



**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 6-8**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# Gregor the Overlander

Suzanne Collins



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Gregor the Overlander

Suzanne Collins

## 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, inferring,  
cause/effect, supporting  
judgments, problem solving

### Literary Elements

Story mapping, character  
analysis, setting, conflict, theme,  
point of view, figurative language

### Vocabulary

Word maps, homophones,  
definitions, idioms

### Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,  
drama

### Writing

Creative writing, personal  
narrative, dialogue, poetry,  
journalism

### Critical Thinking

Brainstorming, research,  
compare/contrast, analysis,  
evaluation

### Across the Curriculum

Social Studies—American  
Museum of Natural History,  
Nostradamus, civics, history of  
sandwiches, Greek myths,  
heroes, underground cities;  
Science—cockroaches,  
echolocation, animals' sense of  
smell, animal evolution time line,  
spider webs and life cycles,  
snottites, rat teeth, water  
compass; Health—happiness,  
canoe safety, forgiveness; Art—  
illustration, design, collage,  
map; Music—composition

**Genre:** fantasy

**Setting:** Regalia, a city beneath present-day New York City (New York City is referred to as “the Overland.”)

**Point of View:** third-person limited

**Themes:** family relationships, prejudice, war, survival, betrayal, sacrifice, heroism, leadership, responsibilities, destiny, empathy, hope, alliances, overcoming fears

**Conflict:** person vs. self, person vs. person, person vs. society, person vs. nature

**Style:** narrative

**Tone:** conversational, thought-provoking, ominous, humorous

**Date of First Publication:** 2003

## Summary

Two years, seven months, and 13 days ago, Gregor's father disappeared and Gregor's life changed. Gregor resigns himself to a boring summer of baby-sitting and household chores, but then he and his toddler sister, Boots, fall through a hole in the laundry room into the Underland. Beneath New York City, pale humans and giant talking cockroaches, bats, spiders, and rats populate the Underland. Gregor just wants to find a way home until he learns that rats hold his father prisoner. Furthermore, an ancient prophecy foretells a war and, as the Overland warrior, Gregor's role in a quest that may save the Underlanders' lives. Gregor and Boots, accompanied by two arrogant royal teens, their loyal bats, two timid cockroaches, and a couple of spiders, follow a wise but lethal rat deep into enemy territory to rescue Gregor's father. When a member of the quest betrays the group, Gregor risks his life to save the others. He steps up as a leader, overcomes his fears, and fulfills the prophecy. Gregor gives hope to the Underlanders and brings his father safely home.

## About the Author

Suzanne Collins was born in 1963. By the age of eight, she loved reading Greek and Roman mythology. War also played a role in Collins' childhood and heavily influences her writing. Collins remembers, despite her mother's protective efforts, being frightened by TV coverage of the Vietnam War, knowing her father was serving there. Collins' father, an Air Force officer, historian, and doctor of political science, “felt a great responsibility and urgency about educating his children about war” and used storytelling skills to bring history alive for his children. Collins majored in theater and telecommunications at Indiana University and earned her master's degree in dramatic writing at New York University. She became a playwright for adult audiences. In 1991, Collins began writing for children's television, including the Emmy-nominated *Clarissa Explains it All*, *Little Bear*, *Oswald*, and other Nickelodeon programs. She received a Writers Guild of America nomination in animation as co-writer of the Christmas special, *Santa, Baby!* Encouraged by children's author and *Generation O!* creator James Proimos, Collins wrote *Gregor the Overlander*, the first book in the highly awarded Underland Chronicles series. *Gregor the Overlander* was a Kirkus Reviews Editor's Choice in 2003, a Book Sense Children's Pick, and was awarded the NAIBA Children's Novel Award in 2004. The Underland Chronicles continue with

## Part 1: The Fall

### Chapters 1–3

Gregor's life has changed since his father's disappearance. Instead of attending summer camp with his sister Lizzie, Gregor remains at home to care for his sister Boots and their grandmother while their mother is at work. However, Gregor's boredom evaporates when he follows Boots into an air duct in the laundry room and falls down a vapor-filled tunnel. At the bottom, Gregor and Boots discover enormous, talking cockroaches that escort them to a stadium filled with humans and gigantic bats. Gregor meets Queen Luxa—a pale, arrogant girl, and Vikus—an older man who seems to expect Gregor's arrival.

