

Teacher Guide

Grades 5–6

# Coraline

Neil Gaiman

NOVEL UNITS<sup>™</sup>

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# CORALINE

by  
Neil Gaiman

Illustrated by Dave McKean

## Teacher Guide

Written by  
Rachel Boyers

### Note

The 2003 Harper Trophy paperback edition of the novel, ©2002 by Neil Gaiman, was used to prepare this guide. The page references may differ in other editions. Novel ISBN: 0-380-80734-3

**Please note:** Parts of this novel deal with sensitive, mature issues. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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## Skills and Strategies

### Critical Thinking

Analyzing, inference, research, prediction, cause/effect, compare/contrast

### Literary Elements

Theme, symbolism, conflict, characterization, literary devices, setting, genre, novella, tone, mysticism, parallel worlds, writer's craft

### Vocabulary

Glossary, definitions, denotation/connotation, parts of speech, context clues, root words, thematic connections

### Listening/Speaking

Reenactment, discussion

### Writing

Essay, poetry, research paper, script, journal

### Across the Curriculum

Literature—other works of fantasy fiction, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, monsters, symbolism, parallel universe; Art—illustrator study, collage, photography, painting, comic strip; Music—soundtrack for *Coraline* (orchestra, children's choir); Drama—acting, stage performances, puppetry; Film—movie trailer, movie version of *Coraline*

## Chapters X–XIII

Coraline is tormented and tempted by all sorts of monsters while trying to find the children’s lost souls and her parents. She concludes that her fears are irrational because the other mother can only distort reality, not create it. The other mother’s frightening tactics, therefore, are mere illusions. Once Coraline makes this connection, she realizes where her parents are trapped and enlists the black cat’s help to outwit the other mother. Coraline returns to the real world victorious, but her triumph is short-lived. The lost souls soon return to Coraline and enter eternity, but the other mother’s hand, severed as Coraline fled the other world, now stalks Coraline. In one last heroic effort, Coraline lures the other mother, spider-like, and into a well, thereby making the world safe for her and her parents. The creature that longed to steal her soul and sew her eyes shut is defeated in a battle of good over evil. With newfound confidence, Coraline ends her fantastic journey and relaxes into her ordinary life.

Vocabulary
illusions
determined
ingeniously
sneaked
winked
ululating
wraiths
immensely
crime
shape
goug
amble
apprehensive
piccolos

### Discussion Questions

1. What does Coraline conclude about the other mother’s creative powers? What do these realizations lead her to discover? How do her deductions finally convince her that Coraline is indeed “an explorer” (*Coraline tells herself, “These things—even the thing in the center—were illusions, things made by the other mother in a ghastly parody of the real people and real things on the other end of the mirror.”* [p. 117]. *Coraline concludes that she has nothing to fear since the other mother’s world is false, the other mother being a mere master of replication and distortion. This realization leads Coraline to question why snow globes would exist in the alternate reality when at home the market is busy and suddenly Coraline knows her parents are trapped inside the snow globe. Answers will vary. An explorer is one who braves unknown paths, with curiosity, determination, conviction, preparedness, and focus. As the novel progresses, Coraline the explorer proves to be resilient, independent, persevering, a risk-taker, and driven by a higher purpose.)*
2. What is the mood of the rats’ song? What is the author’s purpose in including vermin vers in the novel? (*In this section, the rats’ singing creates a sinister and threatening mood. The novel’s whisperings earlier in the novel serve as premonitions or warnings. The juxtaposition of musical mice to red-eyed rats and childlike rhythms set against the lyrics is a literary device employed by Gaiman for effect. Language play is just another thrill for fans of his horror.*)
3. How does the “crazy old man” from the other world appeal to Coraline? Which of the novel’s themes does his conversation with Coraline address? (*The old man convinces Coraline to remain in the other world by telling her that if she returns home, she will “be ignored. No one will listen to [her], not really listen.... They don’t even get [her] the night”* [pp. 118–119]. *Coraline was dissatisfied with her previous life, and most adults treated her with little respect. The other mother knows this, so Coraline is reminded of it whenever she expresses the desire to leave the other world. The old man is addressing the theme of gratitude and contentment.*)

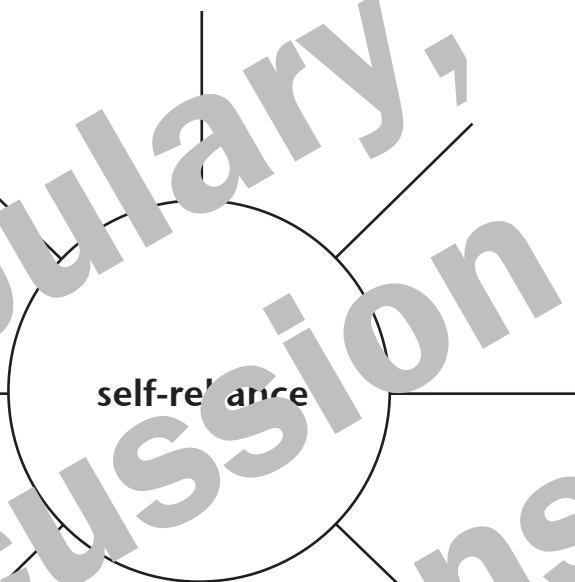
## Supplementary Activities

1. Theme: What examples of self-reliance do you find in the story? Complete the Thematic Analysis diagram on page 26 of this guide.
2. Artifacts: Create a boxed collection of artifacts based on the novel. Write descriptions for each item (stuffed cat, tea cup, stone, etc).
3. Critical Thinking: Use the Cause and Effect T-Chart on page 27 of this guide to describe the plans Coraline carries out and their effects. How do the triumphs help Coraline mature?
4. Music: Listen to the soundtrack for the movie version of *Coraline*. Research the featured orchestra or children's choir, or create another related project.

Vocabulary,  
Discussion,  
Questions,  
Activities,  
Worksheets

## Thematic Analysis

**Directions:** Complete the web, and then answer the question in each starred box.



★ What is the author's main message?

★ What did you learn from the novel?