAPTER 20

Back in his Flatland home, A Square decides to hide his experiences from his Wife, so he reassures her with a fake story. Once alone in his room, he broods over everything he has learned from the Sphere and recites the phrase "Upward, yet not Northward" repeatedly until he falls asleep. During his sleep, he has another dream of visiting another foreign world. The Sphere takes him to Pointland, the Abyss of No dimensions, which is inhabited by the lone Monarch of Pointland.

In simple terms, the axiom "Upward, yet not Northward" describes the essence of the third dimension. But a deeper look reveals that it also speaks of the exalting effects of knowledge—which literally lifts those who have been enlightened upwards into better worlds with higher dimensions. The "yet" is particularly hopeful, since it suggests that knowledge can be eventually achieved, as long as one is humble and curious enough like A Square.

The Monarch of Pointland believes himself to be the entirety of his universe. He is incapable of conceiving of anything other than himself, since he does not know what length, breadth, and height are. A Square is stunned by the complacency of the Point and tries to make him realize his insignificance in the world. But the Point takes A Square's **words** to be his own, and is awed at his "own" thinking.

The Monarch of Pointland offers a humorous caricature of the ignorant. Completely engrossed in his own wisdom and intelligence, the Monarch is literally unable to think of anything beyond himself. It is truly a bitter image of what it is like to live without the ability to empathize with others and seek knowledge outside one's self.

A Square and the Sphere return to Flatland, and the Sphere inspires A Square to teach others of higher dimensions. He apologizes for his previous bout of anger at A Square's request for knowledge of higher mysteries, and then teaches A Square how to construct extra-solids and double extra-solids, according to **analogy**.

Throughout the book, analogy is used as a teaching technique. Here it is used explicitly by the Sphere once more, to help A Square seek higher knowledge (i.e. of extra dimensions), which is liberating.

CHAPTER 21

A Square wakes up from his dream and decides to start his mission of enlightenment with his Wife. At that moment, however, he hears a proclamation from the Council declaring the arrest, imprisonment, or execution of anyone who attempts to enlighten others of revelations from another World.

It has been evident throughout the whole book that the Circles maintain their social power by cracking down on anyone who poses a threat to their authority, here silencing anyone who might contradict their "natural laws."

Threatened by the Council's proclamation, A Square decides to keep his own revelation secret and to demonstrate what he has learned instead. He forgoes his plan to begin with his Wife and considers starting with his hexagonal Grandson. His Grandson had already shown his cognitive potential by meditating on 3 to the third power, and is young enough to not understand the Proclamation. On the other hand, A Square's pentagonal sons are already too loyal to the Circles to take A Square's **words** seriously without handing him over to the Circles.

The fact that A Square cannot even teach his own sons the Gospel of Three Dimensions because they have been brainwashed by the doctrines of the Circles demonstrates another aspect of how the social hierarchy is maintained and truly how engrained it is in the mind of a society. The Grandson, on the other hand, is still young enough to not have been indoctrinated.

First, A Square relieves his Wife's questions about the other night's encounter with the Sphere. Then he immediately seeks out his Grandson, since he feels that all his experiences and the knowledge he has learned are slowly fading away. A Square sits down with his Grandson and resumes the previous day's lesson of a point creating a line and a line creating a square, when he hears the proclamation being announced outside again.

A Square's determination to spread the idea of the third dimension is truly praiseworthy. However, the very abstract nature of the third dimensional concept makes it hard for him to retain that knowledge, suggesting that some higher mysteries are simply difficult to understand with human faculties, like the mysteries of God.

A Square's Grandson hears the Proclamation and begins to cry at his grandfather's request to repeat what he had been thinking the other day concerning three-to-the-third. The Grandson does not take A Square's **words** seriously, assumes A Square is joking, and runs out of the room.

A Square fails to convert his Grandson because, unfortunately, the little hexagon is already very much aware of the Circles' power and their intolerance for outspoken Flatlanders.

CHAPTER 22

After failing to enlighten his Grandson, A Square decides to write a treatise on the mysteries of Three Dimensions, which he believes will be more effective in teaching others. To avoid breaking the law, he writes for several months about a hypothetical "Thoughtland" that resembles the third dimension. However, he finds it difficult to draw helpful diagrams and to compose a clear enough treatise that would help others understanding his meaning.

A Square's struggles in writing "Thoughtland" seem to be Abbott expressing his own troubles in composing Flatland. *These struggles also closely resemble the troubles the Sphere had in explaining the third dimension to A Square, and A Square had with the Monarch of Lineland.*

One day, 11 months after his return from Spaceland, A Square attempts to envision a cube, but fails at his first try. Although he eventually succeeds, he is not sure if he is actually correct, so he begins to feel sad. A Square is still confident and determined to devote his life to spreading the Gospel of the Third Dimension, however. Thus, many times A Square becomes so passionate about teaching others that he expresses dangerous thoughts about Spaceland.

A Square's resolve can be seen as dangerous, particularly in a society as highly regulated Flatland. This could be a warning from Abbott about hastily attempting to overturn the existing social hierarchy without a strong plan.

After occasionally mentioning ideas of seeing the "interiors of things" and of the Third and Fourth Dimensions, A Square gives an entire account of his experiences in Spaceland at a meeting of his Local Speculative Society, in response to the Prefect's assertion that God had limited the world to two dimensions. A Square is then arrested and taken to the Council for trial.

Because of A Square's inability to control his passion for preaching the Gospel of Three Dimensions, he is, of course, immediately arrested by the Circles. This recalls stories of early Christians, and even Jesus himself, who were persecuted for preaching their beliefs.

The next morning, A Square offers his defense to the President of the Council, but he is sentenced to eternal imprisonment. A Square writes that it has been seven years since he was imprisoned. He occasionally sees his Brother (who was imprisoned earlier) and laments that his brother does not understand the concept of the third dimension, despite having witnessed the Sphere's revelation.

A Square has been writing Flatland *from prison. Despite the inspiring messages he has conveyed throughout the book, the stark reality of having been defeated and trapped by those in power is very bleak. However, this depressing ending may actually be more effective in inciting his readers to action in real life.*

A Square expresses regret because he does not have any converts. Yet he writes this memoir-like story in the hopes that it may incite a group of rebels who seek higher dimensions. A Square ends the story on a defeated note, questioning whether the mysteries of the Third Dimension are simply the products of a wild imagination or dream.

This ending is unsettling, and has generated much speculation on the meaning of A Square's self-doubt and grim conclusion. Although he claims that he writes this treatise in order to inspire his readers to fight against oppression, in the end, he wonders himself if all his experiences with the Sphere and Spaceland were simply a dream.

HOW TO CITE

To cite this LitChart:

MLA

Lee, Michaela. "*Flatland*." *LitCharts*. LitCharts LLC, 24 Jul 2017. Web. 21 Apr 2020.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Lee, Michaela. "*Flatland*." LitCharts LLC, July 24, 2017. Retrieved April 21, 2020. https://www.litcharts.com/lit/flatland.

To cite any of the quotes from *Flatland* covered in the Quotes section of this LitChart:

MLA

Abbott, Edwin A.. Flatland. Dover Publications. 1992.

CHICAGO MANUAL

Abbott, Edwin A.. Flatland. New York: Dover Publications. 1992.