#### Vocabulary

impulse  
primal  
envious  
wilted  
tallied  
frantic  
abandon  
confronted  
vapor  
generated  
crevice  
appreciative  
offended  
exertion  
monstrous  
feat  
intricate  
haughty  
contradict

#### Discussion Questions

1. Review the first four paragraphs of the novel. What do you learn about Gregor? How do you think this information will be important to the story? *(Answers will vary. Gregor demonstrates the extent of his frustration by comparing his situation to life-and-death circumstances faced by a caveman. The comparison hints that Gregor is intelligent, educated, and imaginative. Gregor lives with his mother, grandmother, and two sisters. That the family shares its only air-conditioned room indicates Gregor's family may have limited means. Gregor's boredom alerts readers that Gregor's circumstances are about to change, and his revulsion toward rats may indicate that rats will play a role in the story.)*
2. Why doesn't Gregor attend summer camp with his sister Lizzie and the other children? Why does Gregor's acceptance of this make his mother sadder? *(The sudden disappearance of Gregor's father changed the family members' roles. Because his mother must now work full-time, Gregor, being the oldest, has to care for Boots and his ailing grandmother. Answers will vary. Gregor's mother understands Gregor is hiding his true feelings about camp in order to make her feel better. When Gregor, who is 11 years old, says "Camp's for kids, anyway" [p. 3], his mother realizes how quickly he has matured. She wishes Gregor could have fun with the other children and did not have to take on additional responsibilities due to the family's circumstances.)*
3. Why is it important that Gregor knows precisely how long his father has been gone? How does Gregor feel about his father's disappearance? *(Gregor's "inner calculator" is tracking the day his life changed and implies that he is counting the days until his father returns. Searching for possible explanations for his father's disappearance consumes Gregor. He does not want to believe his father abandoned the family or died. Gregor remains hopeful yet also angry with his father.)*
4. Why does Gregor decide against thinking about "things that would happen after his dad got back" (p. 11)? How does this mindset affect Gregor? Can you think of a better solution Gregor could use to cope with the loss of his father? *(Refusing to think about the future helps Gregor get through each day and cope with the pain of missing his father. However, without dreams for the future, Gregor's life is on hold. He simply exists, not truly living, and not dealing with his father's absence. Answers will vary.)*

5. What do you learn from the scene where Gregor meets the enormous cockroaches? What information do you think is most important? *(The cockroaches can talk. They distinguish humans as Overlanders or Underlanders based on smell and elevate Boots to royal status because of the odor of her dirty diaper. The roaches reveal that, in addition to humans living underground, there are also “bad” rats. Answers will vary.)*
6. Compare and contrast Gregor’s and Boot’s reactions to the cockroaches. Why isn’t Boots afraid? What do you think would have happened if she had not been present? *(Gregor uses caution to hide his fear upon discovering enormous, talking cockroaches. Boots happily greets the bugs and basks in their admiration. Answers will vary. Boots likes everyone and is too young to understand that life holds dangers. She is also unable to distinguish fantasy from reality. The roaches’ high regard for Boots convinces them to take Gregor and Boots to the Underlanders. Without Boots, the roaches may have abandoned Gregor or taken him to the rats.)*
7. Upon entering the stadium, Gregor thinks, “Maybe it’s like Rome, and they feed people to the bats” (p. 24). To what is Gregor referring? Do you think Gregor has good reason to fear the Underlanders, or is he being overly cautious? *(Gregor is referring to the Coliseum in Rome, where people used to gather to watch horrific events such as men fighting to the death or men fighting wild animals such as lions. Answers will vary. Some students will think Gregor should fear the unknown situation, especially since he has to protect Boots. Others may think the normalcy of people at a sporting event should put Gregor at ease.)*
8. Why might Gregor believe there is a difference between “having attitude” and “being a total show-off” (p. 28)? Into which group does Gregor classify Luxa? Why? *(Answers will vary. People with “attitude” exude self-confidence and a willingness to stand up for their beliefs. Contrarily, show-offs often feel superior to others and just want to be noticed. Gregor classifies Luxa as a show-off. He feels she intentionally performed a fancy dismount from her bat to impress him.)*
9. What does the scene in which Luxa bargains with the roaches tell you about her? *(Answers will vary, but students should infer that Luxa likes to be in control. She knows the roaches expect payment for Gregor and Boots; however, she considers herself above the roaches and would rather Gregor and Boots be taken to the rats than overpay for them. Luxa considers herself to be in a position of authority, but Vikus destroys that image when he generously completes the bargaining without consent from Luxa.)*
10. **Prediction:** What does Vikus mean when he says, “One more basket will be a small price to pay if he is expected” (p. 34)?

### Supplementary Activities

1. **Literary Analysis:** Begin the Story Map on page 33 of this guide. Add information as you read the novel.
2. **Critical Thinking/Art:** Each patch of Grandma’s quilt represents an event in her life. Design a quilt with patches representing special events in your life. Your quilt may be paper or cloth.
3. **Health:** Research the benefits of happiness to one’s health. Create a written or visual display that outlines ways to help you add more happiness to your life.
4. **Science:** Write a one-page report about cockroaches and their behavior. Include one little-known fact about roaches in your report.
5. **Creative Thinking:** Invent the game that the bats were playing when Gregor arrived at the stadium. Prepare a rulebook stating the object of the game and explaining its rules.