

Oroonoko Summary

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Summary of Oroonoko

Introduction and Setting: The story begins with the narrator explaining her purpose. She says she will tell the true story of a royal African slave. She lived in Surinam, a colony in South America, and saw many events herself. The colony is ruled by the English. Here, the English colonists live peacefully with the native people. The native people are friendly and honest. They trade food and local items with the English. Behn describes them as innocent and naturally good. They do not understand lies or fraud until they meet Europeans. The native people live simply and peacefully. The natives have no king. They respect their oldest war leader. They know the forests and rivers well. They are skilled hunters and swimmers. This harmony ends when African slaves are brought to Suriname.

The Background of Slavery and Oroonoko's Childhood: European traders bring African slaves to work on sugar plantations. Slaves are bought from African kings and war leaders. Coramantien is a powerful African kingdom. The king is very old and once had many sons. Only his grandson, Oroonoko, survives. Oroonoko is a prince and heir to the throne. He grows up strong and brave. He is trained by generals and a French tutor. The tutor teaches him languages and European manners. Oroonoko learns about both African and European cultures. He is respected by all for his courage and wisdom. He has a noble and handsome appearance. He moves and speaks with great dignity.

The Royal Veil and Oroonoko's Love for Imoinda: Oroonoko returns from war as a celebrated hero. He visits Imoinda, the daughter of the former general. He brings her gifts and slaves won in battle. When Oroonoko meets Imoinda, he falls in love. She is beautiful, modest, and virtuous. Imoinda is pleased by his affection and falls in love too. Their love is deep and sincere. Oroonoko promises she will be his only wife. He breaks with the custom of having many wives. They marry secretly and hope for happiness.

Meanwhile, The king, Oroonoko's grandfather, hears of Imoinda's beauty. He becomes infatuated and wants Imoinda for himself. The king sends Imoinda the Royal Veil. This is a powerful custom in Coramantien. The Royal Veil means a woman must come to the king's palace. Refusing the veil is punished by death. Imoinda must obey and leave with sorrow. Oroonoko is heartbroken and powerless to stop her. The Royal Veil is a symbol of royal

authority. It also shows the limited freedom for women in this society. The king's power over women shapes the fate of Imoinda and Oroonoko.

Separation, Betrayal, and Loss: At the king's palace, Imoinda tries to explain. She tells the king she is already married to Oroonoko. The king is angry and demands her obedience. He threatens death if she refuses him. Imoinda is loyal to Oroonoko, but the king takes her by force. Oroonoko is filled with rage and grief. He desperately searches for Imoinda. Eventually, with help from Onahal and Aboan, Oroonoko sneaks into the palace. He and Imoinda reunite but are discovered. The king decides not to kill her, but instead secretly sells Imoinda and Onahal as slaves. He tells Oroonoko that Imoinda is dead. Oroonoko is overwhelmed with sorrow.

Oroonoko's Enslavement: Oroonoko is tricked by an English slave trader. The trader pretends to be his friend. He invites Oroonoko and his trusted men onto a ship. Suddenly, Oroonoko and his men are seized and chained. They are shipped to Suriname as slaves. Oroonoko goes from prince to slave by this betrayal and trickery, not by war. His royal status means nothing in the face of European greed. When the ship arrives, slaves are sold to planters. Oroonoko is bought by Mr. Trefry, who recognizes his noble appearance. Trefry treats him with kindness and respect. But Oroonoko is still a slave.

Life in Surinam as Slave: At the plantation, English owners give new names to slaves. Oroonoko is named "Caesar." This new name removes his royal identity. But the name "Caesar" also echoes his noble qualities. To the colonists, it is easier to use. For Oroonoko, it is a mark of loss but also dignity. He inspires respect and awe among both slaves and whites. Oroonoko meets Trefry, who is impressed by him. Trefry promises Oroonoko a better life. The narrator, too, becomes Oroonoko's friend. Oroonoko lives among the other slaves but is given special treatment.

Reunion with Imoinda: Oroonoko learns of a beautiful slave woman called "Clemene". All men admire her. Oroonoko asks to meet her. Clemene is actually Imoinda. When they see each other, they are overwhelmed with joy and surprise. Their old love is renewed. Now called Caesar and Clemene, they live as husband and wife on the plantation. Imoinda becomes pregnant. Their happiness is clouded by their status as slaves.

Oroonoko's Plan and the Slave Revolt: Oroonoko asks again for his freedom. The governor and Trefry delay their promises. Oroonoko worries that his wife's child will be born a slave. He realizes the white men are lying about freedom. Oroonoko plans a slave revolt to win liberty. He gathers the slaves together on a Sunday. He makes a moving speech. He speaks of the endless suffering of slaves. He says freedom is worth the risk, even death. He encourages the

men, women, and children to escape together. About 150 men, with their families, join him. They flee into the wild forest at night. They plan to find a ship or start a new colony. But the escape is soon discovered. The English and their Indian allies give chase.

The End of the Revolt and Punishment: Oroonoko leads the slaves bravely against their pursuers. They fight, but many are afraid. The women cry out for surrender to save their families. Most slaves abandon Oroonoko. Only Tuscan and Imoinda stay with him. The white leaders offer terms if Oroonoko surrenders. He does not trust them. Finally, after much persuasion and for Imoinda's sake, Oroonoko and Tuscan surrender. The surrender is a trick. The governor has Oroonoko and Tuscan whipped brutally. They are tied to stakes and punished as examples. Their flesh is torn with whips. The narrator and her friends are horrified.

Death of Imoinda and Oroonoko: Oroonoko recovers but is deeply wounded in spirit. He sees that freedom is impossible for himself and his family. He is tormented by the thought of Imoinda and their child living as slaves. Oroonoko takes Imoinda into the forest. He explains he must kill her to save her from a slave's fate. Imoinda bravely accepts her death from her beloved. Oroonoko kills Imoinda with his knife. He lays her body on flowers and grieves. He tries to kill himself, but is too weak. The colonists find him and bring him back.

Oroonoko was executed on the orders of the governor. The governor orders Oroonoko's execution as a warning to others. Oroonoko faces death with dignity and pride. He is tortured and dismembered in public without crying out or resisting. He dies bravely, like a prince. His last act highlights his loyalty to his honor.

Central Message of Oroonoko: This story is about love, loyalty, honor, and the horrors of slavery. The custom of the Royal Veil is a key turning point in the story. It shows the power of old customs and their tragic consequences. Oroonoko and Imoinda's love begins with the deepest respect and understanding. They fall in love quickly and truly. Their suffering comes from a system they cannot control.

Oroonoko takes up arms to seek freedom and dignity for himself and his people. His plan for revolt is based on hope, leadership, and shared pain. But betrayal and fear bring failure and tragedy.

Oroonoko's slave name "Caesar" is both an insult and a strange tribute. It marks his loss of royalty but keeps his dignity alive. Oroonoko's journey from prince to slave happens through trickery. His trust is betrayed by those he thought friends. In Suriname, he must accept a new life as a slave.

In the end, Oroonoko and Imoinda die, but their love and honor survive. Their deaths show the injustice and sadness of slavery and tyranny. This story is told so that their dignity and struggle remain in people's hearts forever.

LxNotes