



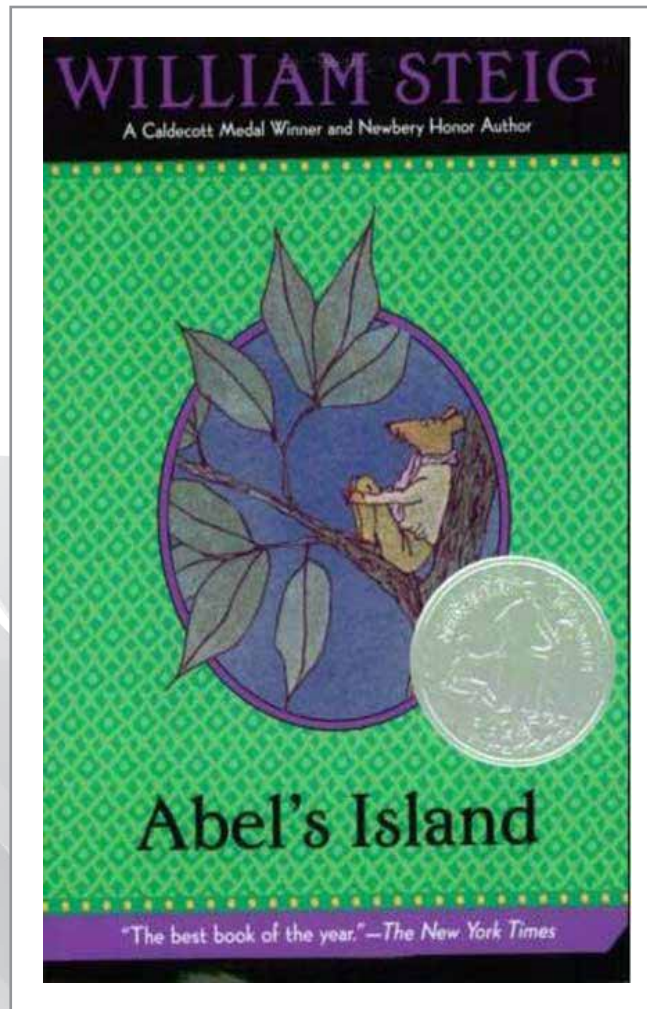
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 3-5

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Abel's Island

William Steig



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Abel's Island

William Steig

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, comparison/
contrast, inference, cause
and effect

Literary Elements

Characterization, story
elements, fantasy, genre,
conflict

Thinking

Research

Writing

Description, poem

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, drama

ABEL'S ISLAND BY WILLIAM STEIG

STUDY GUIDE BY MARY DENNIS

About the Author:

William Steig was born November 14, 1907, in New York City. He studied art and design, and by the time he was 23 his cartoons and other illustrations were appearing in The New Yorker.

He was 61 years old when his first children's book, CDBI, was published. Since then he has received a number of awards for his many books, all self-illustrated.

Sylvester and the Magic Pebble was on the Horn Book honor list, was nominated for Children's Book of the Year and the National Book Award, and received the Caldecott Medal in 1970. Other award-winners are Amos and Boris, The Real Thief, Farmer Palmer's Wagon Ride, The Amazing Bone, and Abel's Island. Steig has produced seven ALA Notable Books.

About the Novel:

Abel's Island, which received the Newbery Award in 1977, appears at first glance to be a cute story about a little mouse. Instead, it is a remarkable fable about what happens when those brought up in secure, well-ordered worlds must survive in an environment where instinct, resourcefulness, and determination are essential and propriety and wealth are useless.

In the process of learning to survive on an island by himself, Abel—a most refined and cultured mouse from a fine family—finds an inner self he didn't know existed. He has a chance to implement much of the practical knowledge he has gained by reading and by watching others work. He finds he has an artistic talent he can continue to use when he returns home. Physical labor strengthens his body and gives him the satisfaction that comes from a hard day's work, something totally new to him. With more time to think, he even journeys into the spiritual and metaphysical realms. Abel learns to love the island he once regarded as his prison, and he returns home with an appreciation of all the things in nature he formerly considered merely "uncivilized." In short, Abel has become a "new mouse," and is completely aware of how much he has grown. Abel's Island provides an excellent opportunity to discuss many of the most fundamentally important aspects of living.

