

Abel's Island

Novel Study

Grades 4-6

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Illustrated by S&S Learning Materials

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ABEL'S ISLAND

by William Steig



Table of Contents

Objectives	4
Summary of Story	4
Author Biography	5
Teacher Input Suggestions	6
Discussion Questions	7
Character Tracking Sheet	14
Chapter Activity Cards	15
General Activity Cards	47
Creative Activities	53
Comprehension Quiz	55
Short Answer Quiz	59
Answer Keys	60



ABEL'S ISLAND

by William Steig



Objectives

1. To introduce the world of fantasy to students through the writings of William Steig.
2. To teach and reinforce various reading skills and techniques.
3. To develop and improve student creativity.
4. To improve independent reading skills and work habits.
5. To improve and develop higher level thinking skills.

Summary of Story

Abel's Island

The main character is a mouse named Abelard Hassam di Chirico Flint (Abel). Abel is married to Amanda. The year is 1907. They are a refined and cultured pair of mice with human personality traits.

Abel and Amanda are having a picnic in the woods when it begins to rain. As they hide in a cave to stay dry, the storm gets worse. The hurricane winds take Amanda's scarf and carry it away. As Abel goes to get it, he too is swept away by the wind. He finds himself in a river and hangs on to a nail in a board. Eventually, he gets stuck in a tree that is on an island.

He munches on twigs and bark until the water level returns to normal. He finally gives up on the idea that a search party is coming for him and makes various attempts to leave the island.

As each of his attempts fail, he has much time alone with his thoughts. He begins to get introspective. He acknowledges that he has never worked a day in his life or actually accomplished anything. He realizes that he is a snob.

He learns some survival skills. He continues to try different ways to get off the island. He makes a home in a hollow log. He finds different food sources. However, he is lonely; he misses Amanda and his friends.

As winter arrives his ideas for getting off the island are more innovative. As well, Abel is more philosophical about life. But, he must also leave time to prepare for winter. He stores food and prepares his home for the cold. He has also taken up a hobby - clay sculpting. He makes a statue of Amanda and of his parents.



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Then, danger strikes - an owl captures Abel. Abel fights back and is released when he slashes at the owl's feet with a penknife. Later, there is another fight with the owl; again, Abel manages to escape. He spends the rest of the winter in his log, munching on stored food.

He is pleased when the March sun melts the snow. He is even more pleased to meet a new friend, Gower Glackens, an old and confused frog. Gower wants to leave the island when the river becomes calmer. Unfortunately, he is too old to carry Abel with him. When he does leave, Gower promises to send a rescue team for Abel - if he can remember. Once again alone on the island, Abel is lonelier than ever.

A drought in July reduces the level of water in the river so that the rocks are poking out. Abel decides this may be a break for him. He swims from rock to rock, finding that he is much stronger than he was last year. Finally, he makes it all the way across.

As he walks home, he wonders what has happened to Amanda in the past year. He doesn't want her to see him in his old raggy clothes so he waits until she has gone to the park and he sneaks back home. He washes, dresses and lays her scarf on the hall table. When she returns and rushes to him, he says, "I've brought you back your scarf."

Author Biography

William Steig

William Steig was born in New York City in 1907. He studied art and design in school. His first career was in the field of arts; he drew cartoons and other illustrations for The New Yorker.

It wasn't until he was 61 years old that his first children's book was published. He illustrates all of his own books. Abel's Island is a Newbery Honor Book. Other award winning books by William Steig are: Sylvester and the Magic Pebble, Amos and Boris, The Real Thief, Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride and The Amazing Bone.



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Teacher Input Suggestions

NOTE: It is strongly recommended that the teacher read the novel and the material in this unit well in advance of implementing them into any reading programme. The teacher's knowledge of the story and interest is essential in order to maintain the enthusiasm of the students.

Introductions for the Unit:

- Abel's Island can be used in conjunction with themes about mice, friendship, survival skills and self-esteem.
- There are many unusual and difficult words in ***Abel's Island***. Choose and list the vocabulary words and their meanings that students may have difficulty with and discuss them with your students. Add any other words that they suggest as they read the book.
- Distribute copies of ***Abel's Island*** to the students. Have them examine the cover and discuss the title, characters, author and artist. Ask them to make predictions about the story. (i.e. Will the book be realistic or a fantasy? What clues does the picture give them? How is the mouse on the cover different than a real mouse?)
- Relate information about the author using the Author Biography in this unit.
- Give each student a copy of the sheet called "Characters in the Novel". Instruct them to fill out the sheet each time that a new character is mentioned in the book. They are to record information about the character (appearance, personality, relationship to other characters, etc.) and make personal comments.
- Display and read other books written by the author. William Steig has written other award winning books including ***Sylvester and the Magic Pebble***, ***Amos and Boris***, ***The Real Thief***, ***Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride*** and ***The Amazing Bone***.
- Display and read fiction and non-fiction books about mice. Some other fictional books that have mice as characters are:

Dr. De Soto, by William Steig

The Mouse and the Motorcycle and ***Ralph S. Mouse***, by Beverly Cleary

Mouse Tales, by Arnold Lobel

Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH, by Robert O'Brien

Stuart Little, by E.B. White

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse, by Aesop