Chapters 1-4, Pages 3-25

Summary:

It is August, 1907, and Abel and Amanda—two very refined mice—are picnicking in the woods when it begins to rain. They take shelter in a cave full of other small woodland creatures, and watch as the storm turns into a hurricane. The wind is so strong that it tears Amanda's scarf from her neck. When Abel steps out to retrieve it, he is swept helplessly away and down a raging river. He manages to stay alive and afloat by holding onto a nail in a board, which finally lodges in the upper branches of a tree, which is apparently on an island in the middle of the river. He is sure that search parties have already been organized, for he is an important mouse, Abelard Hassam di Chirico Flint of the Mossville Flints. In the meantime, he remains in the treetop and munches on twigs and bark. Although the cherry birch is one of his favorite flavors, he longs for a mushroom omelet and garlic toast. When the water returns to its normal level, Abel climbs down and begins planning a way to escape back to shore. His attempts to use the board as a boat fail, as does the catamaran he builds from sticks. Abel has never done a day's work before in his life. Things have always gone just as they should for him. He finds his own ineptitude quite surprising.

Initiating Activity:

Have the students look at the cover of the book and identify the animal in the picture. (If they say it's a rat, explain that it's actually a mouse.) Ask them if they think the story is going to be realistic or fantasy fiction. What clues does the picture give them? How is the mouse in the picture different from a real mouse? Use T-charts to compare the two kinds of fiction and the two kinds of mice.

FICTION

realistic	fantasy
characters like us action could happen problem could be ours setting is our world	unusual characters action couldn't happen problem couldn't be ours setting is not quite our world

MICE

real world	mouse in picture
don't wear clothes don't sit with arms around knees	wears clothes sits like a human being

Vocabulary:

caviar-4	verdure-4	foliage-4	skeltering-7
walloped-8	caromed-8	roiling-10	turbulent-11
maelstrom-11	capsized-11	cerulean-13	speculated-14
marooned-16	ineptitude-20	ingenuity-22	catamaran-24

Questions for Discussion:

1. What did Abel and Amanda eat at their picnic? (*cheese, watercress, quail egg, onions, olives, caviar, and champagne*) What does the menu tell you about the mice? (*various answers*)
2. What sort of mouse-wife was Amanda? Give some examples from the book to support your answer.
3. Where did the mice find shelter from the storm? (*in a cave*) Who else was there? (*other mice, toads, a weasel and "some strangers"*) What was Abel's mistake when they were still there? (*going out into the storm to get Amanda's scarf*)
4. How did Abel stay alive? (*by clinging to a nail in a board*) Where did he finally land? (*in the branches of a cherry birch tree*) How did Abel figure out there was an island under the tree? (*The tree was in the middle of the river.*)
5. What disturbed Abel about his appearance? (*His clothes were damp and rumped and no longer had "style."*) Do you think you'd be concerned about how you looked if you had just survived a flash flood? (*various answers*)
6. What did Abel find amusing about climbing down the tree? (*It was a tree he had never climbed up.*)
7. How did Abel plan to navigate his board-boat? (*with a rudder made from a strip of wood he tore from a log*) What caused the boat to fail? (*The current was too strong.*)
8. When Abel found the piece of driftwood, he found it "somewhat disgusting since it had been gnawed and bored and channeled by lower forms of life." Read the rest of this paragraph on page 22. Do you think it's funny? Was this situation serious or humorous to Abel? (*various answers*)
9. What "remarkable, newly discovered tool" did Abel use? (*his rodent teeth*) What made him use this tool in the first place? (*instinct*) How did he react when he realized what he was doing? (*"He drew back for a moment, in revulsion."*) How does this relate to his feelings about the driftwood? (*various answers*)

-
10. If Abel was a person and you met him at a school picnic, would you like him? How would he dress? In what sort of house would he live? (*various answers*)

Question for Writing:

Describe a rainstorm in which you were caught, and explain how you found shelter from it. Be sure to include your feelings, and tell how the storm looked and sounded.

Extension Activity: Weather

Have several students research the types of violent storms that could threaten your area, for example hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards. Once they have presented their information on what happens in these storms, have a whole-class discussion on what to do when there are storm warnings. You may want to use this opportunity to distribute take-home materials which you can probably obtain from the local Red Cross or city offices. You may even want to invite a representative to come in and talk to the class.

Extension Activity: Art

Reread the first paragraph on page 17. Then draw a map of what Abel could see from his perch in the treetop. As you continue reading, add other features to the map.